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ARTICLES in this issue of the Bulletin return to the puzzle of the English major. They reflect the community’s pride in having so enormously expanded the range of what study in English can now encompass. And they express as well the community’s worries about how the field’s lately acquired wealth of possibility can be accommodated to the constraints of semesters and the educational needs (and schedules) of students. No program of study can long hold appeal for students if it lacks intellectual interest and conviction for the faculty members who teach it; yet it seems equally true that what we faculty members find most interesting to teach may not align immediately and directly with what undergraduate majors stand most to gain from studying. Certainly, reading Hillis Miller’s reflections on the occasion of his receiving ADE’s Francis Andrew March Award, one feels how close, even stifling, were the confines of what study in English comprised half a century ago, in 1953, when Miller started out in the English department at Johns Hopkins University. Yet, as no blessing comes unmixed, so the expansive redefinition of the field that occurred over the course of Miller’s fifty years in the profession could not be achieved without cost. What we have gained in possibility we are perhaps paying for by a blurring of institutional definition and a loss in articulateness of educational purpose. As Miller observes, “What used to make sense as a rational discipline, with identifiable rules and goals, no longer does, at least in many departments.”

No version of the field or of curriculum could exist without attendant problems and trade-offs. Recognizing limitation, however, need not decline into nostalgia or promote reactionary postures. It may even come as something of a relief to realize that the attainment of educational utopia need not be the criterion dividing success from failure in curriculum review and revision. Even if we allow that the prior formation of the field that Miller recollects really could boast a significantly greater measure of programmatic clarity than curricula will typically afford today, it does not follow that today’s undergraduates are served less well than their grandparents were. Surely the increased range and diversity of the materials available for study, and also our altered sense of what makes study in English worthwhile, have some connection, however indirectly, to the increasing range and diversity of the undergraduate student population itself—ethnic, racial, economic, demographic.

Two reports, drawn from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study and published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in July 2002, offer a statistical profile of that undergraduate student population, its diversity, and how it finances a college education (Berkner et al.; Horn et al.; both are available online as PDF files). For the academic year 1999–2000, the NCES places the number of undergraduates enrolled in United States postsecondary institutions, both two- and four-year, at 16.5 million (Horn et al. iii). Of these 16.5 million students, 42% attended two-year institutions, 31% attended public four-year institutions, and 14% attended private not-for-profit institutions (the remainder attended for-profit institutions). Women make up a majority (56%) of the undergraduates in the United States today; students other than non-Hispanic whites make up a third; students 24 years of age or older comprise 43%; 27% of undergraduates have children or dependents, and nearly half of those are single parents (Horn et al. iv). Nearly three-fifths of graduating seniors (from the four-year institutions) have federal student loans outstanding; on average, the cumulative debt each student needs to repay approaches $17,000 (Berkner et al. 59; table 1.3-A). Three-quarters of students attending four-year institutions work an average of 27 hours per week (26.4% work full-time, 50.7% work part-time) (Horn et al. 118; table 5.1). And (perhaps one of the more revealing bits of information the Department of Education reports) nearly three-quarters of undergraduate students report owning a credit card in their own name, and among those carrying a balance (45%), the average balance was more than $3,000 (Horn et al. 104, 112; table 4.3).
Students pursuing baccalaureate degrees make up about 44% of the undergraduate student population (students in associate degree programs account for 38%; the remainder are either pursuing vocational certificates or taking courses but not pursuing a degree) (Horn et al. vii). It will probably come as no surprise that business claims the highest percentage of students—19%—among the 90% of undergraduates with a declared major. What may surprise is that arts and humanities fields rank a close second at 18%, collectively, and that in both areas of study gender differences are nonexistent or relatively small: business was chosen by 18.6% of male undergraduates and an identical 18.6% of female undergraduates, arts and humanities fields were chosen by 16.6% of male undergraduates and 18.3% of female undergraduates (Horn et al. 24, table 9). Less reassuring for the arts and humanities, however, is the finding that blacks are underrepresented in the distribution of undergraduates in our field but not in business: business was chosen by 18.0% of white and 19.1% of black undergraduates; arts and humanities were chosen by 18.6% of white but only 11.8% of black undergraduates.

Viewed through the lens of numbers of baccalaureate degree awards, the English major remains one of the strongest majors in the humanities and in any area of study. In the academic year 1999–2000, the last for which data on degree completions are available, more than 50,000 baccalaureate degrees were awarded in English, about 4% of all baccalaureate degrees conferred in all fields, and English ranked ninth among more than fifty fields in the Department of Education's general categorization of academic fields of study. After decreasing each year since 1993, the absolute number of baccalaureate degree awards has increased slightly from its 1997 low of about 48,500. In percentage terms, however, degree awards in English have almost but not quite kept pace with the growth in baccalaureate degree awards overall, declining a tenth of a percentage point from 4.09 to 3.99 of every 100 degrees granted.

The history of baccalaureate degree awards reveals its significance most clearly when the awards are disaggregated by sex. The aggregate numbers mask the critical connections among the dramatic changes in the careers available to women, the numbers of women pursuing and receiving BA degrees, and the academic fields women undergraduates choose. For this reason, relying solely on the aggregate numbers when reviewing the data to discern historical patterns leads to misleadingly negative interpretations of the sharp declines that occurred during the 1970s. Since these trends have been put to polemical use critical of the field, I review the data here—broken out by sex. As noted above, women now outnumber men in the undergraduate population as a whole, and in 2000 57.2% of all baccalaureate degrees were awarded to women, almost the reverse of the distribution in 1966, when 57.4% were awarded to men. In 2000 women were the dominant baccalaureate degree recipients even more decisively in psychology (2000 = 76.5% vs. 1966 = 40.8%) than in English (2000 = 67.8% vs. 1966 = 66.2%). Women constitute the majority in the biological sciences (2000 = 58.5% vs. 1966 = 31.2%). And they have achieved or come within striking distance of parity in such traditional bastions of male dominance as chemistry (2000 = 47.2% vs. 1966 = 18.5%), mathematics and statistics (2000 = 47.8% vs. 1966 = 33.3%), and political science (2000 = 50.3% vs. 1966 = 22.1%). Business offers perhaps the most striking example of how students' academic choices reflect the much-widened array of life and career options that have become available to women. In 1966 the gender distribution of undergraduate business degrees was 91.6% male to 8.4% female; in 2000 it was 50.2% male to 49.8% female. It seems hard to regard such change in any other light than as social progress, even if one consequence of this progress has been the loss of a population of undergraduate women who made a semicaptive audience for the English major. True, had the gender demographics of English baccalaureate degree recipients remained in the year 2000 what they had been in 1966—11.6 of every 100 degrees awarded to women and 4.4 of every 100 degrees awarded to men—there would have been over 100,000 baccalaureate degrees awarded in English in the academic year 1999–2000. But is it anything less than misguided to hold to the field's account losses in degree awards that to a great extent follow directly from the evident general gain in social equity?

Here we broach the other anxiety evident in pieces published in this issue: concern about how undergraduates, and their parents, regard the practical value of study in English, especially the utility of that study as preparation for a graduate's prospects for employment, earnings, and career. The commonplace question "What can you do with an English major?" may induce defensiveness in two directions. On the one hand, I think that a specific and valuable sort of uselessness characterizes true engagement in the learning that serious consideration of literature uniquely affords; on the
other hand, paradoxically, I likewise think that part of the value of that specific uselessness lies in how useful it eventually shows itself to be in various walks of life. We are bound to be incurably ambivalent and conflicted on the subject of the “practical value” of studying English. It is clear that majoring in English offers excellent career preparation, as Peter Beidler’s and Dorothy Baker’s essays each document in a different way. Yet it is clear as well that the part of students our field aims most centrally to address, and the capacity it most seeks to educe or bring students to discover, lies in the region not of the worldly but of the ghostly, the region Michael Cunningham’s Clarissa Vaughan enters when, walking into her kitchen, she finds herself “filled, suddenly, with a sense of dislocation”:

A row of old terra-cotta pots, glazed in various shades of crackled yellow, stand on the granite countertop. Clarissa recognizes these things but stands apart from them. She feels the presence of her own ghost; the part of her at once most indestructibly alive and least distinct; the part that owns nothing; that observes with wonder and detachment. . . . (91–92)

David Laurence

Note

1Findings on baccalaureate degree awards presented in this and the following paragraphs were calculated from data downloaded from WebCASPAR, a database system maintained by the National Science Foundation and accessible on the World Wide Web at caspar.nsf.gov. We obtained data from the earned degrees database of the National Center for Education Statistics for the years 1966 to 2000 (bachelor’s degrees only), by field of study and gender of degree recipient.

Works Cited


I take as my point of departure a passage from that great work of structural poetics, Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*, of 1957: “Everyone who has seriously studied literature knows that the mental process involved is as coherent and progressive as the study of science. A precisely similar training of the mind takes place, and a similar sense of the unity of the subject is built up” (10–11). “Everyone who has seriously studied literature knows . . .”—I have been speculating about exactly what sort of claim this is. Is it really a universal claim that anyone, anywhere, and at any time, who has ever studied literature seriously knows this? Or does “everyone” mean the serious student of literature who Frye imagines might read this work of literary theory? Or could the claim be, rather, a covert stipulation of “seriously studied”? Anyone who has seriously studied literature knows this, so that if you don’t know it, you have been insufficiently serious, merely dilettantish, in your study of literature. At any rate, Frye, a serious man, displays great confidence that there is a group of those who have seriously studied literature who know that this study is coherent and progressive and who have a sense of the unity of the subject. Do we know this still?

Neither the current offerings of English departments nor recent writings about literature provide much evidence that we do, but perhaps we do know this still, at some level; or perhaps we know it only as repressed or forgotten knowledge. I entitle my paper “Imagining the Coherence of the English Major” because I suspect that many of us do not know or no longer know this sense of the unity of the subject and have to posit it by an act of imagination—as Frye himself may well have had to do, since he is in fact arguing for the existence of something that he declares we all know but that he goes on to claim has been so sadly ignored and neglected that we cannot even begin to write an elementary textbook expounding the fundamental principles of what is nevertheless known, by all those in the know, to be a unified and progressive subject (13).

The May 2002 issue of *PMLA* contains a dozen short statements on the questions Why Major in Literature—What Do We Tell Our Students? These provide many defenses of the English major or of a literature major, but not one refers to the sort of cumulative structure to which Frye appeals: the intellectual coherence of the major. We hear about the importance of literature as a locus for playing with and testing knowledge or of literature as a realm that poses value as a question, not an answer (488, 493). Literature encourages the study of signifying practices as worldly events; generates inquiry into language as a condition of our social and subjective lives; insists on interpretation, point of view, or polysemy (493, 494, 500). “Literary texts supplement the real rather than claim to represent it, and they rattle just enough to engage our students in . . . critical thought” (508). The justifications of a literature major that come to mind when colleagues are asked why major in literature manifestly neither celebrate nor perhaps even envision the major as a cumulative process or coherent structure. Should we abandon all idea of coherence, then, or are there ways of strengthening these justifications by grafting to them a conception of a curriculum presupposing what Frye calls “the structure of literature as a total form” (342)?

What does Frye have to say about the nature of this unity? He proceeds to inquire about the source of this sense of the unity of the subject that is built up.

If this unity comes from literature itself, then literature itself must be shaped like a science, which contradicts our experience of it . . . The alternative assumption is that scholars and
public critics are directly related by an intermediate form of criticism, a coherent and comprehensive theory of literature, logically and scientifically organized, some of which the student unconsciously learns as he goes on, but the main principles of which are as yet unknown to us. (11)

He makes the analogy with physics, which is an organized body of knowledge about nature. Students say they are studying physics, not studying nature. By saying we are studying literature, we confuse an object of study with a subject of study, which is properly called criticism or poetics. This confusion makes a difference, because while literature may well seem a diverse, nonunified collection of writings, poetics is or ought to be something more systematic, organized in a coherent way.

Frye’s vision would, in principle, provide a unity and coherence to the English major: You start with, What is literature?; explore its major modes, forms, genres; and go on to more specialized studies in particular genres, modes, or themes. Of course, The Anatomy of Criticism does not provide a simple guide to the construction of a coherent curriculum because its chapters, “Theory of Modes,” “Theory of Symbols,” “Theory of Myths,” and “Theories of Genres,” approach the structure of literature from different angles and do not represent, for example, an ascending series of possibilities for literature courses. What is emphasized above all is the need to think of one’s goal in literary study as the construction of a total picture of literary possibilities. Frye cites with approval T. S. Eliot’s dictum that the existing monuments of literature form an ideal order among themselves (18). This idea might lead to the notion that working through the Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces was the recipe for literary study, the royal road to the sense of unity that serious study produces, but Frye does not emphasize the concept of masterpiece, and he opposes the idea that criticism’s job is the identification of masterpieces. “Every new critical fashion,” he writes, has increased the appreciation of some poets and decreased the appreciation of others. . . . On the ethical level, we can see that every increase of appreciation has been right, and every decrease wrong; that criticism has no business to react against things, but should show a steady advance towards undiscriminating catholicity. Oscar Wilde said that only an auctioneer could be equally appreciative of all kinds of art, . . . but even the public critic’s job of getting the treasures of culture into the hands of the people who want them is largely an auctioneer’s job. And if this is true of him it is true a fortiori of the scholarly critic. . . .

The dialectical axis of criticism, then, has as its one pole the total acceptance of the data of literature and, as the other, the total acceptance of the potential value of those data. This is the real level of culture and of liberal education, the fertilizing of life by learning in which the systematic progress of scholarship flows into a systematic progress of taste and understanding. On this level there is no itch to make weighty judgments and none of the ill effects which follow from the debauchery of judiciousness and have made the word “critic” a synonym for educated shrew. (25)

These passages display less interest in masterpieces than in the variety of literary possibilities—the range of very different sorts of fictions, whose very differences compel admiration for the whole of which they form parts. In place of touchstones or masterpieces, Frye emphasizes “the possibility of seeing literature as the complication of a relatively restricted and simple group of formulas” (17) and hence the importance of archetypes, which he defines as “symbols which connect one poem with another” (99) but which are the most general models and structures of literary signification. Studying literature is above all a matter of relating individual works to the common structures that they manifest and vary. Crucial to the study of literature is what Frye calls the “feeling, however dim, that criticism has an end in the structure of literature as a total form, as well as a beginning in the text studied” (342). He writes, “the moment we go from the individual work of art to the sense of the total form of the art, the art becomes no longer the object of aesthetic contemplation but an ethical instrument, participating in the work of civilization” (349).

This confidence in the structure of literature as a total form is hard for us to recover today—we are so used to resisting notions of totality and totalization and to valuing whatever puts in question such notions. It may be hard even to imagine a totality without simultaneously expecting that what this totality seeks to exclude would put its integrity in question. But phenomenologically the idea of totality can play a significant role. Frye’s claim that a sense of totality makes the work of art no longer an object of aesthetic contemplation but an ethical instrument that participates in the project of civilization evokes the sense of exhilaration I vividly recall from my student days of grasping how a literary work fits into European literature as a whole, the transformation from appreciating it to placing it in a totality. And while Frye’s conception of literature as a totality may be different from that which reigns in today’s multicultural literary studies, the attraction to the idea of a greater totality seems to me persistent. The excitement that the idea of comparative American literatures can generate may
not be unrelated to a sensed totality that makes the ultimate object of attention not individual works but the work of civilization in its broadest scope. Certainly students like to hear that there is some sort of structure or totality toward which they are aiming in their studies, even if we tell them simultaneously that the resources of literary expression can never be totalized, since it is always possible to innovate by playing against any given form. After all, the same is true of a language, and we do not allow our knowledge that French is always subject to change, as well as vast in its vocabulary, to block our making competence, mastery of the system of a language, the goal of language study. It is at least worth pondering the possibility of making some such notion as Frye's as the goal of literary study or of an English major: movement toward a sense of the general structure of literary possibilities, its modes, archetypes, forms, and genres.

Although Frye's structure of argument or presentation represents a claim about what might be most basic in a curriculum, it is not easy to translate into a curricular structure. It does help one think about the decisions that underlie the curriculum of most English majors, or at least what decisions used to underlie it. The most widespread structure was probably that which treated the historical survey of English or of English and American literature as the basic course to be followed by courses on genres: epic, drama, fiction, and poetry. Then came courses focusing on the major periods of literature touched on in the survey, and finally more advanced courses on individual authors or themes. Such schemes have fallen into disfavored because they are conceptually difficult to justify, offering no readily defensible coherence, and because if they are required sequences, they seem excessively and irrelevantly restrictive. Students today are more likely to be stimulated to major in literature by a course on women's writing or on postmodern fiction than by a survey of English literature from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf. And once their curiosity is so awakened, it is scarcely evident that the historical survey is the appropriate way to set about acquainting them with the panoply of literary possibilities. My sense is that today most of us think of literature as a historical phenomenon, in the sense that it is connected with the historical cultures from which it emerged and which it variously represents, contests, and reimagines, but we do not for the most part think of the history of literature as the key to understanding it—at least not as the key for undergraduates—which makes the historical survey hard to defend as the optimal introduction to literary study. And questions about the coherence of the major ought to extend to the ways we teach as well as what and when we teach. The structure we often have now is pyramidal, in which the elementary courses are both large in size and broad in scope and the advanced courses become increasingly smaller and narrower in focus. This arrangement is not pedagogically very sound—most likely it is just a function of the numbers of students involved. We don't believe that in school younger students should listen to lectures and older ones get to discuss—the opposite is true. I teach a fairly large course on literary theory for graduate students and advanced undergraduates in which I lecture, and that seems to work well, but if I were teaching theory to freshmen I would want it to be a discussion course.

A curriculum seeking coherence in the terms Frye advocates would most likely need to select one scheme as its basic organizing device, in order to achieve a structure of progression. Frye puts modes first, moving from there to a general account of literary signs and symbols, the resources of literature, and thus to an account of different levels of interpretation of literary structures. These structures are themselves treated as archetypes, patterns open to a variety of signifying uses but that tie literature together as sentences of a language are related to one another. Frye ends in genres, specific rhetorical possibilities of literary expression. Though his name is associated with myth criticism, and one might see the goal of The Anatomy of Criticism as the development of a typology of archetypes and symbols, which are the topics covered in the chapters on the theory of symbols and the theory of myths, Frye puts modes first, no doubt because poets must account for the bewildering variety of literary works and he sees modes as more elemental than specific genres. There are five modes, based on the hero's power of action ("which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same" [33]): myth, romance, high mimetic, low mimetic, and irony. Each mode is subject to inflections: tragic or comic and naive or sentimental, in Schiller's sense ("a later recreation of an earlier mode" [35]). While European literature "has steadily moved its center of gravity down the list" of modes, from the mythic toward the realistic (34), they go round in a circle in the sense that the progression from realism to irony moves toward myth, as in Kafka. There is a cyclic relation around the two poles of the mythical and the realistic: "Read-
ing forward in history, therefore, we may think of our romantic, high mimetic and low mimetic modes as a series of displaced myths, mythoi or plot formulas progressively moving over towards the opposite pole of verisimilitude, and then, with irony, beginning to move back” (52).

A curriculum based on Frye, whether or not it began with fictional modes, would be much more concerned than most of our curricula are with the theoretical case to be made for the divisions it imposes, instead of lazily accepting the primacy of division into centuries or periods. The theory of modes lends itself to very broad historical overviews, whereas the theory of genres places the poetics of lyric, narrative, and drama at the center. The study of archetypes or motifs would, though, be a good way to highlight the historical variety of literary modes and genres.

Although I certainly do not presume to propose a coherent curriculum, I do believe that if we set our minds to it, we could imagine a coherent English major predicated on poetics and the idea of the range of expressive possibilities of literature. The major drawback may be, however, that this approach defines the English major as a literature major, neglecting all the other things that English departments have come to do—including the study of other sorts of writing; the practice of writing itself, whether expository or “creative,” as we oddly call it; and the study of other cultural practices, such as film and television.

One could imagine organizing the English major around writing: to major in English is to major in writing; to study writing and its rhetorical structures, from the simplest to most complex; and to practice it, whether in the development of critical argument and assessment of evidence or in imitation of literary genres (creative writing courses might actually take that form rather than subscribe to an ideology of self-expression). This imagined coherence could be quite challenging intellectually for students and teachers; it would interestingly connect us with an earlier era of rhetoric, when literary works were studied as examples of the use of language before they came to be studied as the repository of cultural values. In such a scheme the hierarchical organization of courses might lie in the kind and amount of writing required, and here we do already have more of a coherent structure than in the study of literature: the honors thesis, the sustained piece of critical writing comes at the top of the pyramid, to be undertaken only after apprenticeship in courses where one writes term papers, which are likely to come only after lower-level courses, in which one has written shorter papers and exercises of a more controlled sort, on assigned topics perhaps. There is already a progressive structure to the organization of courses by types of writing assignments, which suggests that it is perhaps in this respect, not in some scheme for the organization of the study of literary materials, that the English major today is progressive and cumulative.

For some of my colleagues, a problem with such a scheme would be that it accords no place to visual studies, which are becoming increasingly important in the university: the study of film, television, digital culture. If instead of language and rhetoric we were to take representation as the organizing notion, then we could imagine a broader discipline that included all sorts of signifying practices. We had something of this vision in the heady days of semiotics, and in those days there were a few successful models, such as the semiotics program at Brown that attracted a lot of talented students and achieved good results with them. At Brown, feminism and film theory were central to the study of semiotic practices, from literature and film to advertising. (It is not clear how much of its success was due to the fact that it was conceived and pursued in opposition to the usual form of literature majors. The oppositional course often attracts and generates more energy than the same structure would if it were to become usual.) But there were not many such successes to report, even in the heyday of semiotics, when people were willing to imagine a comprehensive science of signs and sign systems, of which literature was only one.

As a proponent of semiotics in those days I would not be at all averse to reviving such a possibility, which would be a way of achieving coherence of a sort, though at the cost of attempting to cram a lot more into the English major than we do now. In his Theory of Semiotics Umberto Eco provides a list of the concerns of semiotics. The list was designed, I think, to stimulate the imagination and convince readers that here is God’s plenty: zoosemiotics, olfactory signs, tactile communication, codes of taste, paralinguistics, medical semiotics, kinesics and proxemics, musical codes, formalized languages, written languages, unknown alphabets and secret codes, natural languages, visual communication, systems of objects, plot structure, text theory, cultural codes, aesthetic texts, mass communication, rhetoric (9–14). But the effect of this Borgesian catalog, for most of us, is either
hilarity or despair. A major reason for the failure of semiotics to establish itself has been the excessive variety of its objects. Even though the theory of signs and of various types of signification provided in principle a coherent center, that center could not hold and mere anarchy was loosed upon the world.

A different sort of coherence might be the more imperialistic one of general education, in which English departments attempt to define the sorts of learning that we think ought to take place and that might be achieved in the English major. For instance, an English major might include literary and rhetorical analysis, historical analysis, social analysis, cultural analysis, cognitive and moral analysis, and the practice of writing.

Here, I think, we have distinct sorts of analytic practices that students can acquire, all in the broad structure of the English major; the coherence of the major would lie in its attempt to provide instruction in this full range of practices. In some courses the main emphasis would be on techniques of close reading, the analysis of discursive conventions and literary and rhetorical techniques. In others the focus would be historical: the study of a particular period of literature in its historical context—literature as both agent of history and a reflection of history. Elsewhere the emphasis would fall not on literature but on other cultural products and practices, as in courses that give central place to visual media or popular culture. Courses focused on the creation of value and the possibilities of knowledge minister to another type of analysis that the English major offers, what I call, loosely, the cognitive and moral. Here the stress falls on the ethical questions raised in literary works and by literature as a form of social action, as well as on the theoretical issues that arise in literary and cultural theory. Finally there is the practice of writing itself.

A scheme of this sort gives concrete representation to the claims that we frequently make for the English major: that it is more comprehensive in its range and reach than most majors, both because the questions of language, discursive structures, and representation generally are central to so many other inquiries—historical, philosophical, political, psychoanalytic, for instance—and because so many things represented in language become the focus of study in English courses. One problem with this list of types of analysis, however, is that the way we usually organize such matters is to require a course from each category, but in English, courses often do more than one sort of thing—explore history and practice close reading or cultural study. And writing, we have tended to think, works best in courses with subject content.

I think students would be receptive to such a program. The principal difficulty it would face would come from the faculty members who would insist that their course engages all categories at once, so that to require that it be listed under one or the other would be either grossly to misrepresent it or to make teachers twist it out of shape to conform to one of them. Still, this curricular scheme would make a claim about the sort of skills and knowledge that we want students to take away from the English major. And the broader the claim we make for the value of this major, the better it would be to have some reflection of the range of things we think it can accomplish in the categories by which we organize courses and establish requirements. If we can imagine a totality of some sort—general education in the humanities, for instance—it will be easier to articulate and argue about both the value of the major and what ought to go into it than if we continue to treat it as a conglomeration of the various things we are interested in teaching.

Works Cited


Figure and Ground:
The Transformation of the Dickinson College English Department’s Faculty and Curriculum

WENDY MOFFAT

THOSE of us who teach in small undergraduate English departments (say, with fewer than twenty faculty members) recognize that the shape of the curriculum is determined in large measure by the interest and expertise of the departments’ teachers. Larger departments can work from a conceptual template of an ideal curriculum to fill holes in the curriculum by hiring specialized personnel; big departments may have three or four scholars working in a single area or historical period or using similar critical methods. Dickinson College’s English department, with fifteen full-time teaching faculty members, is just small enough to demand that its faculty members develop expertise in “two and a half” subject areas. We do not hire generalists, but we can’t afford the kind of narrow specialization that may define professionalism at a larger university. Since the college expects us all to teach three courses every semester and to keep active as publishing scholars, our department encourages course development that nourishes our scholarly interests. This practice expands the range of courses we can teach with integrity—a quality I define as more substantial than amateur enthusiasm—and offers a practical platform for scholarship in progress. At Dickinson, the emphasis on creating new courses has been welcomed by department faculty members, who have developed 119 new course topics since 1995. (Since our teaching load is relatively heavy for a selective liberal arts college but light compared with many small undergraduate departments, I imagine that finding economies of energy in the balance of teaching and publishing is a common pursuit for many department chairs.) The bedrock assumption of my article is that in most small departments, which are conditioned to shaping the curriculum with the available resources, the people in a department are its curricular future.

If who we are determines what we teach, a department would do well to examine itself as a sociological community. A decade ago, our department undertook a radical shift in curricular structure, and I reflect here on how we made ourselves ready for that change and what forces catalyzed its final form. First, who we were: When I arrived at Dickinson College in 1984, I joined a department of a dozen faculty members, ten on the tenure track. There were six tenured men; two tenured women; and two young, untenured women. We were all white, all Yankees (though not all WASP), and we had trained at elite graduate schools. We inherited—that is the right word—a curriculum largely unchanged since the moment Terry Eagleton calls “the rise of English” (15–16). Indeed much of the department’s self-definition had been shaped by Matthew Arnold’s idea that literary studies was an extension of a larger humanist enterprise, in which we would invite students to explore “the best that has been thought and said and done in the world”—this wording appeared in the Dickinson College catalog from 1954 to 1975. Beginning in the late 1960s, with the hiring of two Americanists, the department added an American literature survey to a two-course survey of British literature. In 1980 our local literary canon expanded again when the core sequence of surveys grew from three to five courses focusing on close reading—four in British literature from medieval to Victorian and (I reveal my bias) a

The author is former chair of the English department at Dickinson College. A version of this paper was presented at the 2002 ADE Summer Seminar in Cooperstown, New York.
ghettoized semester of American literature. The department thus divided what should be taught into literary historical territories and assigned certain faculty members to cover certain areas. Two of the six courses to be taught every year were designated as the core course, and every member of the department taught a section of expository writing or a freshman seminar. I remember being impressed with the egalitarianism of a staffing arrangement where all faculty members taught elementary writing. We had a major that presented our students with a wide terrain of literary history, gave us stability in teaching and clarity in hiring new personnel, and eventually bored us to death.

The catalyst for change was, in my view, the increasing pressure from the college's faculty personnel committee and the dean of the college for production of significant scholarly work. Published writing by all teaching faculty members was deemed to be a requisite element in sustaining our position as a selective liberal arts college. In 1990, as we began the once-a-decade curriculum review mandated by the college, we first noted the extraordinary gap between what was most exciting in our intellectual lives—the intensive discussions of the canon's boundaries and coherence, the new questions about authority and the status of evidence, the rise of cultural criticism and its exploration of new areas of (especially American) culture, the blurring of disciplinary lines, and so on—and what and how we taught our students. Our curricular discussions evolved into a genre not quite confessional but deeply personal. One colleague who trained in eighteenth-century literature, lived in Africa for years after serving in the Peace Corps, and married a Nigerian woman found that new literatures in English were more exciting for him than teaching Pope. Another, who had studied and lived in New Mexico, developed courses in Native American writers. A third was working on Shakespeare and film, a fourth writing a feminist biography of Willa Cather, a fifth examining popular culture—particularly detective fiction—from a Marxist perspective to plumb its relation to the formation of national identities. I dusted off a course called Practical Literary Criticism as an elective at the upper level and, ignoring its New Critical roots, took it to mean practices of criticism, an exploration of ways of reading from reader-response theory to cultural studies. Most of our time was still spent teaching out of our back pockets from the Norton anthologies, asking students to write three or four close-reading papers and to take an exam showing that they “knew the stuff.” Gradually, as we invited the curriculum to include the literature and critical approaches that most compelled us, the myth of coverage was unmasked: even if we wanted to, even if our students were endlessly devoted and completely tractable, we could never teach what they should know about literature written in English.

I have to credit Sharon O’Brien, the department chair during the two years of curricular transformation, with creating a place for us to bring our energy and excitement about the profession into our teaching lives. Our able outside evaluators, Emory Elliott and Jane Tompkins, helped us enormously by listening to what we were saying and echoing it back to us in more coherent form. In 1992, we replaced a rigid, historically based, but essentially ahistorical major with a much baggier monster, to paraphrase Henry James’s definition of the novel (515). We reversed the figure and ground, substituting methods and self-consciousness about literary criticism as the coherence of the major that had once been dominated by the survey of material. I’d like to contrast two passages of self-description from the college catalog, the first from 1990–91, the second from 1991–92:

Most students come to a liberal arts college in hopes of broadening their perspectives, and the English department offers them access to many of the richest and most varied “worlds” our language can describe. The skills taught—whether they involve ways of arriving at a clear and valid understanding of what Shakespeare said 400 years ago or ways of putting together a coherent argument today—are quite simply those needed to understand how language both reflects and shapes human experience.

At the core of the department’s curriculum is a group of five courses, designed to ensure that students gain a sound background to prepare them for more advanced literature courses. Work in the core courses, all of which are required for English majors, includes reading works of major British and American authors . . . and understanding the cultural and historical backgrounds of each literary period. . . . All majors participate in a tutorial or seminar, usually in their senior year, which gives them a chance to work closely with a faculty member on a subject of particular interest. (69)

Why is the department that teaches courses in English, Irish, Afro-American, Native American, and Caribbean literatures called an “English” department? Does it matter whether Shakespeare wrote the plays that are attributed to him? Is The Scarlet Letter really a better novel than Uncle Tom’s Cabin, and what do we mean by better? Why do the same English professors who used to hunt for symbols now hunt for ideology? Did Mary Ann Evans really have to call herself George Eliot in order to be taken seriously? Do authors consciously intend all the meanings that college
teachers and students find in their works? How does the way we read differ if we're on the beach or in the classroom? Was Mary Shelley's Frankenstein really a feminist response to Milton's Paradise Lost? Why do some literary critics claim that the author doesn't matter anymore, while at the same time books are burned and writers are banished? What can you do with an English major?

These are some of the questions we ask. Questions, not settled answers, are at the heart of literary studies at Dickinson. Our major emphasizes problems, issues, and approaches to literature. Our curriculum encourages students to explore both texts and their multiple contexts: historical, cultural, biographical, psychological, political.

Our major, still comprising ten courses, now requires a course on ways of reading that asks questions about author, reader, and text as the gateway to literary study. (This methods course is taken as either the first or second in the English major, depending on students' standing when they matriculate.) We created a rigorous year-long capstone experience, beginning in the first term with a topics-based seminar and developing in the second into the senior workshop, in which the same students and teacher read each other's work in progress as they write fifty-page papers on topics of each student's choice. These papers are cataloged in the library and discussed in a "common hour"—a public forum for English majors—at the end of each academic year.

The coherence of the major is centered on the practice and passion of its students. In between the gateway methods course and the capstone senior workshop, our majors take four advanced literature courses that focus on different methods, periods, or questions. They also choose electives in creative writing, expository writing, history of the language, film studies, or more literature. I would venture to say that no two students—we will graduate seventy-one that same year—have the same literary experience in the same term. It would be too grand to call our individual courses sections of a single course, because we all taught different literary and critical texts, but our focus on methods revealed striking commonalities of theme and common pedagogical problems. This shared circumstance generated discussion and a deeper sense of the department as a teaching community: Just yesterday I witnessed the familiar sight of an old hand (who hasn't taught the course for a year or so) leaning into another old hand's office, consulting on which texts she found to be most effective for that course—"What news on the Rialto?" (Shakespeare 1.3.38). We talk to each other much more about our teaching and useful scholarship than we did when the curriculum was fixed.

We also express our scholarly interests vitally in our construction of new courses and our sharing of course syllabi. As the table of courses indicates, our course offerings are rarely repeated from semester to semester, and this experimentation in teaching has created an expectation of dynamism in our students and a deeper sense of community among the teaching faculty.

When I reviewed the historical evidence I discovered a third surprise: after the curricular transformation, we stopped replicating ourselves and began to hire with an eye toward finding new faculty members who were not like us. Freed from the necessity of "coverage," we ceased hiring "replacements" for faculty members on sabbatical leave. It's hard to prove causality, but the immediate aftermath of our curricular change was a growth in the number of student majors, a growth in the tenure lines in the department, and a steadily increasing diversity in the department's faculty members—measured not only in the categories of gender and race but also in subtle ways of thinking and being. Our training comes from a greater range of graduate schools—from an MFA at the University of Arkansas to a Yale PhD and a diploma from Trinity College, Dublin. We are no longer all Yankees, half the department faculty members are women, our most vital ideas about texts in context. While one might think that the traditional canon might disappear under these conditions, the freedom—indeed the duty—to be passionate afforded some surprising results: the reintroduction of a long dormant course on John Milton; my Africanist colleague revisiting Pope's poetry; a new course on Jane Austen in the context of social history; and so on. The second surprise was that as we gave up territory to share previously balkanized teaching responsibilities, several of us taught the ways-of-reading course during the same term. It would be too grand to call our individual courses sections of a single course, because we all taught different literary and critical texts, but our focus on methods revealed striking commonalities of theme and common pedagogical problems. This shared circumstance generated discussion and a deeper sense of the department as a teaching community: Just yesterday I witnessed the familiar sight of an old hand (who hasn't taught the course for a year or so) leaning into another old hand's office, consulting on which texts she found to be most effective for that course—"What news on the Rialto?" (Shakespeare 1.3.38). We talk to each other much more about our teaching and useful scholarship than we did when the curriculum was fixed.

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experience of the world is more diverse. The most recent expansion of curriculum and of revisionist thinking came last year, when we replaced a specialist in seventeenth-century lyric poetry (who was directing our junior-year-abroad program in Norwich, England) with a visiting poet-in-residence who could teach both literature and creative writing. We were delighted to discover she also wanted to develop a new expository writing class on food and culture and an introduction to Asian American literature. At the end of last year, with the dean's enthusiastic support, we converted her job to a tenure-track line. Having two full-time creative writers and one part-time creative writer made it possible this year to shape a new minor in creative writing, available for majors and nonmajors alike.

The curricular reforms of a decade ago were brilliantly supple: by focusing on texts in context, we gave ourselves the freedom to generate new courses without the cumbersome requirement of approving every new course topic through the all-college curriculum committee. It's my job as chair to balance the department's offerings over time, to track student interest and allow it to help determine course offerings term to term, and to cultivate my colleagues' professional development through new course development. My Africanist colleague, for example, has forged new courses at both the introductory and advanced levels in Caribbean writing, Indian women's writing, and writing of the black diaspora; he is also heading up an innovative program called Crossing Borders, which gathers students from Dickinson, Spelman College in Atlanta, and Xavier University in New Orleans to study in Cameroon, West Africa, and to study at a culturally different American campus for a term. Last summer he and our junior African Americanist led the first group of thirteen students to Yaoundé.

At the decade mark, we have some work to do. We will revisit the question of whether ten courses is enough. Several new majors at Dickinson, especially in the sciences, have up to fourteen required courses, and the college's general education requirements have been streamlined in recent years. Those of us who teach the senior seminars and workshops—pretty much everyone but the creative writing faculty members—have decided to discuss the research component in the 300-level elective classes. We will probably begin with our syllabi, as we usually do, and focus on the many ways we advance research skills through writing and oral presentation. We may write a visionary paragraph or two, but I doubt we'll set strict requirements for all such classes. A second area to watch will be the integration between the creative writing minor and the major. It's too early for us to tell if the extraordinary demand for the entry-level creative writing workshops will put pressure on the major in other ways—since the minor requires a significant number of literature courses.

As you can see, for both faculty members and students, the revised major is not laissez-faire but “do-it-yourself.” We ourselves have become texts in context. The success of our major—and its future—depends on good faith and communication among members of the faculty and a clear-eyed department chair. Opening the curriculum changed who we are. The apparent paradox that an inclusive canon creates a more coherent department is something we can savor.

Works Cited

Appendix: Course Offerings

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<td>Images of the Suburbs</td>
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<td>Beauties and Beasts and Bedtime Ideologies</td>
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<td>Gumshoes and Gunslingers</td>
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| **100-Level Topics Courses: Texts in Context (35 students)** | |
| American Fiction | Continuities and Discontinuities in American Fiction |
| Me and My Shadow | Twentieth-Century Irish Literature |
| Civil War Literature | Romantics and Victorians |
| Romantic Natural History | American Classics, 1925–50 |
| Crime and Punishment | Contemporary American Fiction |
| Sports Literature | Jewish Women Writers |
| The Idea of the City in Literature | The Anxious Empire: Victorian Literature in Society |
| Literature and Social Change | Detective Story: Poe–Doyle |
| All Stories Are True | Postcolonial Women |
| Black Is, Black Ain’t | Film Studies 101: Introduction to Film Studies |
| Film Studies 101: Introduction to Film Studies | |

| **Expository Writing (15 students)** | |
| Writing about Sex, Gender, and Relationships | Writing about Food and Culture |
| Writing about the Movies | Writing about Society |
| Writing about Food and Culture | |

| **Creative Writing (15 students)** | |
| Creative Writing—Fiction | Creative Writing—Fiction |
| Creative Writing—Poetry | Creative Writing—Poetry |
| Advanced Creative Writing—Fiction | |

| **200-Level Courses** | |
| History and Structure of the English Language (25 students) | History and Structure of the English Language (25 students) |
| Critical Approaches and Literary Methods (20 students; 2 sections) | Critical Approaches and Literary Methods (20 students; 3 sections) |

| **300-Level Courses** | |
| Irish Short Story | Contemporary American Poetry |
| Harlem Renaissance | Harlem Renaissance |
| Studies in Early American Literature | Postcolonial Literature |
| James Joyce’s Ulysses | Theater of the Supernatural |
| Gender and Modernism | Three Renaissance Poets |
| Chaucer | Romantic Nature Writing |
| The Suburbs in Fiction and Film | Shakespeare on Love |
| | Edgar Allan Poe |

| **Senior Seminar (15 students)** | |
| Modern to Postmodern | Poetry in Motion |
| Frankenstein and Other Romantic Monsters | Bloomsbury and the Idea of the Literary Circle |
| Remakes and Adaptations | Moby-Dick and Its Contexts |
| Tales from the English Country House | Modern to Postmodern |
| Senior Workshop | Senior Workshop |
The Postmodern English Major: A Case Study

LAWRENCE SCHWARTZ

JUST a few years ago, in the vortices of the culture wars, it was commonplace to read articles in both the popular and scholarly press noting the demise of literary studies—such as Andrew Delbanco’s acerbic omnibus review in the New York Review of Books about the catastrophe that was English studies, as theory had supposedly replaced the study of honorific literature. In its disarray and loss of respectability, Delbanco suggested, the English department had become the laughingstock of the university. I offer here a case study in curriculum change that reveals a very different experience—one that demonstrates a discipline more alive than ever. It is the story of how the lively canon debates prompted our department, a rather typical one in a midsized, public university, to restructure the English major. Our reality has been that the culture wars, critical theory, poststructuralism, and the reemergence of Marxist social criticism have made English studies more exhilarating and less elitist.

In 1991, the English department faculty at Montclair State University (MSU) began a two-year project to revise its major in a modestly postmodernist direction—one that recognized diversity and complexity and acknowledged publicly that all interpretation is constructed and that any and all versions of a set of major requirements are value-laden. After two years of debate and discussion the major was shifted to a more open format with a new required course, called The Pursuits of English, designed to introduce students to their chosen academic field, English studies.

It required one more year to create the course and generate a formal curriculum proposal for the new major and the new course. In the fall of 1994, the new program began. This essay reflects the program after seven years and reviews what we did and why we did it. I believe that to see an instance of dramatic change in some detail is a helpful and practical approach to an exceedingly difficult process, one that acknowledges a pragmatic side to defining our academic field for undergraduates. Given the many recent articles in the ADE Bulletin and on discussion lists, many departments, in a full array of universities and colleges, are in the process of similar restructurings.

In 1991, when we began, the key was to accept that the study of literature had changed and was evolving in dramatic new directions, that our faculty reflected such change in diverse ways, and that student interests were also shifting. How to accommodate and integrate all this was our challenge. It was clear to us that as teacher-scholars we represented a “passionate diversity” of interests, critical approaches, and teaching methods, as was noted in one of the planning documents associated with the creation of our new required course: “a diversity that is unfortunately masked from both ourselves and our students, by demands of individual courses and specialized areas of scholarship” (“New Course Proposal”). The unmasking of ideological assumptions about the major requirements and our own pedagogies, or at least the conscious recognition of these assumptions, became a central element of all that occurred in the process of making this change, though ultimately at MSU and everywhere an English major program remains primarily defined by what is taught rather than by what appears in a university catalog. However, the questioning of basic assumptions and the challenging of shibboleths are the healthiest form of academic exercise—good for us (in the most surprising of self-serving ways) and good for our students (in a frontal attack on intellectual passivity and complacency).

At MSU, our departmental work to reposition and rethink our major was also bound up in the larger institutional shift to university status (in part, making released

The author is chair of the English department at Montclair State University. A version of this paper was presented at the 2002 ADE Summer Seminar in Cooperstown, New York.

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time for research available to virtually the entire faculty), which included an increased reliance on adjunct faculty; a proposed sweeping revision of the general education requirement; and of course, as almost everywhere in public higher education, reduced financial support, which in the English department has translated into a continued reduction in full-time tenure-track lines (from 38 lines in 1985 to 31 lines in 1999, but with a rebound to 34 lines in 2002). However, if our experience is indeed typical, then the English department is more robust and visionary than ever, though perhaps more strained and overburdened as well.

The Old Major

For some twenty years, predating most of the present full-time faculty members, the MSU English major was defined as a 33-credit program set inside a 128-credit bachelor’s degree with 58 credits in general education. Appendix 1 presents an outline of the English major as it existed before fall 1994. Appendix 2 presents an outline of the 128-credit-hour course of study leading to the baccalaureate, composed of a 58-hour general education requirement (including Freshman Composition and Introduction to Literature, both 3 credits each; a reading course in world literature or general humanities; and a 6-credit foreign language requirement), 37 credits in free electives (generally courses outside the English major, though many students opt for more than 33 English credits), and the 33-credit-hour English major.²

Appendix 1 readily reveals that the sharply established categories, while not quite a core, privileged British and American literature (there is no specific Shakespeare requirement for general English majors, but there is a Shakespeare requirement for teacher-education students, some 20% of our majors). The structure of requirements also made innovation next to impossible. Inside the program, only Women Prose Writers had been added in the late 1980s. All other additions and special-topics courses had to be listed in the narrow area of electives, three courses out of a total of eleven. Thematic courses; interdisciplinary courses; or courses that tried to explore theory or class, race, and gender questions were all in the elective category and had to fight for space in the course cycles with everything else. Not only did many faculty members believe that the major was outdated, they also found it inordinately inflexible in accommodating change in the profession and in their own scholarly and teaching interests. Students with interests in film, creative writing, journalism, teacher education, or future graduate study all found themselves constrained by offerings that were too limited and too skewed.

In the spring of 1992, after a year of rather intense analysis and discussion, the task force (an eclectic group of eight faculty members—old and young, left and right) charged with revision of the major reported its findings and its recommendations. First, the report made the context of dissatisfaction clear:

There is the general perception that the structure of the old major no longer meets the challenges of shifting faculty interests, a student constituency undergoing broad sociological change, and an academic discipline in the midst of dramatic conceptual and institutional transformations. Principal sources of frustration with the old system include its constraints on new course offerings; the division between courses which fulfill major requirements in the categories of English, American, and Comparative Literature, Genre, or Language/Rhetoric on the one hand and, on the other, courses which count only toward the 9-semester-hour major elective category . . . ; the limiting profile of literary studies inscribed by the five required areas; and the failure of the program to adequately address different levels of student involvement in literary culture. (“Task Force Report” 1)

Second, there was a sharp critique of the weaknesses in the old major, a critique that received the broadest consensual support from the faculty members. The task force noted that the tightly structured major allowed just three electives, and those electives did not appear on the list of required courses the department distributed to majors. Over time, students came to see the listed courses as the central thread and all the rest as peripheral and less valuable. In the end, those nonlisted courses were offered less frequently and both students and faculty members were drawn to those on the central list. Since all new or innovative courses fell by default into the elective domain, they were launched or auditioned under an inherent disadvantage. Faculty members were discouraged from creating new courses because the chances of finding a niche and student support seemed small. In sum, the final report noted:

Our current set of requirements is the result of many compromises over a long time and no longer serves any coherent purpose. The genre requirement began with Art of Poetry because of the perception that our students needed such a course. Drama and prose fiction were later added because we did not want to privilege poetry over these, but in so doing, the original purpose of the requirement was lost, and it once again was possible for students to avoid any contact with poetry. The second required area began as a history of
the language requirement with grammar as an alternative for those students who were planning to be teachers. Several other linguistics courses and a few writing courses have been added, and as a result all coherence has been lost. Each of these courses could benefit our students, but it is not possible to make a cogent argument that a student must take only one of them. If the English and American requirements were established to give our students a sense of the historical continuity of the great tradition of literature, this ambition was doomed from the start. To divide English literature into five periods, for example, and then require the student to choose three almost guarantees lack of continuity. More fundamentally, many of us do not agree on the importance of teaching the “tradition,” or subscribe to the political implications of such teaching. Many of our courses, as they are now taught, do not support the original intentions behind these requirements. If, on the other hand, the purpose is simply to give our students exposure to literature from the past, this new proposal offers a better way. Finally, the comparative requirement is too narrowly defined and excludes too much we are interested in. (1–2)

Third, the task force acknowledged a change in students who elected English as their major: there was a resurgence of interest in secondary school teaching. Just a few students wanted to follow an academic career in college teaching; as the economy changed many saw the major as useful preprofessional training; some wanted a career path in journalism; still others wanted to have an emphasis in film or creative writing (presently, the creative writing concentration is the largest subset, having some 125 of our 680 majors). It was obvious that, “given that all of our courses are equally valuable, although certainly in different ways, no single set of requirements will satisfy the needs of these diverse students” (2). Certainly, a major focused so intensely on literature in one rigid structure could not accommodate these demands or provide multiple paths to a degree in English other than in the most traditional terms.

The various venues in which the debate over changing the major took place (regular departmental meetings, the several ad hoc subcommittee meetings, the regular task-force meetings) provided the most spirited discussion among colleagues that any of us had seen. Even if the major had not been formally revamped, these conversations changed us. While a few faculty members saw no reason to alter the major at all, almost everyone believed it was too restrictive, in the ways outlined above. In essence, the debate centered first on the question of whether there should be a required core of courses that all students must take to receive a degree in English, even if their interests were not centrally literary; second, on the question of whether to give parity to a wide variety of courses and approaches inside the department. This was how the larger culture wars became immanent and public in our department.3

The tension was clearly between those who wanted to hold on to a sense of a literary tradition rooted in British and American literature and those who wanted to democratize the major. Some believed that there is and should be a basic core of subject matter (books, poems, genres, language skills, critical approaches); others believed that any notion of a central fundamental list of books, approaches, and so forth would set up a new orthodoxy and that it is exactly the idea of orthodoxy (“right teaching”) that should be distrusted. A core implies a consensus about what subject matter is fundamental—but there was no longer a consensus, and most faculty members understood that one should not be imposed on students. Even those who were loathe to surrender the notion of a great tradition understood.

What emerged from all this discussion and debate was the willingness of a disparate faculty to acknowledge that no structure is value-free—and that two decades of turmoil in the profession have demonstrated that there is no argument for the transcendent literary merit of one writer or national literature, either over time or over other writers or literatures, that would not meet with fierce and widespread opposition. The challenge was to find a way to break free of past restrictions and to encourage exploration into new writings while acknowledging literary history.

The New Major

The solution we reached is grounded in the notion that our central responsibility is to provide students with an introduction to the discipline of English studies in its many varieties and to make clear the assumptions that teacher-scholars and student-scholars bring to the study of texts and films. We decided to create one introductory, required course and to impose a set of guidelines (including a limited but clear historical distribution) to replace the current list of required courses. The total number of credits remained the same, thirty-three, but the shape of the program was drastically altered: a required course introducing majors to English as a discipline; four literature courses including two devoted to pre-twentieth-century literature and one course focused on pre-nineteenth-century literature; a writing-intensive course (in which writing receives attention as a mode
of inquiry and expression rather than as an instrument to demonstrate knowledge or mastery of course material); and finally, distribution requirements by genre (three out of four genres: fiction, drama, poetry, film) and emphasis (two out of five areas of emphasis: multinational study, minority writers, women writers, gender studies, class issues). In addition, it was agreed that all English department courses above the 200 level could be applied to the major as long as students fulfilled the several guidelines by the conclusion of their course work. With all courses in the department equal, students essentially designed a program of study that reflects their interests as shaped by what we, as a faculty, offer. (Appendix 3 provides an outline of requirements students need to complete the major as currently constituted.) It is worth quoting at length the new guiding principles:

The English Major is designed to guide our students to achieve a number of closely related goals. We want our students to develop their critical thinking abilities, to be aware and appreciative of the values of their own and other cultures as reflected in and challenged by literature and film, and to pay disciplined, informed, and appreciative attention to language, literature, film, and their own writing. Under the guidance of a faculty with diverse scholarly interests and critical orientations, our students learn to understand, interpret, and to appreciate a variety of texts from many different ages and cultures, in many different genres. At the same time, they develop their own writing, learning to express their perspectives and to incorporate information and critical opinion gathered from others. . . . We believe in exposing students to multiple points of view, whether these views are complementary or opposed. Through all our course offerings, we immerse students in the perspectives that can be opened through knowledge of literary and film history, through attention to the cultural backgrounds of writers and texts (including issues of class, race, and gender), and through understanding of the commonplaces and constraints of period and genre. Above all, our goal is to enable our students to join us as careful, appreciative readers, incisive writers, critical scholars, scholarly critics, and fully engaged controversialists. ("Task Force Report" 2)

In short, students have the healthy freedom to design programs that meet their individual interest; at the same time, the required course at the center of the new major is to be devoted to acquainting and involving them with the controversies, contradictions, and common assumptions of our profession. Its goal is to introduce students to the large issues of what, why, and how we study. The department voted approval of the new major in May 1992 and set a small group of faculty members to work on devising the required introductory course over the summer for departmental adoption in fall 1993 with a planned start in fall 1994. The traditionalists supported the new program because it retained a base of four literature courses and a historical dimension, and the innovators had won parity for all courses taught in the department and the adoption of a required course introducing students to the study of English.

The Pursuits of English

From the outset, the new course The Pursuits of English was conceived in terms of team teaching and active student engagement in presentations and discussions, with a mix of large- and small-group instruction. The three-credit course was presented for approval in sections of twenty-five students but taught by full-time faculty members in combined sections at least once a week. In fall 1999 it was revised to four credits. The stipulated aim of the course was "to acquaint students with the manner in which we as teachers of literature, film, and writing define and practice our areas of interest and as scholars, writers, and readers engage the controversial issues that attend our discipline(s)" ("New Course Proposal"). It was seen from the outset as broader than a theory course or a course in criticism, one in which the fundamental issues of literary study were to be raised. For the given semester, the faculty team would select common readings and a set of introductory problems or questions such as, What is literature? Why study it? What is a text? Why do we read what we read? How do we read and write? What occurs in the process of interpretation? What are the politics of interpretation? The intent was to make students aware, usually for the first time, that questions of interpretation that are taken for granted in high school and introductory college courses are in fact problematic. In short, we wanted to focus their learning on the problems that ensue when texts are subject to multiple interpretations, often with rather incompatible or at least contending approaches.

The course-catalog description included in the original proposal read:

This course will involve students in a variety of materials (e.g., poems, stories, films), critical practices (e.g., modes of interpretation, historicist analysis), and pedagogies (e.g., lectures, discussion groups, peer analysis) representative of our curriculum. Faculty will be encouraged to interrelate presentations in such a way that students will be able to grasp the principle of heterogeneous meaning (or significance) inherent in any single textual production.
The proposal offered four specific course objectives:

1. To familiarize students . . . with a range of critical and theoretical perspectives through which texts are interpreted and contextualized, with special emphasis on comparisons between traditional and poststructuralist literary/filmic models of creativity and history.
2. To explore how single works can be addressed from diverse perspectives, and the ideological implications informing choice of method of text: examining the impact of such factors as social class, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation in writing and reading practices.
3. To introduce students to the consequences of pedagogical and interpretive practices and to encourage excellence in the creation of analytic and expository texts.
4. To work toward the development of independent and critically informed habits of thought, research, discussion, and writing. To prepare students to make informed decisions about future course work and classroom prerogatives.

(“New Course Proposal”)

The new major was to be phased in over four years beginning in fall 1994. Students already enrolled were allowed to select either the old or new major for graduation; students entering the program after fall 1994 were committed to the new major. Initially Pursuits was to be taken within two semesters of declaring the major, but that rule was recently altered to a recommendation that the course be taken before twelve credits in the major. Advising students became more central to the program. Faculty engagement in publishing course guidelines was required because different members of the faculty may teach the same course differently and because faculty members may change the emphasis in a course from semester to semester. The department became committed to the regular publication of a list of course guidelines and volunteered to publish a booklet (now on the Web at english.montclair.edu/) that describes courses more fully than the undergraduate catalog. To date these guidelines have been published regularly for 100% of the course offerings, and course descriptions have been published for about 50% of them each semester.

The new major moved readily and without objection through the approval process until the registrar raised the question of the graduation audit. Under the old major, requirements were met by specific courses. The course numbers were included in the audit program in the registrar’s computer. With only one required course, the registrar contended that a central audit was now not possible. For the new major to be adopted, the department had to guarantee and certify that each student had satisfied the course requirements and guidelines for the English major. Instead of being sidetracked by an administrative issue, the department agreed to take on the overview function, and students are now required to submit a final audit form to the English department through their individual advisers, who review students’ work in the program and certify their completion of it. The management of this work and the coordination with the registrar is conducted by the academic advising coordinator. While time-consuming and tedious, the procedures we developed work well, and we routinely graduate some one hundred students each academic year.

There is an active departmental committee that helps coordinate the Pursuits of English course, and more than half the full-time faculty have taught the course at least once. Presently, team teaching is regularly done in pairs (two or three teams of four to six faculty members teach each semester). My impression is that the intellectual culture for courses after students have taken Pursuits is substantially improved. Students who have taken Pursuits show fuller understanding of the grounding issues in and assumptions of course syllabi and lectures. They distinguish themselves most demonstrably in the sophistication of the questions they raise in class discussions. In any given section, it is almost impossible not to notice whether a student has already taken Pursuits.

For faculty members, the shift in the major has made possible the teaching of a variety of new courses that reflect their most recent research and their engagement in the debates in their academic specialties. For example, there have been thirty new course offerings since 1995 (see appendix 4).5 Certainly, these thirty new courses might provide ammunition for those who want to argue that this is just evidence of the disarray inherent in the so-called pluralistic approach. However, in the context of the program of revision described above, the shift is far more positive. First, all the old courses remain in the catalog and are taught regularly (e.g., Shakespeare is offered in multiple sections and always over-subscribed) in coherent cycles that represent the various fields in the department. Second, new courses are now given life in a rather elegant and democratic way.

All new courses are offered first as special topics. After being taught twice, a course is reviewed by the departmental curriculum committee in consultation with the faculty member who initiated it, and a judgment is made whether the course should become a regular offering in the university catalog. About 25% of the courses listed in appendix 4 were added to the catalog, with just one course focusing on the work of a single
career faculty members this opportunity became the
suits was recently approved as a four-credit course. As
breadth of material covered in the required course, Pur-
theories and reading complex analytic essays in Pursuits
difficulties students have assimilating disparate critical
though not without criticism, especially because of the
both formal and anecdotal has been generally positive,
MSU late in the 1980s or early 1990s). The feedback
for a few part-time evening students who began study at
All English majors are now under its umbrella (except
is undergraduate education, the new major guarantees
innovation may be viewed as a model of how a long aca-
demic career in teaching can easily accommodate an
individuation of changing academic interests. The opportu-
nity to convert research interests into courses for under-
graduates was an unintended but serendipitous result.
In retrospect, one might argue that for mid- to late-
career faculty members this opportunity became the
the most meaningful aspect of the changes to our major.

The Fifth Anniversary

In 1999, the new major passed its fifth anniversary. All English majors are now under its umbrella (except for a few part-time evening students who began study at MSU late in the 1980s or early 1990s). The feedback both formal and anecdotal has been generally positive, though not without criticism, especially because of the difficulties students have assimilating disparate critical theories and reading complex analytic essays in Pursuits of English. In response to student concerns over the breadth of material covered in the required course, Pursuits was recently approved as a four-credit course. As the proposal to add a credit to Pursuits noted, “The scope of the course, with its extremely wide range of critical and literary materials and its nontraditional emphasis on raising problems (without necessarily resolving them), requires a more extensive period of orientation for students as they learn how to apply new models of interpretation to texts” (“Curriculum Revision”).

Finally, the course-catalog description was revised to synthesize more succinctly and directly what we see as the essence of the work in Pursuits:

An inquiry into what constitutes contemporary literary study; its subject matter and its underlying goals and methods. Students study literary and cinematic texts of various genres, as well as literary criticism and theory; inquire into the nature of authorship and of texts; examine and expand their ways of reading, interpreting, and writing about texts; trace the relation of literary criticism to theory; consider the relation of literary study to issues of power; and develop independent habits of thought, research, discussion, and analytic writing that are informed by literary theory and criticism. (“Curriculum Revision”)

In sum, at the very least, when students leave our introduction to English studies, they have come to see how literary knowledge and interpretation are constructed and how the literary debates and cultural clashes are a reflection themselves of the complex processes of historical change. Perhaps most important, they understand that no reading of literature is value-free.

Notes

1Delbanco considered the following works: Alvin Kernan, In Plato’s Cave, The Death of Literature, and What’s Happened to the Humanities? (an essay anthology); Carl Woodring, Literature: An Embattled Profession; Robert Scholes, The Rise and Fall of English: Reconstructing English as a Discipline; Michael Bérubé, The Employment of English: Theory, Jobs, and the Future of Literary Studies; and John M. Ellis, Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities. In addition, preparing this essay, I read ADE Bulletin essays from the mid-1980s on the structures of English programs and general education requirements around the country; a College English symposium from July 1999 on English studies at the end of the century—in particular, Patrick Brantlinger’s essay “Who Killed Shakespeare? An Apologia for English Departments”; Gerald Graff’s adjudication of the culture wars Beyond the Culture Wars (1992), especially chapter 2, “The Vanishing Classics and Other Myths: Two Episodes in the Culture War.”

2According to Huber and Laurence, our program of study in English was fairly typical of midsized four-year public colleges with some 6,000 full-time day undergraduates, 35 full-time facul-

3Two proposals went forward to the department at large: a substantial number of faculty members wanted to create a core of required courses. Their plan took the shape of a new course in critical reading—close reading in the New Critical mode (3 credits) and survey courses in American literature (3 credits), British literature (6 credits), and world literature (3 credits). In addition, a variety of specified 12-credit concentrations would be created so that students could specialize (American literature, British literature, comparative literature, world literature, creative writing, theory, cultural studies, etc.). And the 9 credits of free electives would remain. Basically, this was our present major but with a core of courses and a revised distribution requirement. A second
group of faculty members wanted to generate several sets of guidelines and simply drop all required courses and let students...
and their departmental advisers create a program of study based on the courses offered in the department.

This material was initially distributed in paper versions during regular registration and again in the offering. Publication is now done on the Internet at english.montclair.edu under the Course Guidelines / Descriptions link. (For the English department section of the MSU undergraduate catalog, see www.montclair.edu/academics.shtml.) The publication of course guidelines is overseen by the advising coordinator for the department—a position that receives administrative released time, a load reduction of one course per semester.

Most of these were offered once or twice and then dropped, some were made part of the regular offerings of the department, and a very few were proposed but did not have enough students register and were canceled. The major in turn became 34 credits and the university has dropped the total number of credits for graduation from 128 to 120. A student majoring in English now takes 58 general-elective credits, 34 English major credits, and 28 free electives. It is impossible to present a single representative syllabus for Pursuits. The literary selections have ranged from the canonical to the esoteric (e.g., Shakespeare, Conrad, Kinsai, Behn, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o). The most prevalent theory texts taught have been David H. Richter, *Falling into Theory: Conflicting Views on Reading Literature* (1994; 2000); and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory* (1996). And many faculty members now rely heavily on the Web for literary texts, criticism, and theory that make teaching Pursuits easier than ever and far richer—for example, *Voice of the Shuttle* at the University of California, Santa Barbara; *Project Gutenberg* at the University of Virginia; *Project Bartleby* at Columbia University; and the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, to name just a few. Some were made part of the regular offerings of the department, and a very few were proposed but did not have enough students register and were canceled.

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**Works Cited**


**Appendix 1**

**English Major Program (Before Fall 1994)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Requirements</th>
<th>33 semester hours (sh)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>(3 sh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and rhetoric</td>
<td>(3 sh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American literature</td>
<td>(6 sh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British literature</td>
<td>(9 sh)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparative literature (3 sh)
English electives (9 sh)
Genre (3 sh)

Choose one of the following
- **ENGL 226** Literature of the American Renaissance
- **ENGL 234** American Drama
- **ENGL 238** Afro-American Writers
- **ENGL 324** American Poetry to 1940
- **ENGL 326** Early American Literature
- **ENGL 336** American Literary Realism

American literature

Courses marked * may overlap in content. These courses may be used to satisfy only one area; that is, if taken to satisfy area 1, the same course cannot be used to satisfy area 2.

**Early American literature (3 sh)**

Choose one of the following
- **ENGL 226** Literature of the American Renaissance
- **ENGL 234** American Drama
- **ENGL 238** Afro-American Writers
- **ENGL 324** American Poetry to 1940
- **ENGL 326** Early American Literature
- **ENGL 336** American Literary Realism

British literature (3 sh)

Three courses in British literature, chosen from three of the five areas listed below. As in American literature, a course listed in more than one area, marked *, may be used to satisfy only one area.

**Early British literature**

- **ENGL 240** English Literature I: Beginnings to 17th Century
- **ENGL 254** English Drama: Beginnings to 1642
- **ENGL 344** Chaucer
- **ENGL 345** Middle English Literature
- **ENGL 401** Old English Literature

16th- and 17th-century literature

- **ENGL 240** English Literature I: Beginnings to 17th Century
- **ENGL 254** English Drama: Beginnings to 1642
- **ENGL 343** Milton
- **ENGL 348** Renaissance Literature
- **ENGL 353** Shakespeare: The Comedies and Histories
- **ENGL 354** Shakespeare: The Tragedies and Romances
- **ENGL 444** 17th-Century English Poetry

18th-century British literature

- **ENGL 241** English Literature II: Restoration to Present
- **ENGL 247** The Augustan Age
Appendix 2

General Education Requirements 58 sh

Communication (9 sh)
Writing
Reading
Speaking
Contemporary issues (3 sh)
Fine and performing arts (3 sh)
Foreign language (6 sh)
Humanities (6 sh)
World literature / general humanities
Philosophy / religion
Mathematics / computer science (5 sh)
Mathematics
Computer science
Natural / physical sciences (7 sh)
Laboratory science
Nonlab science
Physical education (1 sh)
Social science (12 sh)
American / European history
Nonwestern cultural perspective
Survey
Topic
General-education electives (not in English dept.) (6 sh)

Free Electives 37 sh
(Consult MSU undergraduate degree requirements for minorities culture requirement — 3 sh)

English Major 33 sh

Required Total 128 sh

Appendix 3

The English Major

(Web address for course guidelines and descriptions: english.montclair.edu)
Curriculum Guide and Program Worksheet for Departmental Advisement (Effective Fall 1994)

English major (List all courses) Minimum 34 sh

1. ______________________________________________
2. ______________________________________________
3. ______________________________________________
4. ______________________________________________
5. ______________________________________________
6. ______________________________________________
7. ______________________________________________
8. ______________________________________________
9. ______________________________________________
10. ______________________________________________
11. ______________________________________________

(Use other side if necessary.)

Required course
ENGL 200: The Pursuits of English

Students must satisfy all three of these requirements in literature, writing, and genre.

1. Literature: Four literature courses At least two of these courses must pay significant attention to literature before the 20th century. At least one must deal with literature before the 19th century.

   Pre-19th century title and no.______________________
   Pre-20th century title and no.______________________
   Title and no.___________________________________
   Title and no.___________________________________

2. Writing: One writing-intensive course This may be a course devoted to writing or one in which writing receives significant and focused attention as a mode of inquiry and expression. Courses do not satisfy this guideline that ask students to write only to demonstrate knowledge or mastery of course material.

   Title and no.___________________________________

3. Genre study: Significant attention to at least three genres—poetry, fiction, drama, or film.

   Title and no.___________________________________
   Title and no.___________________________________
   Title and no.___________________________________

4. Satisfy two of the following five guidelines:

   Multinational study: Significant attention to texts or films from at least one national literature or culture other than American or British.

   Title and no.___________________________________

   Minority writers: Significant study of several writers from one or more minority cultures of this country, either in concentrating on them or in more general courses in which a significant number of the texts come out of minority cultures.

   Title and no.___________________________________

   Women writers: Significant study of women writers, either in courses concentrating on them or in more general courses in which a significant number of the texts are by women.

   Title and no.___________________________________
Gender studies: Significant study of the development or expression of gender roles or identities in literary texts or films.

Class issues: Significant study of issues of social class in literary texts or films.

Appendix 4

List of New Course Offerings Taught since 1994

19th-Century American Women
19th-Century Black American Novel
African, Asian, and Caribbean Fiction
American Gothic Literature
American Latino/Latina Writers
Baseball in Literature
Black American Women Writers
Contemporary Biography and Autobiography
Contemporary British Literature and Culture
Culture and Identity in Contemporary Britain
Detective Fiction and Film
Ethics in Journalism
Film and the Working Class
Film on Film
Holocaust and the American Press
Images of Muslim Women
International Lesbian Literature
Internet for English Majors
Lesbian Fiction and Poetry
Literature of United States Immigration
Muslim Women in the 20th Century
The Novels of Toni Morrison
Renaissance Paradise
Seminar in Film: Nonfiction Cinema
Sports Reporting
Talk Radio and American Society
Teaching Writing: Grades 6–12
Utopian Fiction
Victorian Novel
Writing: The Profile
Gumbo? On the Logic of Undergraduate Curricula in English Studies

ALAN SHEPARD

English departments . . . tend to offer a pathless wilderness of courses, with no logic that pulls students from one course to the next.

—Jonathan Culler

Obtaining a degree in English with a Writing and Culture concentration is like cooking a gumbo; you pick the ingredients to suit your taste.

—Writing and Culture

I WANT to argue against the practice of designing a major or concentration in English as a gumbo of courses thrown together to add up to thirty credit hours or thirty-six credit hours or whatever, but, as David Laurence has asked in the spring 2002 ADE Bulletin, “Can a collection or accumulation of courses developed out of the uncoordinated choices of faculty members stand as a curriculum, however brilliant in conception and however artfully taught?” (16). Trained to dodge certainty, I am inclined to answer, “It depends.” But we should ask ourselves whether it really does depend. Increasingly, I am inclined to favor a return to more structure, especially for an undergraduate curriculum, although that structure looks fundamentally different from the historical-coverage model that preceded the gumbo we have now.

To be fair, the Writing and Culture concentration at Louisiana State University (LSU) comes with a set of prescribed courses totaling twenty-four hours, a burden that opens onto another smorgasbord of picks—either the first half of the American or British survey or the second half, and so forth. It seems to me that LSU’s practice here is entirely typical of current practice in a great number of the English studies programs in North America, where the English major and its concentrations or tracks do not in fact guide students and declared majors through the logic of the curriculum. Sometimes, I would venture, faculties themselves have paid that logic little thought. It’s fair to say, I think, that the logic of our pedagogy is almost always undertheorized.

I’m interested in the metanarratives we use to create the English major. In this essay I draw on my local experiences at Texas Christian University (TCU) to suggest why the gumbo trope is an insufficient way of organizing the academic programs in English that departments typically offer to students and I make some flash forwards to the University of Guelph, where in the summer of 2002 I became director of the School of Literatures and Performance Studies in English.

Here are five reasons why the gumbo model of picking and choosing courses to suit students’ taste is not an effective one for students, or helpful to other constituents to whom we want to communicate the value of majoring in our discipline:

1. Persons who do not already hold advanced degrees in the discipline frequently misread the intellectual freedom and apparent scheduling flexibility as suggesting a lack of coherence or even bad faith. Faculties may see such flexibility as a core strength of the student-driven major because of the opportunities it affords across many different courses to raise the big questions that underlie disciplinary assumptions about canonicity or historical periods or tensions between reading and writing. Ironically, these kinds of intellectual opportunities, which we faculty members welcome, can be mistaken for bad faith, because from another angle it looks as if we are refusing to share in an organized, systematic way the knowledge students need if they are to apprehend those big questions—or are refusing to recognize that not everyone comes to college already knowing what we take for granted.

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2. If we argue that an English major doesn’t need to be structured carefully because, after all, we’re principally teaching transferable, universal literacy skills—analysis, argument, writing—we thereby make the English major indistinguishable from another in, say, media studies or communications or even international communications, a major TCU recently launched. I wonder how many students who once would have majored in English are now regularly siphoned off by communications programs.

3. Defining your major as a smorgasbord implies that you believe students receive careful, one-on-one advising about their programs of study. But such programs are based on a liberal arts college model, and there are relatively few such institutions. Many universities have replaced faculty advising with professional advisers; in the era of online registration, a substantial percentage of students at TCU are opting for no advising at all.

4. The gumbo model can be symptomatic of our greed for teaching only what we want, as the spirit moves us or as our grant applications lead us. When I became chair at TCU in 1998, finding no records whatsoever of the courses we had given over previous semesters, I was struck by the randomness of the model we had used to decide which courses to offer. Semester by semester, my predecessors had gone up and down the hallways, more or less creating the schedules from faculty wish lists. While it is valuable to link teaching and research, departments must do so in thoughtful ways that advantage rather than disadvantage students.

5. The gumbo model privileges indeterminacy, ambiguity, and the capacity for teaching oneself—all fine qualities, of course, but it offers them to too many students too early in their educations. Most undergraduates I know reach the capacity for ambiguity and self-instruction best by working through a rigorously laid out English major.

I concede that many departments already go some distance to identify a series of tracks for majors: they may have created an entry-level course into the major or tracks in writing, cultural studies, English education, or the fast track to graduate school. Sometimes these tracks are created from a genuine desire to bring some form to an otherwise inchoate bundle of course offerings. Sometimes they are sops to the very real pressures we may be under to educate students for jobs, which I see as a pressure we ought to welcome. To those who find that obligation unappetizing, I would just say that from the origins of exegetical scholarship and certainly by the sixteenth century, when the white-collar labor force was trained in Latin, humanistic training has been in one form or another job training as well as a noble enterprise of disinterested learning for its own sake. It’s impossible to separate these two functions.

Creating tracks, concentrations, clusters, whatever terminology is used to describe how the major is organized, helps provide an intelligible structure to the discipline and its subsets. But I suggest that simply identifying and naming the various parts of the discipline on a program Web site or in an undergraduate catalog doesn’t go far enough. Large-scale talk about what directions a department wants to go in continues to be an undervalued discourse, perhaps especially in PhD-granting departments. I would like to offer the gist of some of the conversations and actions regarding the undergraduate curriculum at TCU, a department I know well, and in the department I am just entering at the University of Guelph.

TCU’s undergraduate major was revamped in a two-year process, from 1996 to 1998. We killed off about eighteen courses that had outlived themselves and created a dozen or so new courses to reflect disciplinary changes. So the senior seminar in Hawthorne and Poe was out, and cyberliteracy and Renaissance Literature and the “New” Science, a course I designed and taught regularly, were in. The TCU curriculum was in many respects au courant in terms of disciplinary changes, but like LSU’s program it remained a buffet from which students could choose without really understanding why or how. Offerings in rhetoric and composition theory, long a staple of TCU’s doctoral programs, were expanded to include contemporary argument and persuasion and the history of rhetoric for undergraduates. We continued to tinker, adding a first-year seminar called Literature and Civilization that in effect replaced the historical survey of British literature and adding cultural studies to replace American literature. One debate in the undergraduate curriculum committee suggests the divergence of views concerning how to design that first-year seminar, slated to run in two parts over fall and spring semesters: a medievalist wanted to end the first semester at 1500, and a scholar of the Harlem Renaissance thought it would be better to break at 1920.

We made some practical changes too, like renumbering intro to this and that to attract more first-semester students to study with us before they declared a major in another program. We actually collapsed back together the writing and literature tracks that had been created in
the 1980s, to reduce the number of waivers we were routinely granting to majors who were flip-flopping from one track to the other and back again whenever they hit a scheduling snag as they progressed through the program. I was serving then as director of undergraduate studies, and the experience of observing our majors’ apparent lack of interest in brand loyalty led me to wonder if our majors had any sense of how the tracks differed or of the implications of those differences for their education or the shape of their lives after graduating.

Following advice I heard at the 1996 ADE Summer Seminar, we set about to revise the curriculum over a two-year period and had remarkably smooth sailing. Retreats worked well for us. During them we discussed the changes in the discipline and waded into questions of periodization and canonicity, debates that could have been (but weren’t) shark infested. What we did not do, however, may be just as important. We did not slow down enough to ask the deceptively difficult questions about the outcomes we hoped our students would achieve. I use accreditation lingo here deliberately because, in a narrow but powerful way, that lingo can actually help members of a department refocus: as we teach Doctor Faustus or The House of Mirth or the rhetoric of the palinode or the history of literacy, we need to be able to say in broad and specific language what we want our students to know and to be able to do when they complete our course or their degree in English. Indirectly, of course, we do probably know and can say. But if the curriculum is to teach more than gumbo, we need to invest a lot more energy in thinking through the logic of the sequence or sequences of courses and choices available to our majors.

My present grasp of the undergraduate curriculum at the University of Guelph is obviously limited and provisional. But as I prepared earlier this spring for my interviews with the search committee there, I scoured their Web site for clues about the state of the discussions of curriculum at both the BA and PhD levels. One phrase from their Web site jumped out: “We are, with the help of students, in the midst of substantially revising our curriculum in light of recent changes in the field of English studies and in the composition of the School.” When I got there, however, I learned that the undergraduate curriculum committee in one of the major programs had reached an impasse and had not met since 1999. Although I haven’t yet formulated a specific game plan for my first year there, I do think I understand an essential early first step: Do not start a conversation about curriculum by talking first of the hiring that needs to be done or by creating new courses or identifying new tracks. Those are the fun things, at least for some of us. Oh, and certainly do not begin by slaughtering someone’s pet course. What’s less fun, sometimes more tedious, less professionally sexy, and more crucial is to work backward from the assumptions about the nature and status of our discipline and humanities education more broadly to some first questions and first causes: What are we trying to teach? What are our assumptions, and do we still believe in them? What do we want our students to know and be able to do at the end of a course?

We will need to invent (or resurrect) a locally appropriate metanarrative for the school at Guelph, one that can garner broad consensus on these questions. This consensus isn’t something that can be swiped from a competitor’s Web site or quoted from an MLA position paper. Well, it can be, but doing so will short-circuit some very significant conversations among members of a department or school. To be able to articulate to students and their sponsors and your dean (and other pooh-bahs on and off campus) what majoring in English in your department can do for them requires that you hold your disciplinary malaise and prognostications of doom in abeyance, at least long enough to create a local metanarrative about what the department wants to offer, and why, and what those offerings can do for students when arranged into a meaningful pattern.

In The University in Ruins, already a classic, Bill Readings brilliantly analyzes the slide of institutions toward the “university of excellence,” where excellence is an empty sign that can be repeatedly co-opted to push for capitalist behavior masked as Enlightenment dispassion. As we all surely know, there’s rarely any profit to be made in the humanities, which could spell problems for if not death to the humanities in a for-profit university. Readings’s antidote to the slide into the vacuous ideal of excellence is that we should teach our students to be radically skeptical and to champion dissent, an unsatisfying solution that lets faculty members off the hook. For me, Readings’s diagnosis was brilliant, but his treatment was too tame. A better answer than teaching hermeneutical skepticism, which English faculty members do as a matter of course anyway, may be Gerald Graff’s advice to teach the conflicts. But in my mind an even better response to the extraordinary changes in higher education is proposed by Robert Scholes in The Rise and Fall of English. Scholes urges English departments to
embrace rhetoric (or embrace it again might be a better way to put it) as a touchstone for organizing the work and the curriculum, if they wish to spare themselves the fate of most classics programs. He writes, “The question is, how can we begin, in the midst of our difficulties and squabbles, to reconstruct our field as a discipline. My answer, to put it in grossly over-simplified form, is to replace the canon of texts with the canon of methods—to put a modern equivalent of the medieval trivium at the center of an English education” (145). Scholes’s trivium, “like its ancestor, would be organized around a canon of concepts, precepts, and practices rather than a canon of texts” (120). He imagines in place of the medieval grammar course two contemporary courses called Language and Human Subjectivity and Representation and Objectivity. For dialectic, he would help students “learn both how to use and how to criticize discourse that takes reason, system, and logical coherence as its principles of articulation” (125). For rhetoric, he would give a modern course in persuasion and mediation.

I introduce Scholes’s ideas as one provocative example of the sort of changes that seem to be in store for the arts and humanities in the next generation. There are other models out there, some of which take the historical periodization of literary study as the red giant I have come to believe it already is—reluctantly in large part because of the very thorough but not very metaphysical training as a graduate student that I encountered in the 1980s. Preparing this paper, I dreamed up a list of courses that I might propose in lieu of the canon of English courses centered on the historical periodization of literary study. Here’s the list, in no particular order: we could give courses on authorship, the history of reading, literacy, representation, genre, the sacred, canonicity, humanism, poetics, narrative, the history of the book, nationalism and geography, style and its friend decorum, the beautiful, bodies in texts, anxieties of influence, research methods and the uses of archives, gendered reading and writing, the history of how people have been taught to write, incunabula and the printing press and the publishing industry, cyberliteracy, and historicizing literature. But before a department could adopt such a different set of requirements, it would need to have very clear notions about what it wants students to know and do, far beyond the levels of clarity I have seen in my own departments. Few of us, as members of a discipline, really want to achieve that clarity, for fear that it will shut out the shades of gray we so value in literature and in our work.

No matter which curricular revisions any but the most retrograde humanities programs come to embrace, eventually these will need to include more humanities technology. The next generation of students will be far more visual learners than most of us. My proof here—my young nieces and nephews, who learned to use computers before they could read—is admittedly unscientific.

So, to bring things full circle: to make the English major greater than the sum of its parts,

We must be visible, articulate advocates of the best reasons for studying with us. In a simpler era, of course, all we needed to say was the one magic word—“Shakespeare.” But now a department must know and explain the internal logic of its curriculum and the best outcomes of that curriculum.

Keep in mind that the curriculum exists first to serve students’ needs.

Think back to a mediocre meal you’ve had at a restaurant whose menu ran to 101 entrees and resolve to resist the faux-Dionysian impulse to proliferate new courses and new concentrations and new tracks with abandon. There is a point of diminishing returns when the choices become so numerous that nothing seems to be of particular value.

Listen to your students talk about your curriculum; the choices it creates for them; and its effects, problems, and successes.

Invest the collective energy and brains to put in writing the logic of your curriculum, drawing on local strengths; and don’t wiggle out with pat answers that you may be wont to give, so as to be able to get back to your research or that stack of papers to be graded or the next memo.

$\text{Works\ Cited}$$


What English Majors Do Out There, How They Feel about It, and What We Do about It

PETER G. BEIDLER

I READ with interest not long ago in the pages of this Bulletin Katie Conboy’s article “What Can You Do with an English Major?” I found it engaging and useful but general. She reports what we all kind of know intuitively: that English majors can do anything they want to do and that they work in all sorts of professional fields, from banking to engineering to teaching to librarianship to manufacturing to editing to whatever. I decided that it was time to try to find more specific data on what English majors who graduated from the Lehigh University English department in the past two decades are doing to make a living and how they feel about having majored in English. Others in the profession may be interested in the methods we used, the results that we found, and the issues we now face.

In March 2002 we sent questionnaires to all 477 of Lehigh’s English major alumni who had graduated between 1980 and 2000. The questionnaire was phrased similarly to one reported in 1985 in College English that we sent out to the 151 English majors who had graduated between 1960 and 1980. Our goal then as now was to learn what kinds of jobs our graduates were actually doing in the real world, how they felt about having majored in English, and what benefits they saw from their degree. Those questions led to more difficult ones: Given the jobs that our majors are actually doing, should we attempt to restructure the English major or our teaching of specific courses in ways that might better prepare them for those jobs? And should we change the way we advise the students who choose to major with us?

This article is a report of what we found out from our 2002 survey. The results are no doubt skewed in some ways by the particular kind of university that Lehigh University is: a small, private, selective eastern university. Still, our majors are surely not entirely unlike English majors across the country, and our statistics may in any case provide faculty members in other colleges and universities with a basis for comparison with what has happened to their own graduates, should they seek to conduct a survey similar to ours.

Getting Started

After securing a commitment from the English department to cover the costs of stationery and postage, I paid a visit to the director of career services at Lehigh and requested that the office join forces with the English department and the alumni association to conduct a career survey of our English alums. The director said she would love to know what our majors were doing and would help in any way she could. The biggest help was the off-peak services of a wonderful office coordinator, who made an initial tabulation of the results when the questionnaires finally started to come in. Then I called my best contact at the Lehigh University Alumni Association—Jill Anderson, an English major, class of 1991, who works as director of alumni clubs. She was able to provide me a list of all our English major alums who had graduated between 1980 and 2000. “We can send the list electronically right up to printing services,” she said. “Do you want the list separated by sex?” I thought for a moment and replied, “That would be wonderful.” Knowing that most of our English majors in the past quarter century

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were women, I thought it might be interesting to find out whether the responses of women alums were substantially different from those of men. Not long after I took to printing services a cover letter, the two-page questionnaire, and a set of instructions about printing the questionnaires, addressing the 477 business-size envelopes, and printing return addresses on 477 smaller (9-inch) return envelopes. For a remarkably small fee, the good folks at printing took it from there, copying and folding the cover letter and the questionnaire, affixing stamps, stuffing and sealing the envelopes that had magically been addressed from the list sent up by the alumni association, and mailing the whole tray of letters. We had had them print the questionnaires for the women on yellow and the questionnaires for the men on green, to make it easier to separate them after they came in. We did not attempt to individualize the cover letters.

Most of the 218 responses came back in the first two weeks, but they dribbled in for the next two months. The response rate of 45.7% seems reasonable enough, particularly when we recall that the alumni association does not have up-to-date addresses for all our nomadic alums and that for many the most recent address on file is their parents’ address. Although there were some small differences in the responses of the women and the men alums, the biggest difference was in the response rate. The response rate for women was significantly higher than for men; 147 of the 285 women we sent letters to returned the questionnaires, or 51.6%. Only 71 of the 192 men returned them, or 37.0%. Anyone analyzing the results of the survey, then, should remember that we have more women English major alums than men and that the women had a better response rate than the men. Because of those two facts, of the actual responses reported below, those by women outnumber those by men two to one.

The Responses

At Lehigh we have tended over the years to build our English major on the assumption that our best students will someday want to go to graduate school, probably in English or secondary education. In fact, as table 1 shows, few graduates do continue in English. Less than 6% obtain the MA in English—only a few more than go on to get an MBA—while 10% study education. Only 5 of the 218 respondees got a PhD in English, in sharp contrast to the 39 who became doctors of jurisprudence—that is, lawyers. Lehigh English, it turns out, is far more a feeder major for law school than for graduate school in English or education. Our women alums are more likely to go on to study English or education than men, who in a greater percentage study law.

Perhaps the most important information is conveyed in table 2. The responses of our English alums show that they are engaged in a wide variety of occupations, some in more than one occupation. Less than half (though more than half of the women) are involved in some sort of educational enterprise or in one of what I have termed the words-delivery professions like writing, publishing, television, and librarianship. More than a quarter are involved in law or public-service fields, which include health care, social work, and military service. But more than 40%—and more than 60% of the men—are involved in some sort of business or industry. I should note that the numbers add up to more than the 218 responses because we invited respondents to give more than one response to the ques-

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Men Number</th>
<th>Men Percentage</th>
<th>Women Number</th>
<th>Women Percentage</th>
<th>Men and Women Number</th>
<th>Men and Women Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No postgraduate degree</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor of Laws</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA in education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA in English</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate in English</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate in education</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
tions about their current job or employment status. Some indicated, for example, that they were involved in both librarianship and home schooling their children; others indicated that they were teaching and pursuing a master’s degree at the same time.

When I compared these results with those of twenty years ago (the 1960–80 group), I found that there was remarkable continuity in the forty-year period, even though most of the responses to the earlier questionnaire were made by men (Lehigh did not become coeducational until 1972). The percentages of the two groups going into education were almost exactly the same, as were the percentages of those going into business and industry. Of the other categories, words-delivery and public-service professionals both gained a little in the second twenty-year period, while law fell off a bit, but the changes were not drastic. Our English department, then, for the past four decades has prepared students for more jobs in business and industry than in any other profession.

One question we asked alums was what, now that they had graduated and were involved in the workaday world, they thought the two main benefits of majoring in English were. We gave them eight choices, in no particular order. Table 3 shows these eight choices rearranged according to the rank our alums, collectively, gave them. No doubt some of us in the department thought that our primary function was to give our majors an understanding of the history of literature, but almost none of our alums—a minuscule 3 of the 218—mentioned that as one of the top two benefits. By far the two most beneficial aspects of majoring in English mentioned by alums were the writing skills and the critical-thinking skills they developed.

On the questionnaire we asked whether our alums would recommend that other Lehigh students major in English. It is gratifying to note that a whopping 200 of the 218, or 91.7%, said they would. Only 8, or 3.7%, said they would not. (Ten respondents left the question blank.) We also asked them to write in why they would (or would not) make that recommendation. Some of the positive responses are worth quoting. Alums said that they would recommend that others major in English because:

Table 2
Current Employment Status of English Majors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Men and Women</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business and industry</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words delivery</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public service</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of responses</td>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
<td>194</td>
<td></td>
<td>287</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total respondents (basis for percentage)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
<td>147</td>
<td></td>
<td>218</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Respondents were able to give answers for more than one employment category. Percentages can thus exceed 100.

Table 3
Benefits of Majoring in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Men and Women</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing skills</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking skills</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary appreciation and analysis</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding human nature</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public speaking skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the history of literature</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of responses</td>
<td>133</td>
<td></td>
<td>286</td>
<td></td>
<td>419</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total respondents (basis for percentage)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
<td>147</td>
<td></td>
<td>218</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mastery in language gives you so much pleasure in life, along with success in business. What better way is there to learn about life? It helps in all areas of any career path you may choose—writing, speaking, listening, creating, thinking. It gives students an opportunity to explore who they really are.

As an English major leaving Lehigh, you are already strides ahead of the majority of people in the working world in that you have the ability to communicate ideas clearly, think on your feet, and read Middle English in the original language. Okay, that last one I haven’t had the chance to use yet, but I’m ready! I would not have enjoyed studying anything else as much—there is just so much to embrace in English.

The survey was designed primarily to tell whether our students thought that their having majored in English had practical benefits for them. At least at Lehigh, where historically there are lots of business, science, engineering, and social science majors, students who major in English sometimes feel put down for selecting an impractical, pie-in-the-sky, lazy-bones, artsy-fartsy major. In the questionnaire we asked two questions to ascertain the practicality of a degree in English. The questions are reported in tables 4a and 4b. The responses to the first question were encouraging. When asked whether having majored in English helped our alums to land their current job, three-quarters, or 152 of the 205 who answered this question, said that it had. The response to the second question, whether having majored in English helps alums do their current job, was even more encouraging. More than nine-tenths, or 198 of the respondents, said that it did. Curiously, of the men responding, not one said that having majored in English did not help him do his current job.

Curricular Matters

We also asked a few questions that related to the broader English curriculum we teach at Lehigh. The responses, we thought, might help us redesign or tinker with the structure of the major and advise our students.

The English faculty has pondered for decades the extent to which we should offer a basic major with relatively few requirements and by so doing encourage students to do two majors, one in English and one in some other field. That makes a certain kind of sense, but it risks short-changing students who might want to do graduate work in English. We have traditionally resolved this tension by offering two tracks in the major, one regular one with minimal requirements and one honors track for students with a high GPA and more apparent ambition to pursue English at the graduate level. Those on the honors track take more courses and write a thesis. One of the questions we asked our alums was whether they thought it a good idea to structure the major in such a way that students could do double majors. The response was a loud and clear yes! As table 5A shows, almost 80% of our alums thought it better to keep the double major as an option; fewer than a quarter indicated that a “single major in English” is “just fine.” Seven ambivalent
students checked both, apparently wanting to communicate that either way is a good idea.

Table 5B shows the second major completed by the 74 graduates among our 218 respondents (34%) who had actually completed a double major. Most were in the social sciences, particularly psychology and political science, but a number were in other humanities subjects, in business, in science, or in engineering.

Another question we asked was what different decisions our alums might have made, after having had some experience in the real world, about majors, minors, collateral courses, foreign languages, whatever.

The responses were all write-in, so no two graduates used the same language. I tabulated the answers as best I could, and show the results in table 6. Two responses stand out. First, our graduates wished they had studied a foreign language (Spanish was mentioned most frequently as being particularly useful in their careers); second, they wished they had taken at least a course or two in business, economics, marketing, or basic finance. A lesser number wished they had availed themselves of the chance to travel and study abroad or had taken more social science or humanities courses. I sensed from the responses that some alums

### Table 5A
Is It a Good Idea for the Department to Structure the Major So That Students Can Easily Do a Double Major, or Is a Single Major in English Just Fine?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Men and Women</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make double major a realistic option</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>85.9</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>79.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single major in English is fine</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
<td>225</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total respondents (basis for percentage)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
<td>147</td>
<td></td>
<td>218</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Seven respondents selected both answers.

### Table 5B
Second Major of Respondents Who Completed a Double Major

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Men and Women</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political science, history, international relations</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology or sociology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences, engineering, or math</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business or economics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theater or music</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism or public relations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total completing double major</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No double major or no answer</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>66.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total respondents</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
<td>147</td>
<td></td>
<td>218</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6
If You Were Back at the Sophomore Crossroads Again, Knowing What You Know Now, What Different Decisions Would You Make about Your Major, Minor, Collateral Courses, Foreign Language Courses, Whatever?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What graduates most frequently mentioned they would do differently</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Men and Women</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take foreign language courses</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take courses in business, economics, or finance</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take study abroad</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take social science courses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take more humanities courses</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
wistfully realized that the college years are an opportunity to learn all sorts of things and that it is difficult to take the time or find the teachers with whom to learn later. As one alum wrote, “I guess I blew my chance, huh?”

Readers of the ADE Bulletin will perhaps be less interested in the specific results of the survey we did here at Lehigh than in its implications for their own alums. They may be encouraged by this example to conduct surveys of their own English major alums (see app.). Will they discover, as we did, that their alums out there are by and large delighted that they majored in English and would strongly recommend that others do so as well? Will they discover, as we did, that their alums are doing all sorts of interesting and rewarding work out there and are certain that having majored in English helps them both to get and to do their jobs? Will they discover, as we did, that their alums feel particularly fortunate that as English majors they developed both their writing and their critical-thinking skills?

Whatever the results, they will probably find that the real work begins after the surveys are tabulated and summarized. Will they conclude that since their English major alums are so pleased with their majors and doing such richly diversified work out there, they should make no changes in their program? Will they conclude that they should worry less about things like period coverage and theoretical sophistication in the major and try to redesign the curriculum or the individual courses in it to emphasize even more the development of writing and critical-thinking skills and to advise their majors to find a meaningful second major in addition to English? Will they conclude . . . well, what will they conclude?

Let the debate begin.

Works Cited


Appendix

Others who are contemplating surveying their own English majors may want to see the two documents below. The first is my cover letter to our graduates. The second is the survey itself, which was originally printed on both sides of a single sheet of paper.

If I were doing the survey over, I would consider shortening the questionnaire by eliminating several of the questions on the second side of the sheet. Clearly our majors are busy, and answering questions takes time and thought. I feel sure that our response rate would have been even higher if we asked fewer questions, and of course analyzing the results would have been easier and cheaper as well. A multiple-choice test is easier to administer and to grade than an essay test, and the second page started to feel like an essay test, both to the alums and to the “graders” back on the campus.

I have no other advice except that the return nine-inch envelope should be addressed to a professor in the English department rather than to a secretary or someone in career services. And I am certain that it helped that we put a real stamp, not a printed postage-meter label or a bulk-mail label, on the envelope.

Memo to Students

March 1, 2002

To: Lehigh English majors, 1980–2000
From: Pete Beidler
Subject: Career survey

As some of you know, I have been teaching at Lehigh for several decades and have been running our Career Night for English Majors for almost as long. The purpose of this letter is to ask you to let me know what sort of career you—one of our English graduates—are engaged in at the present time. And while I am at it, I want to ask you a few more questions about your experience as an English major at Lehigh and your life out there in the “real world.”

The enclosed questionnaire is designed to solicit from our 500 or so English majors in the past twenty years some information that may help current and future Lehigh students decide whether to major in English, what career paths are open to them if they do major in English, how literature and writing can help them live their lives, and so on. The information you give us will be tabulated and summarized, and will help the faculty to better advise current students. In tabulating and analyzing the results I will have some welcome help from our good friends in Career Services at Lehigh.

I have a question on there about whether you’d like to come back to Lehigh (at your own expense, alas) to talk with some of our majors about your own career path. I always have lots of volunteers, so say yes only if you would like an excuse to come “home” for an evening.

Please, could you fill the form out right away and return it to me in the enclosed stamped envelope? We will start tabulating the results immediately, so please do not delay your response. It will take just a minute to fill out the questionnaire—whatever parts of it you want to fill out. Do note that there are questions on both sides of the sheet. The longer you wait the less the chance that you will get to it. I’d really like to know what you are up to out there and whether you are happy about your having majored in English during your years at Lehigh. Putting your name and address on the form is optional.

Hey, we paid good money for that stamp, so don’t let it go to waste! Thanks so much.
Lehigh University, 2002: Survey of English Majors

1. Year you undergraduated ___________________________

2. Other major you graduated with besides English _________

3. Highest degree you attained after you got your bachelor's at Lehigh
   ☐ certificate in _________________________________
   ☐ master's in _________________________________
   ☐ doctorate in _________________________________

4. Your job title, if you have one _______________________

5. Please check the option below that comes closest to describing your current job or employment status. Check more than one if you need to.
   ☐ Teaching (indicate level)
     ☐ Primary
     ☐ Secondary
     ☐ College
     ☐ Other
   ☐ Words delivery (specify)
     ☐ Publishing
     ☐ Radio or television
     ☐ Theater
     ☐ Writing
     ☐ Librarianship
     ☐ Other
   ☐ Law
   ☐ Medicine or pharmaceuticals
   ☐ Homemaking or caring for family
   ☐ Still in school
   ☐ Seeking employment
   ☐ Retired or disabled
   ☐ Public service (specify)
     ☐ Government
     ☐ Health care
     ☐ Social work
     ☐ Military service
     ☐ Museum work
     ☐ Charity or philanthropy
     ☐ Other
   ☐ Business and industry
     ☐ Banking
     ☐ Manufacturing
     ☐ Insurance
     ☐ Management
     ☐ Public relations
     ☐ Human resources (personnel)
     ☐ Advertising
     ☐ Investments
     ☐ Construction
     ☐ Engineering
     ☐ Consulting
     ☐ Computing
     ☐ Other

6. In your experience, what are the two most important benefits of majoring in English?
   ☐ Literary appreciation and analysis
   ☐ Understanding of human nature
   ☐ Understanding history of literature
   ☐ Personal growth as a human being
   ☐ Critical thinking skills
   ☐ Writing skills
   ☐ Social skills
   ☐ Public speaking skills
   ☐ Other

7. Would you recommend that current Lehigh students major in English?
   ☐ No, because _________________________________
   ☐ Yes, because _________________________________

8. Is there some advice you wish someone had given you when you were a junior English major at Lehigh? If so, what?

9. A number of our students double major, combining English with some other major. Do you think it is a good idea for us to structure the major in such a way as to make double majoring a realistic option, or is a single major in English just fine?
   ☐ Double majoring is a great idea
   ☐ English alone is just fine

10. Students at Lehigh wonder what it is like in the "real world." Write down a phrase or sentence to describe it.

11. Did majoring in English help you get your current job?
    ☐ No, because _________________________________
    ☐ Yes, because _________________________________

12. Does having majored in English help you do your present job?
    ☐ No, because _________________________________
    ☐ Yes, because _________________________________

13. If you were back at the sophomore crossroads again knowing what you know now, what different decisions might you have made about majors, minors, collateral courses, foreign language courses, whatever? Please specify.

14. Is there anything else you want to say here?

15. Are you interested in returning to campus to take part in a Career Night for English majors?
    ☐ Yes ☐ Maybe ☐ No

Name and address (optional, unless you want me to call you about helping with a Career Night)

Phone _________________________________
E-mail _________________________________
After the English Major

DOROTHY Z. BAKER

CHRISTIE DEVON, the feminist heroine of Louisa May Alcott’s Work, makes a statement at the outset of the novel that, while bold in 1873, captures the sentiments of many of our current undergraduate English majors. Very earnest and very insecure about her future, Christie reveals, “I’m willing to work, but I want work that I can put my heart into” (10). Our hardworking students come to literary studies because this discipline is one that stimulates their intellect and nourishes their soul. This is a field they can put their heart into. However, they are also concerned that the quality of their life after the BA will not compare favorably with the vitality and significance of their years in the English department. Christie Devon found her life’s work through difficult trial and painful error but ultimately was guided by a series of mentors who shared her principles and goals. I suggest that university professors might likewise foster students’ desire for work that they can put their heart into after the English major. In doing so, we can further our mission of bringing the intelligence and values of the humanist into the workplace.

In our role as teachers and mentors, we do well what we know best: training our students to be critical and sensitive readers of literature and to write about culture in cogent and compelling prose. Furthermore, we do an excellent job of crafting rigorous and engaging curricula that prepare our students for advanced study, then counseling them on the universities and departments that best match their skill and interests. We know this path well because it is the one we chose and the one we continue to walk.

At the same time, we all acknowledge that most of our students are not future professors of English. This is as it should be. English majors are rightfully discouraged by the competition for faculty appointments. More to the point, although our students elect to study with us, most do not aspire to become us. Some look toward a career as a high school teacher of English, but many aspire to a professional life outside the classroom. Of course, a fair number of these students simply have no concrete vision of the way in which they will earn their livelihood. What do we tell the student who is passionate about literary studies but needs to answer his parents when they ask the inevitable and perfectly reasonable question, But what can you do with a degree in English? What do we tell the student who is anxious about the future? In the past, I have offered the paean that every business needs people with training in critical thinking and writing. I usually closed my avuncular philosophizing with the assurance that good English majors would do well in whatever career they chose. I now find that this statement is so nonspecific that it offers little direction or comfort to young people concerned about their place in the world. My confession suggests that I now offer a different response to the same question. I do and do not. I continue to insist that the workplace outside the academy values the skills that our students develop in departments of English. However, I now have specific information on where those skills are valued; how students can best prepare themselves; and, what is also important, a lengthy list of professionals in a variety of fields they can turn to for further guidance.

The English Advisory Board

When I assumed the position of director of undergraduate studies for my department at the University of Houston, my mission was to establish new ways to support our many English majors who are interested in careers outside the academy. To do this, I took a cue from departments of science, engineering, and
business, which have traditionally excelled in maintaining relations with professionals in their field outside the academy. The faculty members in these disciplines regularly invite speakers from industry to campus, and these professors themselves consult outside the university. Many departments in these fields also establish advisory boards to help the faculty members keep their courses current and relevant to their industry and to help their students make the transition from the classroom to the workplace. These particular disciplines arrive at such initiatives naturally and institute such programs with relative ease, the boundary between academic research in business or engineering and the practice of business or engineering being highly permeable.

Could a department of English also profit from an advisory board? Could we successfully organize one? I broached these questions with the department’s Undergraduate Studies Committee, then with the department at large, and was gratified by the uniform support for this initiative. The only departmental reservation that came to my attention was the fear that this board might be given a measure of authority over curriculum or program development and would propose initiatives to which I or my committee might feel some pressure to yield. However, our instincts also told us that any member of the board would be more interested in serving the department than in directing the department. We would strive to select members who were savvy about the purview of advisory boards and who understood that this post was honorific but clearly circumscribed. Here too the cooperation of faculty members was critical. My colleagues were a rich resource of recommendations for prospective board members. As a department, we assembled a lengthy list of accomplished individuals in the Houston community, people who we knew had roots in the arts and humanities and who might be willing to work on behalf of our students.

For our fledgling English Advisory Board, we tapped exceptional men and women in a wide range of professions. Our initial board included three lawyers—a family court judge, a litigator with a large firm, and an administrative lawyer. Another three were executives from the arts community—an exhibition director for an art museum, an executive director of an alternative art space, and an educational director of a repertory theater. The final four members represented corporate and not-for-profit communications and public relations—the director of communications of the Houston office of a national philanthropy; the CEO of an advertising and marketing company; and two communications specialists, one with a large energy company and another with a national management consulting firm. All had majored in arts and humanities, most were former English majors, and all were passionate about the importance of their early training to their rich professional and personal lives. After sending a formal letter of invitation to join the board, I was frankly amazed that every person responded in the affirmative. In fact, the replies came in the form of thank-you notes. Almost every prospective member sent a heartfelt statement of fond memories of undergraduate study, dedication to their faculty members, and pleasure at the prospect of reconnecting with the academy.

The Undergraduate Studies Committee put a premium on diversity in the advisory board, especially ethnic diversity, which would help us provide role models for the students in our urban university. Many on the early list of prospective members were graduates of our department, and we thought it would be valuable to hear from people with intimate knowledge of our program, our students, and our culture. At the same time, to avoid insular discussions at our meetings, we wanted to invite individuals from institutions decidedly unlike ours. We hoped to learn from those who were trained as undergraduates at Northwestern, Wellesley, and the University of Texas, the alma maters of three of our current board members. We also sought board members from the widest possible range of professions, and we continue to work in this direction. We would like to identify future board members from the publishing industry (although Houston, unlike New York and Boston, is limited in this respect), city government, environmental groups, and development offices for civic and other not-for-profit concerns. Houston is home to the massive Texas Medical Center, and we would benefit from a member from that venue, perhaps a grant writer, a medical editor, or an ethicist. The composition of a board is always a work in progress.

They Make Our Argument for Us

When the English Advisory Board meets on campus, the members divide their time between focused discussions with the department’s Undergraduate Studies Committee and a session with our majors. Every fall, the student meeting takes the form of encouragement by testimonial. Members of the board
are asked to narrate for the student audience their path from studies in the arts and humanities to the position that they currently hold. They speak—eloquently and passionately—about the importance of their training in the humanities for their career and collectively assert that our students will have a place in the professional world. They could not offer a more heartening and bracing message. Our accomplished and impressive board members ultimately make our argument for us when they testify that studying Ruskin, Emerson, and Stevens has tremendous relevance to the “real world.”

Often, the board members use the podium as an opportunity to offer a few words of advice to these young men and women. Such advice varies. One woman counseled our students to follow their passion; if they love the opera or the environment, for example, they can find a niche for themselves with the Houston Grand Opera or the Gulf Coast Conservancy, organizations that will allow them to express their passion. Another board member urged them to seek out friends who have graduated and are now in positions that might interest them. Ask them to show you around their workplace, she recommended, buy them coffee, and invite them to give you an insider’s view of their occupation. In short, learn how to network. To illustrate the point, this board member held out a thick stack of business cards and announced that the students’ networking would start immediately, instructing students to take one of her cards before they left the meeting. The lecture hall was instantly silent. The students were touched by this woman’s personal commitment to them, and the faculty members were impressed with her generosity.

This dramatic moment was the inspiration for the following semester’s meeting of the advisory board, at which the faculty and board members hosted a networking workshop for the English major. The event began with a statement about the unfortunate connotation of this word: isn’t networking the insidious process by which certain elite individuals secure prestigious jobs for their undeserving offspring? If so, it has little relevance for many University of Houston students, most of whom are the first in their family to attend college. We debunked this notion by redefining the term as the natural process by which we reach out to people with similar vocations and avocations. As an example of our redefinition of networking, an arts administrator observed that anyone interested in contemporary painting and sculpture should regularly attend museum lectures and gallery openings, because doing so is a natural way to meet likeminded people, who might also be potential employers or future colleagues. Another member added his perspective on how networking works after securing a job and spoke of knowledge networking that should continue throughout one’s professional life. To keep sharp and current in one’s profession, he claimed, you must always have a network of people who will share information about their related workplace so that you can assess the organization where you work and the projects you do there by what you learn about developments elsewhere. This circle of colleagues outside your office will also offer candid, critical feedback on your best ideas, free from the inevitable politics in a given company. In the eyes of our students, this final point erased any trace of stigma from the notion of networking. Ultimately, they understood this process in a broader and more honorable framework than when they entered the workshop. As a final testimony to the power of developing and nurturing a knowledge network, one board member spoke openly about losing her job in communications with a dot-com, this event occurring since the last board meeting. However, with the aid of her Rolodex, she was able to secure five offers for employment—three permanent and two contract positions—in seventy-two hours.

The meeting included role-playing exercises for the students, one of which was admittedly a bit devious. At midpoint in our workshop, we paused for the requisite coffee and cookies for a good twenty minutes. Once we reconvened, I asked the students to raise their hands if they had approached at least one member of the board to introduce themselves and engage them in a brief conversation. Those students, I announced, had already secured their A in networking. The others currently held an incomplete grade in the “course” but could complete their assignment by exercising their new networking skills at the close of the session. Many of our students simply lack the confidence that comes with formal encounters with older, accomplished professional people—other than their university professors, of course. Our board meetings are one way in which the department provides them these important experiences.

The agenda for our meetings with the majors has become somewhat consistent. The fall meeting tends toward philosophy. The board members speak to their commitment to English studies as preparation for a leadership role in the arts, business, and government. Each new group of students entering the En-
English major benefits from the hearty encouragement of such statements. The spring meeting is more directly practical and focuses on a specific skill that prepares our students for the job search—networking, résumé writing, and interviewing.

Whatever the agenda of the meeting, the students are ebullient when they emerge from the session. They are ennobled by the attention of the members of the board and frankly learn much from them. The voices of the board members are powerful to the students.

**English 4390: Professional Internship**

Has this program altered the curriculum for our English majors? Did we establish a new degree option for students with their eye to a job in advertising, museum studies, or Web design? Not at all. In consultation with the department’s advisory board, we broached the topic of a degree program that would allow students to focus on rhetoric, advanced composition, and business and professional writing, in short a program that would be a preprofessional track. The board vigorously discouraged this notion. The major in literary studies and linguistics, they argued, develops the kinds of skills their professions prize—close reading, critical analysis, and careful writing. As one attorney on the board put it, "English majors are valued for their exquisite attention to detail, both in their reading and in their writing."

The faculty committee was pleased to hear the overwhelming support for studies in literature and linguistics. All English professors believe their discipline is excellent preparation for many professions, but we are always gratified to hear that others—especially members of those professions—feel likewise. At the same time, we pressed the board members further. When they review applications for entry-level positions in their office, what aspects of a given résumé ensure that it rises to the top of the stack? Other than training in literature and linguistics, what attracts them to an applicant? That is, in addition to encouraging our students to excellence in their academic work, what more can we suggest? Here too the board spoke clearly and unanimously.

An ideal new employee is one who has a fine academic record and who shows evidence of being an interesting colleague. Employers all look for the person who has energy and passion for life outside the classroom. When they see the résumé of people who indicate, for example, that they enjoy long-distance cycling or volunteer at M. D. Anderson Cancer Center or speak French and have worked with Habitat for Humanity in Martinique, their impression is that such people are most likely to be lively and engaging. Employers also like those who show some evidence of commitment to a profession they would like to join. If students hope for a career in development for a not-for-profit organization, they should volunteer for the United Way, work part-time for the Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts, or intern with the Galveston Bay Foundation. If students aspire to work in a museum, they might attend openings at the Menil Collection, join the Bayou Bend Museum, or become docents at the Museum of Fine Arts. Two members of the board supported themselves by working in staff positions in law offices throughout law school, and they point to these experiences as providing early professional maturity at the outset of their careers.

The challenge for our faculty members, then, was to devise ways to assist our students to develop into excellent English majors without forgoing their extracurricular interests and to encourage them to investigate their professional options during their undergraduate years. The advisory board was especially helpful in this challenge and supported the concept of an internship program for the English major.

The tangible result of this discussion and the ensuing discussions at our curriculum committee meetings and faculty meetings was the creation of English 4390: Professional Internship. Students enrolled in this course would work in a professional setting that exercised the skills they acquired in their academic studies in English.

The department determined that this new course would be open to English majors with junior or senior standing, who might take it twice and apply these credits toward the electives required for the major. The opportunity to fulfill major requirements with English 4390 provided additional incentive for the students and signaled the department’s commitment to this important aspect of our majors’ professional development. The course would be administered through the office of the department’s undergraduate director, who would review each student’s application for the internship. This application would require a statement of the intern’s duties for the semester and the expected outcomes or products of the semester’s work, which would be signed by the intern and the intern’s on-site supervisor. The supervisor, then, would mentor the student throughout the internship and evaluate the intern’s performance at midterm and the end of the semester. At the close of the internship semester, the student
would write a final essay, reflecting on the experience and assessing the student's performance in this course.

How has this worked in practice? In most respects, the program has proceeded as anticipated. The surprises have thus far been felicitous. I learned immediately that students devote much more than the seventy required hours to the semester's internship. They simply love the work. I suspect also that they relish the vision of themselves in the future—degree in hand—with a professional position, this being a powerful image for them. I had not predicted the immediate growth of English 4390: in the initial semester four students were placed in internships; in the fourth semester fifteen students were placed. I expect this growth will continue. My initial concern was to secure enough placements to meet student demand. However, between the generosity of our board members and the support of colleagues throughout the university campus, the number of placements has not been a limiting factor for our program. On campus, we have placed students in internships with the university's Office of Annual Giving, the Residential Life Office, and Gulf Coast Literary Magazine. Off campus, you will find our majors throughout the city—writing press releases for the March of Dimes, editing policy manuals at M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, writing grant proposals for DiverseWorks Art Space, assisting a court coordinator in the Harris County Family Court, and contributing to a publicity campaign for Clint Black concerts, to offer only a few examples of our internship placements.

One surprise of English 4390 was how the students themselves served to shape the program. Specifically, they helped me understand the flexibility that was uniquely possible with this type of course. For example, because English 4390 takes place outside the classroom, it could also take place outside the scheduled semester calendar. I learned this lesson from a student with aspirations to teach English as a second language. She was offered an internship with a large church program whose mission is to support recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America, but she was concerned that the church's language program began on 3 January, a full three weeks before the university semester. The student wished to commence the internship during the program's busy period before the semester and then complete her internship course early. This incident at the beginning of English 4390 disclosed its flexibility. I now advise students to negotiate the internship schedule directly with their supervisor. One may conceivably work for twenty hours before the semester begins, have lighter responsibilities throughout the semester, and then complete the internship course during spring break—if the supervisor agrees to this schedule. In this way, students might organize their English 4390 to give them additional time for their end-of-semester English papers in an especially challenging semester.

Many of the University of Houston’s undergraduate students work to support their studies, so I received inquiries about the possibility of students’ receiving internship credit at their current place of employment. The department determined that this arrangement might indeed be possible if two important conditions were met. First, interns had to assume duties that were different from their regular job responsibilities; second, those duties had to draw on skills related to English studies. In speaking to students, I encourage them to think broadly about their current job and to use English 4390 as an opportunity to explore a larger role in their company. One of the true success stories of this course came from one such endeavor. An English major who worked as a part-time bookkeeper for ADDitude Magazine a nationally distributed publication focusing on attention deficit disorder, inquired about taking on responsibilities in copyediting for her English 4390 assignment. Her internship began with routine copyediting, but she quickly progressed to proposing titles and feature story outlines and completed her semester by writing an article slated for publication in a forthcoming issue. This young woman is now on the editorial staff of ADDitude Magazine and supervises English interns from our department.

A member of the community who was impressed with the many success stories that have emerged from English 4390 has donated funds for the Crane Award, given at our Honor’s Day ceremony to an outstanding intern during the past academic year. The award, named for Stephen Crane and Hart Crane, two American men of letters who worked in professions outside the academy, was presented last year to our bookkeeper turned editor at ADDitude Magazine.

Low Cost, High Yield

It has become increasingly clear that the two initiatives—the English Advisory Board and English 4390: Professional Internship—reinforce each other. These complementary programs have had an especially dra-
matic impact on the development of our majors. Their actual cost, in terms of monetary expense and faculty time, is minimal, but the yield is high. The primary boon is, of course, our students’ increased confidence and success in making the transition from the campus to the workplace. Moreover, our department has recognized several interesting hidden benefits of these programs. First, like our students, we are honored by the support of our distinguished board members and relish their delight in returning to the academy. The department and the university benefit from this increased visibility in the community. Learning more about our individual scholarly interests, board members have invited our faculty members to speak at museum events and philanthropic functions. We have made strong friends for our department and solid partners in the education of our students.

Several recent articles in the ADE Bulletin and PMLA have addressed similar concerns and initiatives, yet frame their conversation in terms of “marketing the English major” and “selling the major without selling out” (Cohen; Conbow; Moffat). My discomfort with these business metaphors is that they suggest—once again—that studies in English are fundamentally ancillary to other professional activities and that we must wrench our undergraduate majors into positions for which they have little true preparation. I remain committed to the notion that scholarly preparation in literature and linguistics is an optimal foundation for individuals with an eye to a career in law, corporate communications, journalism, marketing, advertising, museum administration, human resources, and on and on. That colleges of business and schools of communications have created preprofessional curricula in some of these fields—in the very recent history of American universities, I must add—does not diminish the value of studies in English as equal if not superior training for entry into such fields. Let us look then to the language of our discipline to express our professional aspirations for our students. Let us assert that our students are trained for leadership in business, public service, and not-for-profit organizations because they are sensitive to the condition of all men and women, they understand the forces that complicate human life, and they recognize the choices that make us heroic or tragically compromised. Our students can contextualize and historicize human experience, and they are mindful of the tropes and narrative patterns that a society employs to represent itself. English majors think critically and express complex ideas with clarity and acute awareness of audience. They are trained in the world of ideas and the power of artistry. As professors of English, we have an obligation to make students aware that these are the skills and values that position them for leadership positions in business and government. This awareness helps them see the relation of their academic lives to their future professional lives outside the university. Our argument is stronger yet when we call on our fellow humanists outside the academy who echo our assertion that the study of English is a discipline that we are not alone in valuing.

Notes

1Several of the contributors to the PMLA discussion, “Why Major in English—What Do We Tell Our Students?” speak against encouraging our students toward English studies as a career path to extra-academic professions, for a variety of reasons. Some argue that the very question speaks to the disappointing trend of viewing undergraduate education as job training, which several insist is simply not our purview. Although I too am disheartened by careerist notions of the academic curriculum, I believe that students are right to wish to see their lives as whole and to seek to understand their future as fundamentally connected to their work as English majors. I also know that many professions value the skills that are developed in departments of English and that are prized by professors of English. Furthermore, I contend that if we cannot speak to the centrality of literary studies to the public and private concerns of the world at large, then we see ourselves as small indeed.

2I am grateful to my colleagues in the Department of English for their support of this project and would especially like to thank Wyman H. Herendeen for his exceptional contributions to this initiative. I would also like to acknowledge the wisdom and generosity of the 1999–2002 members of the English Advisory Board.

Works Cited


Preprofessionalism and Disciplinarity

BARRY SARCHETT

WHEN we at Colorado College conduct a search for a tenure-track assistant professor, I suspect that our procedures resemble those of many other departments. We interview about a dozen candidates (from a pool of 150 to 250 applicants) at the MLA convention, then narrow the field to the usual three finalists for campus visits. It is during this phase of the search that I occasionally receive a telephone call of the sort that prompts these remarks, from one of the original MLA interviewees whom we did not invite to campus, asking me about the status of the interviewee’s application. The callers are almost invariably fine candidates in every respect, often from the top programs in the field, who, when I indicate that they have not been chosen for a visit, will ask me, rather apologetically, to tell them how they might improve their professional personality in subsequent interviews. It is a clumsy moment for both of us. I’m not even sure it is a very professional moment. I am generally able honestly to assure each one that his or her professional credentials and demeanor are beyond reproach. I may try to explain what must surely be a very discouraging fact of life: in the great majority of academic job searches the outcomes are overdetermined, given the multiplicity of institutional types; the relatively random selection of the faculty interviewers, who inevitably project various desires onto the candidates; and the specific needs of smaller departments, which not only demand a competent specialist but are looking for subdisciplinary and general education niches to fill as well. I have learned to resist the impulse to engage in a theoretical discussion about overdetermination in the strictest sense, and my point is rather easy to summarize with a cliche anyway: to be hired usually means that one happens to be the right person at the right place at the right time. But, not to be too discouraging, I have also withheld the worst news of all (though it may be, as Robyn Warhol convinced me in her comments on a draft of this paper, exactly what frustrated job candidates need most to hear): none of these factors is really in a job candidate’s control. Then I have found myself ending up saying something that, as a poststructuralist theorist, surprises me at the very moment I utter it. Given such already superbly professionalized candidacies, I say simply, “Eventually you just have to be yourself.”

I think about those conversations a lot, wondering if I say the right things to the very talented, smart, and engaging young people on the other end of the line, every one of whom surely deserves a good job and any one of whom most institutions would be fortunate to hire. But I also wonder what the question and my comments mean in the context of the controversy, more than a decade long, about what has been called the hyper- or even turbo-preprofessionalization of graduate students. Somewhere along the line these emerging professionals seem to internalize the notion that any problems occasioned by their desire for an academic career can be given a professional solution, that professionalization is the key to all job-search mythologies.

Having published on the issue of professionalization, I’ve read numerous articles and books limning the subject from a variety of angles. David Damrosch, Michael Bérubé, Bruce Robbins, Stanley Fish, Edward Said, Russell Jacoby, John Guillory, Patricia Meyer Spacks, Cary Nelson, Linda Ray Pratt, the ADE’s own David Laurence, and many others with less familiar names have weighed in on the various crises in the profession, including the dismal state of the job market. But I keep coming back to those befuddled job seekers and wondering how I could better explain the position they occupy in a complex web of social, political, and institutional circumstances.

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One thing I would surely not offer such job seekers would be the usual litany of moral and political objections to professionalism itself. High-profile jeremiads such as Said’s *Representations of the Intellectuals* or Jacoby’s *The Last Intellectuals*, in which professionalism itself becomes the greatest threat to the integrity and autonomy of the intellectual, are based to my mind on faulty, nostalgic historical models and suspicious ideological assumptions (on Said, see Williams, “The Life”; on Jacoby, see Sarchett). I would also not engage in a critique of the socioinstitutional conditions of the (pre)profession that have generated the anxieties and exigencies of graduate education today. Such analyses can, ironically, be fertile ground for scholarly professional projects and may in some instances even persuade some of us to engage in activist work. But usually such demystifications are based on utopian hopes and reductive political analyses. For example, in a recent essay Louise Mowder, the former president of the MLA’s Graduate Student Caucus, urges us “to envision the ways in which we are able to change society’s response to capitalism itself” (238). Today’s job seekers can hardly wait for tomorrow’s fully realized socialist state, and job applicants, whether they succeed in establishing academic careers or not, can always work toward such a goal if that is their preference.

I have my own grievances with the profession, of course, as I’m sure you all do or we wouldn’t be responsible and caring professionals. But as a faculty member of a certain kind of institution—a highly competitive liberal arts college—I don’t share in the usual hand-wringing over so-called hyperspecialization and premature publication, the two most commonly cited effects of the evils of graduate education today. Conversations with Linda Hutcheon, Don Bialostosky, David Laurence, and others have convinced me that there is little or no gulf between the kinds of candidates we want to hire at my baccalaureate college and those sought by research universities. Although a liberal arts college must have student-centered, excellent undergraduate teachers, isn’t that what most universities want? And although research institutions usually expect a higher rate of publication and scholarship from members of their faculties, we in baccalaureate colleges too want people who will contribute to what Cary Nelson calls “the professional conversation” inherent in publication practice (157). Most of us at liberal arts schools have never seen a conflict between excellent teaching and excellent scholarship; we are likely to see them as mutually dependent. Perhaps the major difference between research and liberal arts institutions lies in the career trajectories of their faculty members and the priorities these institutions demonstrate by how they allocate local and national academic capital. I have also never seen empirical evidence for the common complaint that most graduate students will be satisfied only if they secure a job in a research university and clone themselves as their graduate professors. In fact, a recent study by the Pew Charitable Trusts “indicates that 71.3% of doctoral students have a preference for teaching in a liberal arts college instead of a research university” (Pratt 32). That only about 7% of undergraduates attend such colleges may be another indication of what John Guillory calls the “fantasies” of “professional desire” (8; 4), but it certainly is good news for my type of institution.

In addition, like Jennifer Wicke, I think we should regard the production of conference papers and published work for graduate students or the professoriat “in the context of an economy of abundance rather than of scarcity. The economy of abundance I refer to is not the job market or the national economy seen through rose-colored glasses; it is seeing the plenitude of possibilities to publish as something good for our field” (54). I have little patience with the usual complaints that much of what is published is a trivial, badly written, premature, jargon-ridden, or cynical attempt to pad vitae. I have yet to see those making such claims dismiss their own publications, so I assume they are informed and sincere attempts to say something worthwhile about an issue of interest to others in as elegant a prose as they can muster with a helpful editor’s assistance. That the ever-burgeoning archive is no longer possible to master doesn’t mean it can’t be managed in a useful and effective way, given specific tasks and circumstances. That’s what trained professionals figure out how to do. All in all, I subscribe to the Stanley Fish school of professionalism whether I need a plumber or a new member of our department: “When there’s a job to be done, and you want it done correctly, call in a professional” (126).

But I do wish I could have explained more clearly to those aspiring professionals how odd and unhelpful I find their notion of a professional personality. It seems something of an oxymoron to me. To be professionalized is to internalize highly conventional modes of behavior and discourse by adopting a set of expectations, protocols, and criteria by which to judge others’ as well as one’s own scholarly, pedagogical, and service work. This internalization seems the antithesis of what we usually mean by a personality—
the aspect of subjectivity that indicates difference, uniqueness, and even likability. That's why I think one of my first impulses has been to tell the students that somewhere in the process they simply have to be themselves. For me, preprofessionalization is the bottom line, the necessary condition for being an acceptable candidate. If we hire people who do not know how or even care to properly and effectively navigate professional life at the local, relatively quotidian level and at the supposedly more glamorous and exciting national level, we shortchange ourselves and our students. But preprofessionalization is not a sufficient reason to be hired. Then the uncanny process (and I mean that descriptor in the strictest sense) of being the right person, in the right place, at the right time begins to have its way. This process is probably intensified at smaller schools because there are fewer faculty members to cover many areas and because small-college faculty members have less room to hide from one another, so individual conflicts can quickly disable departments.

Now I want to turn to the heart of my argument by offering a hypothesis that occurred to me as I thought about those students and while reading recent analyses of the causes and effects of the long-standing crisis of the profession and of the job market and hyperpreprofessionalization. Many of these analyses also, of course, offer solutions to present dilemmas that I find are often either utopian (e.g., Damrosch's recommendation that we simply learn to cooperate more and thus just get along) or implementable only by some sort of authoritarian fiat (such as Bérubé's recent recommendation to center the graduate curriculum on the "history of twentieth-century theories of textuality" [25]). I offer no solutions partly because I'm not that wise and partly because I'm not sure that this recent crisis is any more critical than any of the myriad crises that have constituted the profession of English since its inception in the late nineteenth century.

Most analyses of preprofessionalization attribute the phenomenon to the long, likely-to-continue, and dismal state of the job market: either overproduction of PhDs or the corporatization—and thus downsizing imperatives—of higher education or the alleged loss of the cultural capital of literature itself has been blamed. I don't necessarily disagree with any of these scenarios, but I want to complicate them with another possibility: professionalism is all that remains for us to use as a set of criteria to judge the relative merits of graduate and subsequent careers in literature when our discipline itself, which has never been as coherent as the sciences, becomes so fragmented as to virtually disappear. How can we judge a candidate's disciplinary competence if there is no discipline-wide set of criteria by which to judge? My hypothesis is that when English has effectively immolated itself as a discipline in order to advance, when even disciplinarity itself is regarded as constraining and politically suspect, when no clear repertoire of knowledge can be tested, when only multiple competing methodologies and objects of our attention can be found, when even these change rapidly as we move to the next big thing—we still must have some way to judge our peers at every step of their professional lives. We are thus left with purely professional standards: How well has each person succeeded in objectively accruing the signs—papers read, books and articles published, lectures invited, conferences organized, students' evaluations evaluated, committees served—of professional competence?

I am certainly not bringing news to you when I suggest the discipline is suffering from what, in the recent edition of the ADE Bulletin entitled “The Future of English,” Bérubé calls “a crisis of purpose and self-definition” (23). In that same volume Pratt calls ours a “loosely organized discipline” (27), and Laurence wryly offers a positive twist when he describes the “creative turbulence” of English (16). But I wonder what sort of discipline can possibly be "loosely organized" yet have clear procedures of self-regulation. Practically, of course, we must worry about whether English looks even remotely like a discipline to our colleagues in other disciplines and especially to administrators who might wonder if, as Pratt notes, we might not be more conveniently subsumed under other disciplines such as history and sociology (31). Personally, I like Vincent Leitch's characterization of English as the “postmodern discipline par excellence.” In addition to the traditional historical and genre areas of literary study, Leitch provides a list of the relatively discreet subfields now associated with the cultural studies wing of English:

Body studies, science studies, subaltern studies, trauma studies, whiteness studies, fashion studies, food studies, media studies, leisure studies, narrative studies, globalization studies, indigenous studies, border studies, urban and community studies, queer studies, and visual culture studies. Add to this more established fields such as film studies, American studies, gender studies, and postcolonial studies. . . . Each of these subfields has a theoretical wing so that theory—along with cultural studies broadly construed—has of late itself undergone significant disorganization.
So we have a profession without a discipline. Over sixty years ago John Crowe Ransom hoped, as some do once again, that we might create disciplinary coherence and integrity with a “Criticism, Inc.,” and we certainly have created an incorporated professional culture with all the bureaucratic protocols intact. But the corporation has so diversified that it resembles a miniature version of a megamultinational corporation with no clearly discernible structure or center. In such a context, even large research universities with many faculty members are at a loss to cover every field in English. Nonetheless, the push for coverage has led to the proliferation of job descriptions requiring a particular specialty supplemented by one or two or even three possible subfields for the most desirable candidate. This demand simply increases the likelihood that job searchers will find that they have to be the right person in the right place at the right time.

Obviously I am not implying that once, before some cataclysmic fall, our discipline was coherent and unproblematic. But I would borrow a phrase from Bérubé to claim that some moments in the history of the profession have been dominated by “discipline-founding” projects that seek to characterize the specificity, sometimes even autonomy, of literariness and literary criticism (25). Like Bérubé, I think it is uncontroversial to claim that for the last twenty years or so such projects have been, to put it mildly, out of favor. The profession as it is currently constituted, “amateurist and generalist approaches have been for the most part eliminated” (54). But Wicke inadvertently makes an argument for teaching general education courses when she speaks of the nature and pleasures of writing for publication. She uses a term from set theory to describe the embeddedness of publishable work: “The writing must demonstrate . . . that it is embedded in a professional sphere where the argument or issue or theorization of the essay, conference paper, or book arises in relation to the issues, critical history, current debates, disciplinary conflicts, major figures, or major texts of that sphere” (54). I want to put her comment in relation to Spacks’s often quoted 1994 “President’s Column” in the MLA Newsletter, in which Spacks assesses the costs of what we now call preprofessionalism. She argues that the pressure on graduate students to publish and specialize immediately has eliminated the time for “reflection and exploration, to say nothing of the knowledge that takes a long time . . . and allows for intellectual growth and independence . . . . There is . . . little incentive for them to engage in the slow and demanding pursuit of cumulative knowledge” (3).

I take this as an appeal for the value of a broadly general education in the midst of the rush to specialization and fragmentation. Wicke, writing eight years after Spacks’s column, puts it this way: “The more you know, the more you can embed and the more your work is correspondingly embedded” (57). I admit, like Spacks, that I have no idea what to do about the current state of graduate education. I’m not even sure that the expectations for preprofessionals are ameliorative or really need much amelioration. After all, graduate school seems, by definition, not to be the place to gain “knowledge that takes a long time” (my emphasis). However, to sustain the slow and demanding pursuit of cumulative knowledge so that one may embed one’s work in a broad historical and theoretical framework, that is, to produce the most professionally valuable work, I can think of no better way than to teach undergraduate general education courses. If graduate students must specialize and publish early, that doesn’t mean that they shouldn’t try to make the time after their dissertation to teach courses that demand reading lists in literary history, philosophical traditions, and social and political theory (both traditional and newly canonical “great books”) that may not be directly related to their specialties but that might generate the powerful rhetorical effect Wicke calls embeddedness in their future work. And a bit of special pleading is appropriate here: that’s what we are often fortunate enough to do at liberal arts colleges. Yet, no matter what sorts of institutions those
thoroughly preprofessionalized graduate students find themselves entering, we who must work, mentor, and eventually evaluate them should never forget that the operative prefix in the term *preprofessionalism* is *pre*. As most of us always have, they’ll still need time.

**Works Cited**


Shining Your Shoes for Radio: Teaching at Bronx Community College

NEIL GRILL

My title comes from the final pages of J. D. Salinger’s novella *Franny and Zooey*. The narrator, Zachary Martin Glass, or Zooey, is ending a long telephone conversation (between adjoining rooms of the Glass apartment) with his deeply troubled sister, Franny, by recalling a time years before, when their now dead older brother, Seymour, was a teenage panelist on a Quiz Kids–type radio program called *It's a Wise Child*.

For several years I had wanted to deliver a paper on a directive Seymour gives Zooey one night before he is to appear as a substitute on the show. Therefore, when ADE’s associate director called me one early spring morning and said he needed on the spot a title for my talk at an MLA session “Where Teaching Comes First,” I blurted out what had been in my mind as chair of English at Bronx Community College for most of the nineties and later as graduate seminar mentor for City University of New York doctoral candidates in English who are teaching as adjuncts on our campus. “Shining your shoes for radio,” I said, “shining your shoes for radio.”

Zooey says:

I remember about the fifth time I ever went on “Wise Child.” I subbed for Walt a few times when he was in a cast—remember when he was in that cast? Anyway, I started bitching one night before the broadcast. Seymour’d told me to shine my shoes just as I was going out the door with Waker. [Walt and Waker are twin brothers.] I was furious. The studio audience were all morons, the announcer was a moron, the sponsors were morons, and I just damn well wasn’t going to shine my shoes for them, I told Seymour. I said they couldn’t see them anyway, where we sat. He said to shine them anyway. He said to shine them for the Fat Lady. I didn’t know what the hell he was talking about, but he had a very Seymour look on his face, and so I did it. He never did tell me who the Fat Lady was, but I shined my shoes for the Fat Lady every time I ever went on the air—well, the years you and I were on the program together, if you remember. I don’t think I missed more than just a couple of times. This terribly clear, clear picture of the Fat Lady formed in my mind. I had her sitting on this porch all day, swatting flies, with her radio going full-blast from morning till night. I figured the heat was terrible, and she probably had cancer, and—I don’t know. Anyway, it seemed goddam clear why Seymour wanted me to shine my shoes when I went on the air. It made sense. (198–99)

I taught at Bronx Community College of the City University of New York for thirty-six years until my retirement last September. This two-year college has an almost forty-five-year history and is part of one of the largest public university systems in the country. BCC was one of the first homes of open enrollment in the early 1970s, following on the hard-won triumphs of the civil rights movement. Despite recent political, educational, and financial decisions to discourage open access, BCC continues to serve as a beacon of hope to its overwhelmingly minority, immigrant, and female student population, almost all of whom take an archaic, elevated subway line (which also stops at Yankee Stadium) to our lovely campus, highlighted by Stanford White buildings and a historic hall of fame. The English department of about twenty-five full-time faculty members (including the recent addition of instructors of English as a second language) and fifty part-time faculty members works, often against great odds, to enable its approximately 7,500 students to enter fully into the mainstream of American society.

In the past six years we have filled a remarkable number of tenure-track positions in English at Bronx Community College. Since 1996 the department has made thirteen full-time tenure-track appointments, eleven at the assistant professor level, which at all two- and four-year CUNY colleges requires a PhD, and

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two at the lecturer level, which does not require a PhD. We are fortunate in that we have both the draw of our New York location and a salary scale that, for assistant professors, begins in the thirties and, for full professors, goes above $85,000.

Recent hires have come to Bronx Community College with PhDs from graduate programs as far away as the University of California, Davis, and as close as Columbia University and our own City University of New York. Scholarly areas include feminist short story cycles, composition theory, medieval literature, early-seventeenth-century printed texts, Victorian poetry, English as a second language and linguistics, and contemporary drama.

To prepare this article, I sought help from two young professors whom I and the department's personnel and budget committee had the good fortune to hire in the class of 1996. I felt that their thoughts and experiences would be much more real to those potentially seeking community college jobs than anything I could write some thirty-five years after my last job interview. The first, Frederick DeNaples, from the University of Pennsylvania, with a specialization in Victorian literature, was elected chair of our department in May 2001. The second, Karen Castellucci Cox, from the University of California, Davis, specializes in feminist literature of the Americas and is completing a critical study of Isabel Allende. (After four years with us, Karen returned to the San Francisco Bay Area and is presently a tenure-track English instructor at the two-year City College of San Francisco.) I asked DeNaples and Cox four questions via e-mail that someone might ask while considering a teaching career at a two-year college:

What would have better prepared you to teach at Bronx Community College or City College of San Francisco? What did you learn in your first year at Bronx Community College? What advice would you give prospective PhDs seeking a position or about to start a career at a community college? How do you find time for research or curriculum development writing?

As preparation for teaching in a community college, Cox is thankful for the opportunity to teach her own composition classes for all six years of graduate school, which gave her invaluable experience “selecting textbooks, preparing syllabi, grading papers, etc.” She does, however, express the wish that she taught “at least once at a community college” before coming to BCC.

DeNaples has positive words to say for a required course on teaching freshman composition, taught by a good professor, and for a voluntary high school mentoring program in which Penn undergraduate and graduate English students “worked with students at one of Philly’s public schools.” He regrets the absence of “a teacher-training program that actually required grad students to discuss theories and practices of teaching.”

In response to the question “What did you learn in your first year at Bronx Community College?,” DeNaples uses exactly the words at the heart of the MLA convention session at which I spoke: “Teaching comes first, second, and third.” He recalls his first teaching observation, “when the department chair who hired me [I] sat in my 02 developmental writing classroom and watched me conduct the hour from my desk. He was not impressed. Luckily, he let me try again.” He also mentions his own approach in a fine suggestion for beginning community college faculty members: “I looked very carefully for a niche I could operate from. For me, it was technology. I could make computers work—and I could teach others in the department how to use them. . . . New hires should find something—grant writing, advisement, curricular review, mentoring, etc.—that interests them and work outward from that center.”

Cox’s response is equally valuable: “I treat my students with the respect aptly earned by adults making all kinds of sacrifices to attend school. I set high standards and let them know my high, college-level expectations right away. What I’ve had to learn, though, is that they may have the desire but not yet have the tools to meet those expectations, so I’m learning to be very flexible, change the lesson when I need to, and backtrack when students need further direction.”

Both Cox and DeNaples have very pertinent and at the same time very direct advice for those seeking a teaching position in a community college. Cox writes that “the lion’s share of my time and energy goes to class preparation, student conferences and grading, grading, grading.” She also advises, “It is a wonderful, exciting, stimulating place to spend one’s career—but you have to love the classroom environment, because you’ll be doing more of that than other things.”

DeNaples suggests, “If you don’t have a job in your pocket, be an adjunct at a community college. Learn what community college students are like. Learn what community colleges do. This is especially important for PhDs coming from research universities, where the students they encounter have been, most likely, well-prepared for academic life.”
He goes on to say something that I can only echo as loudly as possible: “If you’re looking for a position at a community college as a shelter, a bide-a-while until the market opens up . . . , then don’t apply for a tenure-track job at a community college. . . . Community colleges should not be seen as stepping stones to bigger careers at universities.”

If you wish to pursue research, DeNaples suggests finding out if your college has a faculty development program or speaking with the department chair or the grants office about funding or reassigned teaching time for junior faculty members. But in the absence of those possibilities, he adds, “Try to separate your time at school from your time at home” and quickly develop some good survival and time-management skills.

Cox finds that most of her research takes place during summer and winter vacations, in short blocks of time after class during the school year, or on those rare weekends without papers to grade. She admits that “completing a project takes longer than it would for someone in a different teaching situation,” but, accepting this reality, she adds, “I enjoy my life as a two-year college instructor so much, it does not create undue tension for me.”

“If you’re on the job market this year, don’t overlook two-year colleges just because you think you know what goes on there,” Cox concludes. “With some deeper probing, you might be pleasantly surprised to find an energetic community of educators and learners, including active, intellectual scholars and dedicated students whose diverse interests, lifestyles, and backgrounds make for an educational experience like no other.”

The students at Bronx Community College and many other urban, suburban, and rural two-year colleges may not be as self-motivated as students at more prestigious colleges. They may have recently arrived in the United States. English may not be their first language. All you should know, all you need to know—on your students as Seymour and Zooey and Franny who bounced off the blackboard and came home with chalk on his jacket or on her skirt. Remember, you cannot know what magic may appear suddenly even in a poorly lit, crowded, 8 p.m. classroom in a forgotten part of the Bronx, what moments of light and poetry. All you should know, all you need to know if you teach in a two-year college, is that you must always shine your shoes for radio.

And what I have to tell you, finally, is that if you are preparing to teach at a community college, you must remember to shine your shoes for radio; you must look on your students as Seymour and Zooey and Franny who looked on the Fat Lady; you must treat each student and each class with the deepest respect, because they are as fully human and rich with potential as any college students anywhere. As educated as you think you are and as well-meaning as your graduate adviser seems to be, remember, if you teach in a two-year college, you do not know who is in front of you and what new or interrupted or inarticulate dreams and promise (and promises) he or she brings with him or her from off the freeway or up the long hill from the elevated train to the classroom. Be it remedial or developmental writing, freshman composition, or introduction to literature, you must assume before you walk into your first or four hundredth class that all your students will succeed and, in the event they do not, that they will have been taught by someone who believed in them from their first introductions through their final papers, someone who bounced off the blackboard and came home with chalk on his jacket or on her skirt. Remember, you cannot know what magic may appear.

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Pedagogical Possibilities: The Needs and Benefits of Working at Teaching-Oriented Institutions

KATHLEEN McCORMICK

"Teaching-oriented" sounds like second best. The lucky graduate students get jobs in top research universities. This paper calls into question the value system underlying these two statements.

I was a lucky new PhD in 1984, landing my first job at a Research I institution, Carnegie Mellon University. And while I spent eight highly productive and successful years working there, I left voluntarily, in part because of the limits that the institutional values of a research university put on assumptions about the undergraduate classroom and the faculty's teaching habits and practices. In how many research universities would a scene like the following be characteristic? A promising assistant professor of English with positive teaching evaluations and a strong record of scholarly publication is scheduled to come up for tenure and promotion. The dean of the college calls the young faculty member in for what is to be a reassuring chat, since the dean is in the happy position of being able to say that a positive outcome is all but certain. Let's suppose that this soon-to-be associate professor has strong interests in composition and undergraduate teaching and has worked as part of the faculty leadership group administering and teaching in the university's freshman English program. How lucky, the dean offhandedly observes, that the candidate has such a strong record of scholarly publication, so that the two freshman textbooks and extensive consulting with the local schools that also appear on the record will not count as negatives. Comments like that, intended as reassurance, reflect a value system I find deeply disturbing.

Yes, faculty members in research universities generally enjoy lighter teaching loads. Yes, the junior faculty members of these universities often have minimal service responsibilities because they are deliberately protected from such institutional work so they can concentrate on their scholarship. I, for example, had two wonderful and generous faculty mentors who helped me maintain my publishing pace. My students were usually highly engaged and stimulating people to work with, and my department was committed to undergraduate education. But, despite all these benefits, I began to question whether I wanted to continue working for an institution ultimately directed by the values underlying the comments of that dean. The work I saw as most important to myself and to many of my immediate colleagues, our commitment to undergraduate teaching, was not taken sufficiently seriously.

I tell this story because I realize there are many graduate students hoping to land a plum job and because I want quickly to go beyond what seem to be the obvious advantages of working in a Research I institution and focus on what has the potential to get lost—for both faculty members and students—in working in an environment that does not see undergraduate education as its first priority. And I want to explore in more depth the very real challenges and pleasures of working in a college whose primary focus is the teaching of undergraduates.

To help start us thinking about the needs and benefits—for students as well as for faculty members—of working at teaching-oriented institutions, I begin with a quotation from Antonio Gramsci's Prison Notebooks. When reading Gramsci's lines, I would ask you to think of the organic intellectual as potentially a person working in a teaching-oriented institution. By invoking Gramsci in this way, I am not setting up teaching and research as dichotomous; rather I am trying to get them on more equal footing and to articulate some of
the achievements that are possible when one successfully teaches undergraduates. Gramsci writes:

Creating a new culture does not only mean one’s own individual “original” discoveries. It also, and most particularly, means the diffusion in a critical form of truths already discovered, their “socialization” as it were. . . . For a mass of people to be led to think coherently . . . about the real present world, is a “philosophical” event far more important and “original” than the discovery by some philosophical “genius” of a truth which remains the property of small groups of intellectuals. (325)

These are heady words. Yet there is still much in our academic culture that militates against our profession’s seeing things this way. A paper on this subject would be naive if it did not address this fact, at least briefly. If we look at discussions in our journals by senior faculty members on teaching freshmen—a good place to start is the Spring 2001 ADE Bulletin—we are given a window into how conventionally elitist attitudes about teaching still pervade some of our colleges and universities. Among the reasons faculty members list for not teaching freshmen are a concern that “it’s no fun,” that it lacks the “exhilaration” that usually comes with teaching, that it takes away from research time (Boehm 50), and that it leaves one feeling “demoralized” (Journet 46). One faculty member writes that he would now find it “intolerable” to do all the grading required in freshman composition and argues that his graduate students do it much more “carefully and thoroughly” than he would (Nelson 21). Philip Cohen notes that “the reluctance of tenure-line faculty members to teach lower-division courses reflects our discipline’s . . . higher valuation of upper-division and graduate courses” (11). This attitude can have a significantly negative effect on graduate students trying to develop a professional identity.

Graduate students reading any of these articles—even if similar discussions are not happening in the halls of their universities—receive the clear message that the more work teaching takes, the less valuable it is. James Knapp, for example, observes, “For many graduate students and new faculty members, the entitlements of the most privileged members of the profession have become a part of their imaginary” (57). Not only are such attitudes unrealistic, but their elitism can cause graduate students to become dissatisfied with jobs they are offered at apparently lesser institutions before they even begin to understand the value and the excitement inherent in the work of intellectual community building in undergraduate institutions.

Of course some faculty members have more positive reactions to teaching freshmen and undergraduates in general. William L. Andrews, for example, notes that in his department “there is considerable camaraderie and genuine admiration for good undergraduate teaching” (43). Beth Boehm notes that one faculty member in her department responded to teaching freshmen much in the spirit of the Gramsci quotation above: “I . . . feel that in teaching the classes through which every student in the university must pass that I am more truly a member of and producer of an intellectual community” (50). It is in this spirit of seeing oneself help to produce an intellectual community, a spirit of exhilaration and hope, that I write here.

The assistant dean of State University of New York, Purchase College, where I now teach, remarked recently that what we do best at Purchase is to change the direction that the lives of many of our students will take. We tend to have students who are not only financially disadvantaged but also often have incredibly difficult lives, lives that have frequently made them feel emotionally and intellectually disenfranchised. An article in the New York Times notes that the “State University of New York at Purchase has seen a 48 percent increase over the last three years” in the number of students seeking mental health counseling (Berger 31). While this figure is part of a national trend toward counseling, it doesn’t mean emotional stress is new. Faculty members with whom I have spoken at Purchase recall that a significant percentage of their students lived with serious emotional stress in their lives well before recent increases in therapy.

Many of our students at Purchase come to college needing to learn the conventions of schooling; to be taught how to think critically and in depth—and to value such thinking; to find a disciplinary orientation; and, in many instances, to find themselves. Education gives these students hope and the possibility to think from perspectives very different from those with which they come to college, which are often defeatist, sometimes abusive, and quite frequently not intellectually stimulating or promising. Students such as ours—and many undergraduates across the country—need faculty members to theorize their teaching to help students decode the complexities of academic discourse, to develop strategies to motivate them to want to learn, to become excited by student learning itself, and to be open enough to learn from students. Students need faculty members who see their teaching as rigorously student-centered, not teacher-centered, and who want to develop a sense
of community around learning. In short, they need faculty members willing to put teaching first.

What are some of the benefits for teachers and students when teaching is made a priority? When teachers refuse to feel demoralized by undergraduates who may not be all that interested in their courses? When they don't find working hard in the classroom “intolerable” but, rather, an exciting challenge?

To answer these questions, I turn to some examples drawn from classroom experience, for it is in the material details of classroom life that we can glimpse—on both a microcosmic and a macrocosmic level—the satisfactions for students and faculty members of working in an environment in which teaching is highly valued. I offer four teaching moments that illustrate some of the challenges and rewards of teaching undergraduate students who do not necessarily come to college ready or who do not even understand what it means to be ready for college or for participating in an intellectual community. The first two moments illustrate the challenges experienced by and the potentialities created for teachers and students when teachers theorize common classroom problems and work with students as both individuals and active subjects in history. The third example underscores opportunities that can arise for undergraduates in institutions where there are no graduate students. The fourth explicitly examines something that underlies the other three: ways in which faculty members can develop productive collaborations around pedagogical issues that cause institutional change in colleges that value teaching.

The four examples are at once fictional and real—fictional in the positive sense. They are based not on direct descriptions of particular individuals, but on pedagogical situations occurring across several semesters and class sections in two different undergraduate institutions, the University of Hartford and State University of New York, Purchase College. Seeing similar moments recur is what made me notice and wonder about them. I am sure that many readers will know counterparts in their own experience. None of the four are grand: they describe fairly ordinary classroom problems familiar to many undergraduate teachers. Further, the solutions I discuss can hardly stand as final answers. More important are the pedagogical processes by which teachers address these problems, since it is the activity of observation and self-examination that requires insight, perseverance, and a commitment to theorizing one's experiences in the classroom. Engaging in such activity can be deeply rewarding to teachers and students alike, but the work will not be equally rewarded in all types of institutions. My first two examples are about facing the difficulty that a number of undergraduate students have participating productively in class discussion. I am not talking simply about getting students to talk to each other; one can create noisy classrooms with little intellectual rigor. I am exploring, rather, how to enable students to see value in thinking about issues—before, during, and after class—from complex viewpoints and then in working to use what is often new language or new concepts to participate actively in discussions with a community of fellow learners. This act of redefining what class participation means makes one grow as a teacher, particularly if redefining pedagogical experiences forms an active part of one's academic life. Such redefinition caused me to stop seeing my students' resistance to intellectual discussion—in such forms as off-topic comments, behavioral problems, or the refusal to speak—in simplistic terms, either as the students' own problem or even as their right to remain silent. When I began to theorize such behavior in terms of gender, social class, and prior schooling experiences I turned to new kinds of academic work. I was seeking alternative pedagogies that might allow more students to develop the confidence necessary to create an intellectual public presence in class. When one teaches in a teaching-oriented institution, one can usually find much collegial support for taking on such pedagogical challenges. I have to acknowledge the guidance and ideas of many colleagues who helped me help my students develop a stronger intellectual public presence.

In a general education course on gender I assign various gender theorists and require students to apply these theorists' concepts and vocabulary to examples of their own choosing, both in class discussion and in writing assignments. A few weeks into the class (let's assume a class of 30 is made up of an equal number of men and women), three young men come to my office to explain that they cannot participate in class discussion. They tell me that they are sophomore business majors and are used to dealing with factual material, not theories. Further, they say that they will look like girls if they participate in an intellectual discussion of the kind I appear to want in class.

For a number of reasons, I have learned to restrain the impulse to tell students like these that their anxiety unconsciously reflects various gendered assumptions that they might usefully explore. While this observation seems painfully obvious, my making it
would only further alienate students who are already feeling uncomfortable not only—or even primarily—with the subject matter but also with the discursive structure of the class. More important, I now bring to the discussion a desire to understand and theorize these students’ perspectives, not in order to excuse them from intellectual work but rather to find a way that might make it acceptable to them. Definitions of masculinity in our culture place powerful constraints on boys and men, as so many gender theorists have observed. The “culture of cruelty” that Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson talk of in Raising Cain (72–93) or the “miseducation of boys” addressed by Myra Sadker and David Sadker in Failing at Fairness (197–225) helps explain why the prospect of developing a public intellectual presence might have caused such discomfort in these male students. But if I did not teach in an institution that placed a high value on its general education programs and if I did not have colleagues who serve as role models dedicated to improving their students’ intellectual life, I might all too easily disengage from these three young men, thinking that dealing with their complaint was no fun (it really wasn’t at that point) or dismissing them as slackers who were simply trying to find an excuse to come to class unprepared. In either instance, I would unwittingly reinforce such behavior. Instead, I have come to accept the challenge these students offer to find a way to make intellectual work at least acceptable and possibly engaging to them.

Initially, every technique I try fails to get them to participate in class discussion. Finally, the four of us meet and brainstorm again and at last discover an approach that they say might work for them: we agree that I will announce to the class that they do not really want to engage in intellectual discussions, but that they need to appear to do so to pass the course. From then on, they will role-play being intellectuals in class. What they say and do in class will not really come from them; they will be acting solely to meet a course requirement I am holding them to. It takes two weeks, a number of false starts, nervous laughter, hands thrown up in the air, pleading eyes, and many supportive classmates. One of the three withdraws, but the other two get so involved in class discussions that eventually they lose many of their inhibitions and become strong members of the class. They assure me at the end of the course that they “wouldn’t act like this again.” Because of the strength of the college’s general education program, however, I know that they may well be required to engage in verbal intellectual work in other classes and I am confident that they will feel less threatened in that situation in the future. Again, it is no single class hour or course but the cumulative effect of such experiences that can potentially change students’ conceptions of themselves.

A number of bright female students also avoid participating in intellectual discussion in class, but for different reasons from those of the men described above. These women come to college lacking confidence in themselves, fearing that they will look smart and meet the same derision they experienced in middle school and high school. They are the kind of students Carol Gilligan writes about in her work on the psychology of women and the development of girls (Gilligan; Brown and Gilligan; Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan). Anyone teaching college freshmen has surely encountered such students. But if one’s focus is not primarily on student learning, it is easy to ignore them. They usually write good papers, perform well on tests, and don’t disrupt the class. For years, I know that I accepted—and even respected—their shyness and let them remain silent. But once I began to teach in an institutional environment that focused on undergraduate education, accepting their silence no longer seemed adequate, and I began to struggle to find ways to help these bright young women develop public voices.

For a time, while I met with the odd success, I failed to find ways that consistently encouraged such women to talk about what they were thinking in class. But when one of my colleagues suggested that I read more about the schooling experiences of girls and boys in publications by the American Association of University Women (How Schools Shortchange Girls), Sadker and Sadker, and Gilligan, among others, I gradually came to see the problem as culturally based, like that of the young men in the example above. The messages of anti-intellectualism in America are interestingly gender-encoded, and they are sent to boys and girls in different forms beginning at very early ages. Although men fear that they will look like girls if they become analytic, looking smart holds just as much of an onus for many of the bright female students I have taught. Theorizing the silence of quiet young women rather than just accepting it encouraged me to explore pedagogies that might enable their intelligence to become a social as well as academic asset rather than a liability. I eventually evolved a strategy that works quite consistently, particularly with freshmen: competitive group work. I require students inside and outside class to
work collaboratively on special projects, all of which require in-class presentations.

Group work is hardly a revolutionary pedagogy, yet when I make it explicitly competitive, I find that I am able to change the classroom dynamic for bright female students. I divide the class into groups of about six and assign each group the task of preparing a presentation. Groups receive points for different aspects of their presentations, and all group members must participate. The result? Quite suddenly everyone wants to be on the smart women's teams (it turns out everyone knows all along who the smart women are and that their silence isn't just due to shyness). But group members have to realize that these women cannot do the work for them because the assignment requires that all members of each group participate equally in the presentation. These bright students' relation to the rest of the class, as well as their sense of what it means to be smart, changes quite dramatically. No longer passive and silent, most develop a take-charge attitude and begin speaking in strong voices. They also adopt mentoring roles with other students, encouraging them and helping them to work to their potential. The other students seek them out, ask their advice, listen to them, work with them, respect them, and publicly give them credit for helping a group to victory. The greatest victory, of course, belongs to these smart women and the deepest pleasure, perhaps, to me. Not only do they become a public intellectual presence in class but the quality of class discussions improves significantly.

Clearly, the teaching I have described in these first two examples is not primarily about presenting course material, which usually takes the least amount of preparation time. The challenge a teacher faces in such common classroom situations is taking the pulse of the class and finding ways to help more students enter an intellectual community and become motivated to work productively. Teaching classes with an attunement to students' resistance to participate in intellectual discussions led me in directions I had not anticipated. Working on these problems took time. And failures from some classes motivated me to see these problems in new lights. While these particular pedagogies will clearly not work with every group of students, including my own, what remains with me as a teacher are three sources of motivation. I have a commitment to trying to find ways to help students become articulate and productive members of an intellectual community. I have faith that they can. And I have the knowledge that my colleagues are grappling with similar problems and will be a source of support because they also believe that these issues are important to address with every new class one teaches.

While my first two stories focus on teaching freshmen and sophomores in general education classes, my next two move to upper-level classes in the English major. When you do not have graduate students to rely on, all sorts of tasks can fall to undergraduates who are willing to meet challenges and who can grow in unpredictable ways if they are well mentored. Peer tutoring, for example, exists in many institutions and can have myriad positive effects on students. (When talking with me about this paper, one of my colleagues mentioned that collaborating with undergraduates on one's research, including them on research grants, and even coauthoring papers with them are other common ways of working with undergraduate students that happen when one does not have graduate students.)

In *The Employment of English*, Michael Bérubé argues that faculty members in English should encourage a number of their undergraduates to go into secondary education where they are desperately needed rather than into PhD programs, after which there is no guarantee of a job in the current market (84–85; 167–68). A particularly successful way to encourage students to think about teaching in elementary and high schools as a career is through the mentoring that goes on in peer tutoring.

We have a strong peer-tutoring program in writing at Purchase. Upper-level students from various disciplines who are recommended by a faculty member and who have a high grade point average are selected to take a class on theories of reading and writing, which I currently teach as director of writing. They are simultaneously assigned to work in a practicum as peer tutors with a freshman composition class. They do not grade papers, but they do read drafts, help students with library research, participate in the freshmen composition classes as group leaders, and generally serve as role models. They have the advantage of working with two faculty members—the teacher in the course in which they are tutoring and the director of writing, who teaches the theoretical class. They also—directly or indirectly—have the support of the faculty member who nominated them. Further, they are required in their theory class to work with other peer mentors. So their support system is far-reaching.

My third story concerns a peer tutor. It is midterm time. The freshmen are tired and start grumbling in class to the teacher about the difficulty of the writing
course. Suddenly, the peer tutor stands up and begins lecturing the students in a way that only another student can. She talks about the demands courses will make on them in future semesters—inside and outside the classroom—to be analytic; to write complex, integrated papers; to be able to take a stand; and about the consequences if they do not learn the skills being taught to them. She uses herself as an example of a student who has struggled at Purchase, since she is a transfer student and, to her mind, did not have a rigorous freshman writing class in her previous school. She tells the students they are lucky their class is challenging because they will learn something. Everyone, including the peer tutor, is a bit stunned by her spontaneous speech, but it helps her, the teacher, and the freshmen students.

This is a moment of completely unplanned learning, an unsolicited motivation to work hard and to learn to write well by a student who speaks firsthand about the consequences of coming to college without these skills. The points of growth are multiple: the peer tutor affirms her own abilities, is surprised that she can speak so eloquently about the value of working hard, and is more convinced than ever that she should become a high school teacher. The students do not act out again in class and for the most part produce good work for the rest of the term. Even the faculty member benefits, because she realizes that she needs to work on her pedagogical strategies for dealing with small mutinies in class.

But it is the tutor on whom I want to focus. If we had graduate students in our program, it is unlikely that we would even have a tutoring program, and we certainly would not have one with such a carefully worked out, institutionalized mentoring system for undergraduates. Because our faculty sees our peer-tutoring program as something that should benefit the tutors as much as the tutees, we take the time to develop strong networks of support and instruction for tutors. That support takes time and requires that faculty members get to know the peer tutors well, see them often, and help them develop relationships with other peer tutors. Faculty members, however, can be highly rewarded for such work as they see their best students gain a deeper sense of their own abilities; take risks in the knowledge that they are part of a community that recognizes and values them as teachers and learners; and, in a number of instances, begin to clarify teaching as a career goal—an area in which these students have significant contributions to make.

Faculty members also can develop productive collaborations with one another around pedagogical issues when they work in institutions that value teaching. The example here focuses on an area of concern for faculty members and students across the country, the research paper. Many research papers from undergraduates, at all levels, are disappointing to faculty members. The reasons for this disappointment are numerous. Students come to college with negative views of research largely because they have written only research reports—basically summaries—rather than researched essays, which require intellectual engagement, the development of integrated arguments, and genuine conversation with a group of experts. But faculty members at the college level often do not help matters: in the name of academic freedom, they frequently assign open topics for student research, unwittingly encouraging plagiarism and failing to provide the necessary instruction on what genuine research is and how it can be tremendously exciting.

Together, the faculty members in the last two writing programs I’ve directed, at Hartford and at Purchase, have worked to develop a collaborative method of doing research that usually results in good research papers. I will not discuss this research process here. Rather, I want to highlight the faculty collaboration involved in addressing this issue, which is more valued in a college that sees teaching as central to its mission. To spend hours in meetings brainstorming ways of teaching is to sacrifice time one could spend doing something else. The culture of an institution that values teaching can support activities that create pedagogical change and lead to more satisfying intellectual work for students and teachers alike.

In my experience, faculty members at both Hartford and Purchase are motivated to address the problems of the research paper because they are teaching only undergraduates: they have only their research papers to read. There are no brilliant graduate students to stem our pain, and we can’t wallow in feeling demoralized by our undergraduates. We have to create change. We put our faith in our undergraduates and in our ability as teachers to find strategies to change our teaching to improve our students’ writing and research.

By no means am I suggesting that such work does not go on at all types of institutions of higher learning, but some institutions value it more than others. Some will have faculty members in other disciplines, as I am discovering at Purchase, who are receptive to learning about new methods developed by a particular
program. If you are a graduate student about to enter the profession, you should evaluate the priorities of each college and university you are considering taking a job at, because these priorities affect your daily material reality as well as your own sense of the importance of the work you are doing.

Teaching undergraduates is hard work. The hours are long. The rewards are great. If you plan well, there is still time to write. And there is a lot to write about, especially if you remember Gramsci’s words that “creating a new culture does not only mean one’s own individual ‘original’ discoveries. It also . . . means the diffusion in a critical form of truths already discovered.” This act of diffusion is an “event far more important and ‘original’ than the discovery . . . of a truth which remains the property of small groups of intellectuals.”

Works Cited

On 15–16 September 2000, the English department at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, with the support of several units at the university, including the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education, and with the blessing of the general administration of the consolidated University of North Carolina system (UNC), sponsored a conference entitled Teaching for the Public Good: The Future of the Humanities in Public Higher Education. The conference was an experiment. I and several of my colleagues in the department wanted to find out if it was possible to attract humanities educators from across the UNC system to our campus to talk about pressing issues that humanists face, whether we teach in community colleges, regional universities, or research-oriented institutions.

While I was chair of the English department at Chapel Hill, it hosted and cosponsored a number of academic conferences on topics ranging from early modern cultural studies and Renaissance literature to black queer studies. Teaching for the Public Good was a conference whose origins, goals, and fund-raising emanated entirely from my department. I wanted my department to undertake some sort of assessment of our roles and responsibilities not just to literature and language study but to the humanities in a larger sense. I didn't want to do this assessment on a departmental retreat, where we'd be inclined to engage in collective navel gazing. It seemed important for us to consider our work as humanists in a larger, real-world context—the arena of public education. I wanted my department to take the lead in considering, for a new century, what the humanities should be and do in the specific context of public higher education.

In the summer of 1999 I formed an ad hoc committee of leaders in my department and asked them to think about parameters and priorities for the kind of conference I've just described. I told the committee I was open to almost anything except a recommendation to put on another business-as-usual lit-crit or theory conference, headlined by a high-dollar speaker or two and composed of participants and an audience that looked pretty much like us or our graduate students, from the standpoint of academic pedigree and affiliation. I have nothing against literary criticism, theory, or cultural studies, of course, but I don't think there's any shortage of conferences about them, and I wasn't convinced the best way for us to spend our time was to put on such a conference. I wanted my department to sponsor a conference that would attract diverse participation and attendance from people beyond the Chapel Hill campus.

The response of the ad hoc committee, led by James Thompson, my successor as chair of the English department, and John McGowan, another senior member of the department, was brilliant. The committee said: Let's have a conference on the future of the humanities in public higher education and let's focus our attention on real issues that affect what we do in our own state of North Carolina. I agreed wholeheartedly and set about trying to interest other units at Chapel Hill, with a fair degree of success—and tangible support.

Two fundamental questions informed our planning for the conference: First, what effect can and should the humanities have on public higher education now? This isn't simply a matter of how the humanities should be packaged in the curriculum of public higher education but also what role it should have in shaping...
the priorities, values, and missions of public education in general.

Second, what do we mean by public education, and who is the public? This question led to more thinking about the multiple constituencies of public higher education today. At Chapel Hill, our primary mandate is to educate each generation of the most capable students from within the state. By state law each freshman class at UNC, Chapel Hill, must have no more than 17% out-of-state students. This quota defines the Chapel Hill campus as a public institution in ways that some similar institutions, such as the University of Michigan and the University of Virginia, aren't obliged to observe.

Readily acknowledging that the people of North Carolina are our most immediate constituency, we asked, What is our responsibility to the people of this state? Since a public university like UNC, Chapel Hill, has more constituencies than the one that shows up each year in its classrooms, we also tried to look more broadly at those various constituencies. We have a business and corporate constituency that invests in the university and expects a return on its investment. We have a wide range of professional constituencies—from physicians to secondary schoolteachers—that look to us to train people for their ranks. We have a huge constituency for our research, both pure and applied. Can public higher education balance all these constituencies? When conflicts between responsibilities arise, should the problem be treated solely as a managerial or policy issue? Or do the humanities speak to multiple constituencies and responsibilities?

These kinds of questions were complicated enough when applied simply to one institution, such as UNC, Chapel Hill. But, as I said earlier, we didn’t want this conference on the humanities in public higher education to treat UNC, Chapel Hill, as the representative of the public university. We were quite aware that, although we were the so-called flagship institution of the sixteen-campus UNC system, we knew little about how the humanities fared at other universities in the system. Nor did we know what our colleagues’ experience could teach us about how to think about the future of the humanities in public higher education in North Carolina. So as we set an agenda for this conference, we also made a concerted effort to find colleagues throughout our system and the statewide community college system who could speak authoritatively about issues bearing on the humanities in a variety of institutional settings.

This search meant not only inviting specialists on various topics from a wide range of institutions to come to Chapel Hill to lead sessions at the conference but also sending invitations to administrators at every university and most of the community colleges in the state system. We also offered free registration and overnight lodging to anyone whom a state university or community college would send to the conference. This invitation brought in nine representatives from community colleges in the state; we also had representatives from eleven of the sixteen universities in the UNC system. The conference registered seventy-two participants, not a huge number but a good start for an undertaking of this sort, especially considering that fifty-four of the participants were not from UNC, Chapel Hill. I think we were reasonably successful in conveying to our target audience—that is, to colleagues at the various state universities and community colleges of North Carolina—that we were serious about holding a conference in which people from all over the public higher education map would have a voice. We planned the conference around four major sessions: Diversity and Growth in North Carolina Postsecondary Education, Instructional Technology and Its Effects on the Humanities, Pedagogy and Teacher Education: What Is the Role of the Humanities?, The Future of the Humanities Curriculum.

The conference began with a welcoming speech from Molly Broad, president of the UNC system, whose interest and support were very gratifying. Our keynote speaker was Annette Kolodny, professor of English and former dean of the humanities at the University of Arizona, Tucson. Besides her pioneering work as a feminist critic and historian of American literature, Kolodny is also the author of Failing the Future: A Dean Looks at Higher Education in the Twentieth Century, a book that brought a humanist’s perspective on some of the issues we wanted to address. She gave an inspiring talk about the need for commitment to humanist values in the face of the increasing corporatization of American higher education.

The four major sessions featured short presentations by speakers from Appalachian State University; UNC, Asheville; Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College; East Carolina University; UNC, Greensboro; Granville Community College; North Carolina Central University; UNC, Pembroke; and Western Carolina University. The presentations led to questions and answers and then to break-out discussions among smaller groups. We ended with a general meeting in
which the chairs of the four major sessions reported on their sessions and several participants and observers reported on what they had seen and heard.

The opening session on the changing demographics of public higher education in the state of North Carolina was an eye-opener. We had three speakers: a vice president for policy assessment from the UNC system, the president of the North Carolina Community College system, and the chair of the North Carolina Humanities Council. I wrote down a few statistics from these speeches. In the first decade of 2000, the state of North Carolina will see 27,000 more undergraduate applicants to public universities than are currently enrolled. At present, 14% of all undergraduates in the sixteen-campus UNC system are humanities majors. Twelve percent of our minority-student population choose to major in the humanities. Every year, one in eight adults in North Carolina is enrolled in a community college, 43% in some form of distance learning. The average age of a community college student in our state is thirty-five. Seventy percent of community college students are white, 25% are black, and 5% are Asian or Hispanic.

At the session titled Future of the Humanities Curriculum, I heard a good deal of concern from colleagues at other institutions about how to keep the humanities major an attractive option in the eyes of utilitarian students anxious to specialize in a specific job skill as soon as possible. This concern led to reflection on how poor we as humanists seem to be at conveying to the nonacademic world what we do and why it’s important. Several faculty members from UNC, Asheville, talked about the success of their thirty-seven-year-old humanities curriculum, which spurred a good deal of interest among all of us at the session.

At the end of the conference, during the “Where do we go from here?” discussion, a number of participants agreed that we needed to form a steering committee for follow-up work. Ten people at this discussion volunteered to be on the steering committee, which set for itself an eight-point agenda, the most significant elements of which were: establish a formal organization of humanities educators in public higher education institutions around the state; develop an annual budget for this nascent organization that would draw support from individual campuses in the UNC system and from the central administration of the UNC system; develop a liaison between this organization and the North Carolina Council for the Humanities; sponsor an annual conference at a different host institution in the UNC system each year, at which time the host institution can feature what it is doing to foster the humanities on its campus.

On the long-term agenda for humanities educators of North Carolina are the following:

Exchange of humanities faculty members from campus to campus, perhaps involving teaching for a semester, or establishment of semester-long seminars that would meet biweekly for humanities faculty members in a region, hosted by one institution and drawing faculty members from the area (including community colleges) on a topic of common interest.

Establishment of a semester’s fellowship leave at the UNC, Chapel Hill, Institute for the Arts and Humanities for humanities faculty members from a university or community college in the UNC system.

Creation of a speakers’ board of humanities faculty members from the entire UNC and community college systems. The speakers should be prepared to address humanities issues to a wide range of audiences including high school guidance counselors (who often discourage college-bound students from choosing humanities majors) and business audiences.

Maintenance of an annual conference of humanities faculties on a different state campus each year, including resources from individual campuses and from the UNC and community college general administrations, which would provide honoraria and one-night lodging for speakers at the conference and defrayal of travel and lodging expenses for at least five humanities faculty members from every state institution to attend.

This Teaching for the Public Good conference and the subsequent creation of humanities educators of North Carolina indicate to me that coalitions of faculty members from various types of higher education institutions can develop when we recognize that there are a lot of issues and problems that we hold in common that aren’t likely to diminish in the foreseeable future. It seems to me that common cause among public higher education faculty members is particularly needful as we look beyond disciplinary differences and recognize the core values in the humanities that brought us to college teaching and that continue to invigorate our teaching, scholarship, and service.
THE effect of J. Hillis Miller on the profession of English studies has many dimensions, for, like the fox, Hillis Miller knows many things. His scholarship of the nineteenth century is deep, detailed, and explorational, mining the richness of texts and their contexts. His critical thinking has deconstructed and reconstructed the paradigms of perception in our time, and he has never paused in experimenting with innovative ways of discussing things, seeking new things to discuss, or opening the discussion to younger scholars. His ethical dedication to the work we do as teachers has inspired a long career of leading the profession’s discourse and action, by word and example, in the Modern Language Association, the College English Association, the English Coalition, and the Association of Departments of English. Paradoxically, Hillis Miller, like the hedgehog, also knows one big thing, that our reading, our thinking, and our teaching must be scrupulously joined in order for our profession to prosper in, and influence, our society. For past accomplishments and for the vision of our future that he has given us, the Association of Departments of English presents J. Hillis Miller with the Francis Andrew March Award for Distinguished Service to the Profession of English Studies.

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EVERYONE who reads these remarks has, no doubt, consumed at least a few of J. Hillis Miller’s many books. I discovered Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels as an undergraduate, and I was hooked. Imagine my joy when, as a newly tenured associate professor, I found myself at Yale one summer in the seventies, being paid by the National Endowment for the Humanities to study theory with the man whose work I so admired. Rather than talk here about Miller’s writings, which provide a model of how to read literature with theory, I want to celebrate his exemplary citizenship; his service to the profession; and his support of young scholar-teachers as they enter the professional debate about theoretical, literary, cultural, and pedagogical issues. For his qualities and these activities, he has rightly won the Francis Andrew March Award for Distinguished Service to the Profession of English.

Despite his pioneering work in phenomenology, deconstruction and poststructuralism, and speech act theory, Miller’s insistence on the ethical effects of reading is perhaps his most important idea. In his local and national professional life, he acts on his belief that whoever is present on, for example, a committee has an equal right to participate in the conversation; he makes sure it’s a group commitment. Whether he’s serving on a search committee for the University of California, Irvine, or on an MLA ad hoc committee on, say, citizenship, professionalism, or curriculum; speaking at a conference or lecturing in China; or writing his seventh book in a given year, he never acts like the international celebrity he is. Although Miller, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman, and Harold Bloom appeared in glorious color in the Sunday New York Times Magazine, they singly and together cared more about transforming the study of literature and theory than about publicity. Although Miller doesn’t brag about it—because he doesn’t brag about anything, except perhaps his skill with sailboats—his exemplary and outstanding career is, as he says in his essay in this bulletin, simply the perfect work for him. His affect is refreshingly down home, or should I say down east, for he’ll always be to me the professorial man who happened to teach in New Haven and in California but is primarily a Mainer, with all the “ayup” and spinnaker knowledge that goes with that honorific.

Nothing fazes Miller, for in the face of challenges, resistance, even petulance, he never fails to be gracious and magnanimous. I’ll never forget the ADE Summer Seminar at which, on Father’s Day one summer in the eighties, he lectured the gathered chairs and directors of graduate study, and D. A. Miller responded. The younger Miller—who didn’t let us forget that Father’s Day is an anniversary appropriate for adolescent antipaternal vitriol—attacked the venerable older Miller, only to have his theoretical father of sorts refuse to chastise him in public or in the profession at large. Hillis Miller’s equanimity, his willingness to serve as patriarch who can take the punches, reminded me that he is not only a brilliant scholar but also a model of professional poise and generosity. Indeed, his genuine interest in the younger man’s oppositional remarks led him to respond thoughtfully and sincerely to the younger man, who was himself positioned to join the ranks of literary-critical celebrity.

Indeed, Hillis Miller’s generosity would be legendary, if he let it. One of his great gifts is the capacity to celebrate younger scholars’ work and to include them in the professional conversation. He invariably shares the ideas he has been thinking about with scholars, individuals, and groups: he’ll describe to you his new work on the kiss with a gleam in his eye. On more than one occasion, he has mentioned an idea about a

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text I was working on that led me entirely to rethink my claims. Yet he never demands or expects thanks and modestly acknowledges the praise he attracts in other scholars’ acknowledgments. His work’s centrality to the study of literature and theory, then, cannot be understood by the many footnotes in which his books and essays appear, for his students’, his colleagues’, his students’ students’ interpretations and theories have been everywhere influenced by his readings.

In the business of publishing, he works hard to be useful to those who will follow him. He reads many manuscripts for university presses, and he enthusiastically recommends those soon-to-be-published books that he has read. When he praised a new book for which he had served as reader by a new author whose work he much admired, I immediately assigned it for my theory reading group. At the end of my NEH Summer Seminar with him, Miller sent all our essays to *Genre*, where he served on the editorial board, and four of us were lucky enough to be published there early in our careers. He even helped me revise my essay, which badly needed revision, and praised me for having been astute enough to diagnose its difficulties, thereby ignoring his helpfulness. Moreover, Miller has written countless letters for former students—for grants, jobs, whatever those new colleagues needed, for he invariably thinks of his former students as his equals. Many of these—now themselves often established scholars—cannot thank him enough for his generosity, for his graceful willingness to help younger scholars become and stay the best professionals they can be.

I applaud J. Hillis Miller’s ethical attitude toward the profession, his extraordinary local and national citizenship, and his support of younger scholar-teachers. Indeed, his great love of writing, his eagerness to work hard with students, his full participation in the profession’s work, and his sadness at the prospect of retirement all announce his exemplary status for all of us in this profession. Thank you, Hillis, for being yourself, and congratulations on having won the prestigious Francis Andrew March Award. It is enhanced in status because you hold it.
RECEIVING the Francis Andrew March Award is a tremendous honor for me. It is difficult to imagine a greater one. This is an especially happy event, because I am being rewarded for having done for over fifty years just what I most wanted to do. What I most wanted to do is to read literature, to teach it, and to write about it. I continue to be amazed that I have been paid for doing what I would do anyway if people would let me. That there should have been a profession and a discipline just waiting for me is one of the greatest pieces of good luck in my life. My advice to all young people is to make every effort to find something to do that fits you like that. You have only one life to live. As chat-group lingo has it: GAL (Get a life!). You should avoid at all costs getting stuck in a profession that means you spend all day doing something you do not like doing. Receiving this award is like being rewarded for doing as one likes. My puritan conscience makes me a little uncomfortable about that.

I have been asked on this occasion to make a few wise remarks about the future of the profession of English. As I have, in odd moments (while out jogging, for instance), tried to think what to say, I have kept being reminded of the character in one of David Lodge's novels, Small World, who is marooned in the University of North Queensland in northeastern Australia, up by the Great Barrier Reef. This is a place even more out of the way than Irvine, California. Lodge's character wants to move. He knows he must publish to do that, so he is trying to write a publishable essay for a conference on the future of criticism. The reader sees him at periodic intervals trying to write this essay. He cannot, however, for the life of him, get beyond the first half of the first sentence: "The question is, therefore, how can literary criticism . . ." (85). I feel more than a little like this character. How should I know what the future of English studies is, or should be? Nevertheless, here goes.

Francis Andrew March is said to have been the first professor of English. Think of it! Before him there was no such thing in the United States as a professor of English. Moreover, he was, at least at first, all alone, with no colleagues, no department, no ready-made discipline. All that had to be created later. I don't by any means think I shall be the last professor of English, but sometimes I wonder if the discipline will or should outlast my time. The discipline of English has a history. Just as it had a beginning, so it might have an end. Civilization would not come to an end if that were to happen. More likely, the profession of English will simply be transformed into something markedly different. In fact that is already happening.

The discipline of English studies was certainly well in place when I entered graduate school in 1948 and when I began full-time teaching in 1952. In those days we knew what we were doing. All sorts of disciplinary rules, boundaries, and taken-for-granted assumptions were firmly in place. We knew what the canon was, what were the main periods of English literary history, and what constituted good scholarship in the field. I was told by the then chair of the Department of English at Johns Hopkins, Don Cameron Allen, when he hired me in 1953, that I could teach anything I liked in the Victorian and modern periods and do whatever research I liked, "so long as it is not speculative." He was right to be suspicious, since I hardly remained faithful to that implicit contract or promise. Nevertheless, he was my faithful supporter as I moved up the ranks. Each of us in the Hopkins English department had a historical niche. Mine was British literature from 1830 to the present.
Northanger Abbey as a precursor text in the first course in the Victorian novel I taught, Earl R. Wasserman, my esteemed and closest colleague for my nineteen years at Hopkins, let me know in no uncertain terms that I had invaded his turf. I had better henceforth stay off his grass. In those days “we” were mostly men, all men in the English department at Hopkins, and all the works we studied, with some exceptions, were by men. American literature was pretty marginal. It all made perfect sense.

We also knew the double good of what we were doing. English literature was taken for granted as the primary repository of the ethos and the values of United States citizens, even though it was the literature of a foreign country we had defeated almost two hundred years earlier in a war of independence. That little oddness did not seem to occur to anyone. As the primary repository of our national values, English literature from Beowulf on was a good thing to teach. This good depended on the widespread presence in the population of what Simon During calls “literary subjectivity” (33). Literary subjectivity is a love of so-called literary works and a habit of dwelling in the virtual meta-worlds that reading literature allows the adept reader to enter. To put this another way, English literature used to be a chief means by which people were interpellated as United States citizens. The teaching of English literature in schools, colleges, and universities was one of the main ways this interpellation took place.

The second good that English professors accomplished was to do research in their field. This meant finding out the facts, even the most recondite or obscure facts, about literary works and their authors. This justification was strongly in place at Johns Hopkins when I first taught there, just as it had been strongly in place for my teachers at Harvard, where I did my graduate work. The motto of Johns Hopkins is Veritas Vos Liberabit, the truth will set you free. Harvard’s motto is Veritas. The goal of a research university like Hopkins or Harvard was to find out the truth about everything. We in the English department thought of ourselves with a clear conscience as participating in that enterprise. We did not ask ourselves whether a truth about Milton, Pope, or Dickens was more or less valuable than a biological or physical truth such as our scientific colleagues might be discovering.

What held together these two goods (Bildung and Wissenschaft) was the central commitment of English studies to the elucidation, in teaching and writing, of the meanings of literary works. This commitment made it possible to transmit these meanings to others. As I have already said, it all made sense.

How all that has changed in the fifty years since I entered the profession! “O earth, what changes hath thou seen!” (Tennyson). English studies changed slowly at first. In recent years it has changed with unusual rapidity. What can one say about these changes? What should we do now, in our various local situations, to respond to these changes? I do not think hand wringing will help. Most of the changes, in any case, have been all to the good. Perhaps the most important has been the gradual inclusion of women in the professoriat and the inclusion of literature by women and of feminist perspectives in our teaching and writing. Moreover, we know now that periodization is problematic. We know that United States literature is important, and that the literature and culture of the United States are multicultural, multilingual, and multiracial. We know that the old canon was complicit in sexist, racist, nationalist, and imperialist agendas devised primarily by white European males to maintain their dominance.

First the New Criticism shifted attention away from biography and literary history toward the texts themselves, with the unintended consequence of getting new questions asked about the meanings of those texts. Theory continued that displacement by a more distanced interrogation of literature’s nature and social function. If literature’s role can be taken for granted, as we for the most part did take it in those aboriginal years at Johns Hopkins, you do not need theory to account for it. The rise of theory is a sign that something has happened to the social function of literature.

The rise of cultural studies, postcolonial studies, global studies, African American studies, film studies, popular culture studies, and so on, along with their inclusion in the curricula of English departments, has further broadened the discipline of English studies or, some might say, has exploded it, fragmented it beyond hope of reunification. This beneficial broadening has come at a price. What used to make sense as a rational discipline, with identifiable rules and goals, no longer does, at least in many departments. I think the old unity of the discipline is slightly exaggerated—for example, in Stanley Fish’s account in Professional Correctness or in the one I gave above. Though we were a small and relatively homogeneous group in the old Johns Hopkins Department of English, a closer look would have revealed a good bit of irreconcilable diversity. Kemp Malone did quite traditional Old and Mid-
dle English philology, while Allen had a special brand of very learned history of motifs or topoi, Wasserman combined the history of ideas with a fanatical commitment to close reading and to the shibboleth of a good work’s organic unity, and I did more and more—what shall I call them?—speculative readings. Nevertheless, the diversity is much greater now.

One slightly nightmarish vision that troubles my reveries is the visit to my department by a smart California legislator, who, having looked at the list of courses being offered in a given year, asks us to explain its rationale, how it all hangs together. I think we would have big difficulty doing that. Fish has written eloquently and provocatively about the losses involved in expanding the work of English departments in the name of what he sees as a foolish (because unrealizable) desire to be politically effective, until “what we do around here” no longer makes sense as a coherent discipline (30).

How did this happen? Is it, as many people inside and outside the academy believe, something that scholars in English studies have done, whether rightly or wrongly, to their own discipline, through a kind of sovereign willfulness? I do not think the answer is quite so simple, or that Fish is right to blame a mistaken desire to be politically effective imposed on an originally politically neutral discipline for the explosion of English literary studies. In the fifty years since I joined the Johns Hopkins English department, we have gradually, and now with increasing rapidity, moved out of the print age into the age of electronic media. Radio, cinema, television, DVDs, MP3 music, and the Internet now play more and more the role literature once played as the chief interpellator of citizens’ ethos and values. During’s literary subjectivity is becoming rarer and rarer among our citizens. They go to movies or watch television. That is what makes them what they are, not reading Shakespeare or Jane Austen, Dickens or Henry James, much less Donne or Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens or John Ashbery. I am sure hundreds or thousands of people have seen TV versions of novels by Austen, Dickens, or James for every person who has read the books. One reason that university administrators have stood by and allowed English departments to dismantle themselves is that they, no doubt unconsciously, feel that it does not matter so much any longer what these departments do.

From the other direction, the changes I have named in English departments—the New Criticism; the rise of theory; the development of cultural studies, global English studies, film studies, studies of popular culture, and so on—can be seen as spontaneous attempts to find again the social utility that is being lost for the study of canonical works of English literature.

What should we do in this situation? Well, each English department will have to find its own way. Who am I to make prescriptions or prophecies? I think there will be, and already is, some confusion and dissension as well as a lot more difference from department to department than there used to be. In the “old days,” every department of English was made up of more or less the same repertoire of specialists: the Victorianist, the Old English man, the Restoration guy, and so on.

I conclude with two tentative suggestions. First, I think the broadening of our discipline, or even the formation of new ones that will study the new media that work these days to make citizens what they are, is necessary and good. Whether that new discipline should still be called English language and literature I am not sure. Perhaps not. Second, I think we need to recognize, unflinchingly, that literary subjectivity is, in the electronic age, more and more a “minor form,” “not quite of this time and this place,” as During puts it (49). “This may mean,” he goes on to say, “that it retains critical, if not necessarily politically critical, potential. . . . At least we can say: never does the institution of literature have more energy than when it upsets official public culture and governmental rationalities, communicating its own complex ruptures and differences” (49). English departments should be constituted to focus on those ruptures and differences. We need to make every effort to defend, in changed circumstances, the tradition that makes the humanities in the university the place especially charged with the combination of Bildung and Wissenschaft, ethical education and pure knowledge. That means defending academic freedom, the freedom to put everything in question, in the name of veritas, even the traditional concept of critique itself, even our most cherished assumptions and presuppositions. Jacques Derrida calls that “the university without condition” (202), though he goes on to recognize how the university is penetrated from many directions by conditions. The university is always liable to surrender, “without condition,” to instrumental or political uses.

The study of the literature in English of past centuries will, however, continue to be an essential means of understanding that past, as the print age that made literature in our modern sense possible recedes further and further back in time. But it would be a big mistake to build English departments on the assumption that literary subjectivity can ever again have the social
role it used to have and, to a considerable degree, still had back in 1952, when I started full-time teaching.

Works Cited


