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(RE)SHAPING THE PROFESSION

Graduate Courses in Writing Center Theory, Practice, and Administration

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The development of graduate courses devoted to writing center studies (theory, practice, and administration) is a relatively recent phenomenon, one we attribute to several key factors: (1) the reality of various kinds of administrative work—writing program, writing center, WAC—for PhDs in rhetoric and composition; (2) specific local exigencies; (3) the growing professionalization of writing program and writing center studies, in particular the emergence of a new generation of rhetoric faculty specifically trained in these areas, and the steady growth of scholarly literature devoted to writing program and writing center issues (Hesse 1999); and (4) a consequent increase in interest among rhetoric graduate students in writing program and writing center careers—in the practice of administration as intellectual and scholarly work. Our principal concern here is with the ways in which graduate courses in writing center work shape and are shaped by the professionalization of writing centers, and the visions and interests of the next generation of writing center specialists. We begin with what might be called the "professionalization debates" in writing center studies—looking closely at arguments both for and against the actuality and/or desirability of writing center professionalization. We then turn our attention to graduate courses in writing center theory, practice, and administration, exploring the ways in which they enact and reshape the professionalization debate. We end with brief case studies of our own graduate-level writing center courses and implications of such courses for the future of writing center work.

PROFESSIONALIZING WRITING CENTER WORK

Graduate-level writing center courses might be seen as marking a significant stage in the professionalization of writing centers, part of the identifiable pattern that can be traced in the evolution of most academic disciplines. The essays collected in Mary Rosner, Beth Boehm, and Debra Journet's *History, Reflection, and Narrative: The Professionalization of Composition*, 1963–1983 (1999) take a variety of approaches to tracing that professionalization, often mixing anecdote with analysis to show the emergence and recognition of composition as an academic discipline. In their different ways, these essays suggest a similar overall pattern, which might be summarized fairly simply: (1) practitioners recognize that what they do differs fundamentally from the work done by the larger group with which they are associated; (2) practitioners form alliances that eventually are formalized, often in the form of local, regional, or national organizations; (3) practitioners develop a body of scholarship, often developing conferences, establishing new journals, or creating other means of disseminating that scholarship; (4) as this new field of study becomes sufficiently visible, it is gradually acknowledged (or at least tolerated) as a legitimate field of inquiry; and (5) it eventually takes its place with other disciplines taught in the academy. The fourth and fifth phases of this process are especially important, since together they enable a discipline to reproduce itself within the context of a larger institution and under the sanction of that institution. Although such a simple description strips away most of the complexity of professionalization, its very crudity may be useful in raising some fundamental questions, particularly the implications of that concluding phase.

This very general pattern does seem to describe the gradual professionalization of writing center work. Although writing center scholars have problematized our various narratives of origin (e.g., Carino 1995; Carino 1996; Boquet 1999), the concerns they address are symptomatic of a discipline's awareness of itself as a distinct entity. Equally important are the venues in which these essays have appeared—whereas Carino's two essays tracing the history of writing centers appeared in *The Writing Center Journal*, a publication likely to be read only by specialists, Boquet's more recent essay was published in a special issue of *College Composition and Communication* celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of CCCC. The fact that Boquet's essay was selected for this special issue signals a wider recognition

of the importance of writing centers (and the study of writing center work).

Further evidence of this kind of recognition may be inferred from the inclusion of Muriel Harris's recent *College English* article, "Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors" (1995) in the fourth edition of *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook* (Corbett et al. 2000), marking the first time writing centers have been represented in this frequently consulted resource. The presence of writing centers as a separate category in other resources, such as *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Writing* (Bizzell et al. 2000), and the number of sessions devoted to writing centers at national conferences (thirty-one such sessions were identified in the topic index in the CCCC program book in 2000) provide further evidence of the increased scholarly interest in writing centers. Perhaps the most certain sign of academic acceptance is the number of dissertations involving writing centers in recent years. A quick look at *Dissertation Abstracts* between 1990 and 1999 shows twenty-six doctoral dissertations (and two master's theses) directly focused on writing center work; in addition, writing centers are important enough to figure in the abstracts of twenty-three more theses and dissertations.

Together, these developments have led to a sense of professionalization, even a sense of disciplinarity, that is now being perpetuated in graduate courses dealing with writing center theory and administration. The way in which a graduate course on writing centers may further that professionalization is evident in the stated goals of one such course:

> By semester's end, you should be able to
> - discuss the evolution of writing centers and writing center practices over the last 30 years
> - discuss the various theoretical orientations that form/have formed the foundation of writing center practice
> - engage in ongoing scholarly conversations about the relationship between writing center theory and writing center practice
> - start a writing center
> - administer a writing center (and all that this involves)
> - design and conduct writing center research studies of your own.
>
> (Jackson)

This ambitious set of goals, taken from Becky's class, would certainly prepare future writing center administrators to enter the field with a clear sense that it is a field, that it has a history (a complex, contested

history, in fact), that all practice is informed by distinct theoretical or philosophical stances, that research can and should be conducted in a writing center. In short, we would assume that the student who actualizes these goals will be and will be perceived by others as a professional. Furthermore, the very existence of such a course suggests that writing center professionalization has reached the final stage of being institutionalized as a discipline, or as part of a discipline, within the academy.

INSTITUTIONALIZED SUBVERSION: THE PARADOX OF PROFESSIONALIZATION

The reality, however, is much more complicated. Like the larger discipline of Composition Studies, writing center directors and teachers began to form a community not only because of a shared commitment to a certain kind of intellectual work with student writers, but also because of a need to share resources and strategies for addressing what many still consider a marginalized status within institutions of higher education. While it is true that any new group of scholars seeking to establish themselves as a discipline or field is likely to face institutional resistance, writing centers face more than resistance to a new form of knowledge; they face the common prejudice within universities against valuing work deemed as service. That prejudice remains common despite the work of those, most notably Ernest L. Boyer (1990), who call for recognizing—and valuing—the "scholarship of service" as well as the "scholarship of discovery."

Differences between the institutional(ized) values of academic professionals and the values writing centers wish to embrace as part of their professional identity constitute one reason writing center workers themselves continue to debate the benefits of being professionalized. For many academic professionals, the work of the profession is most often described in terms of the production of research, the credentialing of majors, and the reproduction of professionals through graduate programs. As many writing center scholars have argued, the work that writing centers do is not driven by the mandate to pass on an officially sanctioned body of knowledge, but instead grows out of the specific needs of students and other constituencies in very local contexts. For example, while some writing center professionals have expertise in writing across the curriculum or English as a second language, others are experts in professional writing or writing assessment. If writing center professionals do share a common pursuit that differs from what others

in the academy are doing (as the first step in becoming professionalized), it is the pursuit of individualized instruction in writing. As Harvey Kail (2000) puts it in an issue of *The Writing Center Journal* devoted to the future of writing centers, "What distinguishes writing centers in academe is their willingness and ability to engage student writers sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase, word by word, comma by comma, one to one, face to face. No one else in the academy can or wants to do this work, but everyone wants it done—now" (25). This focus on addressing individual students' needs rather than inculcating them into a definable discipline is one reason writing center work is not seen as professional by other academic professionals.

While many writing center professionals do produce research, that research is closely tied to practice. Indeed, a recently published bibliography of the last twenty years of *The Writing Center Journal* reveals a preponderance of articles dealing with tutor training and the art of the individual conference. This practical emphasis supports Kail's (2000) contention that writing center directors are primarily occupied with teaching and administration. As Kail puts it, "[R]esearch is something we have added on after the original writing center creation myth was well established in our minds and embedded in our job descriptions. . . . As Writing Center Director my priorities are teaching, service, service, service, and then research—on our service" (28). In the same issue of *WCJ*, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford argue that writing centers are well situated to contest common academic assumptions about research: "Rather than a model based on highly competitive individual research, writing centers foster team-based and collaborative research. . . . [S]uch research aims less toward individual advancement and more toward programmatic and institutional improvement. . . . In such research, theory and practice exist in a reciprocal and dialogic relationship" (35). Ede and Lunsford emphasize the degree to which the values associated with writing center work—including writing-center-based research—differ from those of the traditional academy: "[I]n writing center work, the extrinsic reward structures of the university—represented by grades and class standing for students and promotion criteria tied almost completely to individual 'original' research for faculty—is replaced by intrinsic rewards measured in improved performance and satisfaction for students and faculty alike" (35). They note, however, that working against institutional norms can be risky, for research tied too closely to practice is often devalued. Thus, for writing center professionals, step

three in the professionalization process—the development of a body of scholarship—is a complicated one, for while writing center workers have produced research of value to each other, the value of this scholarship to the larger institution remains in question.

In spite of widespread evidence that writing centers already are professionalized through research, journals, books, tenured faculty appointments, and the creation of writing-center-focused graduate courses, established writing center professionals continue to deliberate about what this evidence means. As Lil Brannon and Stephen North (2000) argue in their recent essay "The Uses of the Margin," although writing centers are much more common than when they both were assigned the task of starting writing centers in the late 1970s, "So far as we can see, not much has changed in this 20-year-old description of our work" (9). Brannon and North point out that writing centers continue to be underfunded; the staff is still typically dominated by student workers that change from term to term; and writing centers continue to be ignored or disrespected by the institutions that house them, even when student demand for writing center teaching is high. Such were the conditions in the mid-1980s that led Stephen North (1984) to publish his now canonical essay "The Idea of a Writing Center" in an attempt to make a case for the importance of writing center work to his non-Compositionist colleagues.

What is particularly interesting about the professionalization of writing centers is that while no professional wants to be despised or misunderstood, some writing center professionals do argue for caution in pursuing a fully professionalized status if that status requires that we give up what Brannon and North (2000) call an "(en)viable" place on the margins of the institution, free from the constraints of semester calendars, course objectives, and the inevitable grades associated with the "real" business of higher education (8). Of course, in exchange for this seeming freedom, writing centers have the additional burden of justifying what they do. While some writing center professionals struggle to justify the value of their research, others struggle with the institutional demand to produce traditional research that takes them away from their writing centers. Such struggles have led to disagreements within the writing center community about the benefit of having tenure-track status (the ultimate mark of professionalization), especially in institutions where research is the significant factor in awarding tenure. Having tenure-track status may be a sign that writing center directors are profes-

sionalized, but if such status require them to give their research agendas greater priority than the administration of their writing centers, they may be striking a devil's bargain. Directors with non-tenure-track appointments may have less status as professionals, but may be freer to devote their energies to administration and the kind of research valuable to writing centers without the fear of losing their jobs for focusing too much on administration or teaching or doing research not deemed scholarly enough.

Another example of the ambivalent professional status of writing centers is the conflict that can arise between the literacy values of writing center professionals and the literacy values of the institution that houses the writing center. Although academic freedom is an important value that colleges and universities are ethically obligated to protect and that academic professionals have a right to expect, writing centers (and other branches of Composition) often find themselves being asked to support literacy values that they would rather resist. As professionals, writing center workers should have the freedom to teach writing as they see fit, and yet, writing centers are often called on to support basic writing programs with questionable placement procedures, to tutor students who must sit for state-mandated competency tests that privilege status quo literacies, to limit collaborative practices seen as academic dishonesty by other professors. Nancy Grimm (1999) has argued persuasively that this conflict in literacy values arises when the institution's modernist concept of literacy (that individual, unified subjects should speak a single discourse) bumps up against the postmodernist reality of fragmented subjects enacted through multiple literacies, something especially apparent in writing centers. As Grimm sees it, "Just as postmodernity pushes against the limits of modernist beliefs, so does writing center work expose the limits of existing literacy practices in higher education. But because writing centers are funded for modernist reasons (to improve the clarity, order, and correctness of student writing), writing center workers too often must avoid questioning taken-for-granted university assumptions in order to fulfill their designated function" (2). Granted, being a professional who is able to marshal the authority of a body of scholarship puts one in a better position to act to change these expectations than would someone arguing from local conditions only. Still, being a writing center professional does not mean the kind of academic freedom in one's teaching and research experienced

by professors teaching upper division courses in the major or graduate seminars to their devotees.

One of the values that writing center professionals are initiated into, then, is the practice of questioning what it means to be professionals within the larger field of higher education. While such initiation once typically occurred on the job, increasingly, graduate-level writing center courses serve as sites where questions related to professionalization can be addressed explicitly and systematically. Focused on complex problem solving, on strategic ways of approaching the constellation of issues writing center directors inevitably face, these courses emerge as sites of acculturation and critique, preparing students to participate in, complicate, even resist and reshape the conversations and context within which their work is situated.

We began our exploration of graduate-level writing center courses with documents from our own courses, then turned to Brown, Jackson, and Enos's (2000) "Survey of Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric" to locate similar courses in programs across the country. Profiles from the survey indicated that at least 12 doctoral programs in rhetoric offered either a course in writing center administration exclusively (5), or a course in writing program administration (8) with a writing center component (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Doctoral Programs with Graduate Courses in Writing Centers or Writing Program Administration

Institution	*Course Focus*
Ball State University	Writing Programs
Florida State University	Writing Centers
Iowa State University	Writing Programs
New Mexico State University	Writing Centers
Purdue University	Writing Programs
Syracuse University	Writing Programs
Texas A&M University	Writing Centers
Texas Tech University	Writing Programs
University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign	Writing Programs
University of New Hampshire	Writing Centers (and WAC)
University of Kansas	Writing Programs
University of Southern Mississippi	Writing Programs
Washington State University	Writing Centers

Our next step was to request recent syllabi from instructors at each institution who had developed and/or taught the writing center or writing program administration course listed in their program profile. In

all, we gathered ten syllabi, including those from our own courses. Again, courses and accompanying syllabi fall into two primary categories: courses in writing center theory, practice, and administration (6); and courses in writing program administration (6) with a writing center component (see Table 2).

Table 2
Syllabi Received

Institution	*Course Title*	*Instructor*
Ball State	"Professional and Administrative Issues"	Carole Clark Papper
Florida State	"Teaching for Multiple Literacies"	Carrie Leverenz
Iowa State	"Writing Program Administration"	Carol David
New Mexico State	"Writing Centers: Theory, Practice, and Administration"	Rebecca Jackson
Purdue	"Writing Program Administration"	Shirley K. Rose
Syracuse	"Writing Program Administration"	Louise Phelps & Eileen Schell
Texas A&M	"The English Writing Lab"	Valerie Balester
U of Illinois U-C	"Issues in Writing Program Administration	Catherine Prendergast
U of Kansas	"Writing Program Administration"	Amy Devitt
U of New Hampshire	"Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing Centers: History, Theory, and Practice"	Cinthia Gannett
Washington State	"Administering a Writing Lab"	Lisa Johnson-Shull
Wright State	"The Study of Writing: Writing Center Theory and Practice"	Joe Law

Graduate Courses in Writing Program Administration with a Writing Center Component

For most of the courses in this category, "writing program administration" is used as an umbrella term for various kinds of work in writing programs, writing centers, and writing across the curriculum. In other words, writing center work is (also) writing program work, as the description of the graduate-level WPA course offered at the University of Kansas makes clear:

> This seminar attempts to examine writing program administration as an intellectual activity. Whether directing a first-year composition program, a writing lab, or a writing-across-the-curriculum program, writing program administrations must ground their local, institutional practice in disciplinary knowledge.

More interestingly, perhaps, these courses advance a vision of writing program administration as an intellectual, highly political kind of work,

work embedded within and shaped by layers of disciplinary, institutional, and public contexts. At Syracuse, for example, students are introduced to the "issues, problems, and strategies of writing program administration," to the "complexity of writing programs as communities, including. . .the use of adjunct or part-time labor, mixed constituencies within programs, and relations to English departments." Courses offered at other institutions offer similar descriptions and objectives.

- This seminar will address both theory and praxis of writing program administration for diverse writing programs (first-year composition, professional writing, writing centers, WAC programs) in a variety of institutional contexts. Course readings and seminar discussions and activities will address . . . ethical implications of defining the responsibilities of writing program administrators; rhetorical strategies for documenting writing program administration; [and] institutional policies of characterizing writing program administration as "service," "teaching," or "research." (Rose)
- During this semester we will examine some of the contemporary issues and debates in composition . . . [with a] primary focus on writing program administration. We will look at the role of the Writing Program at the University and the relationship of writing centers to writing programs. We will consider the professionalization of writing and writing programs, particularly the role of contract faculty in sustaining writing programs. . . .Readings concerning Writing Programs, Writing Centers, and Writing Across the Curriculum will necessarily include a variety of issues, such as job roles, training, assessment, relationships between these programs as well as between their administrators and the university administrators, students, and colleagues. . . . [Readings will] give us an idea in both practical and theoretical terms of the diversity of issues, duties, ideas, relationships, and scholarship that WPAs must know and contend with. (Papper)
- This course seeks to prepare graduate students in writing studies and closely related fields for the inevitability of administration. . . . We will be discussing issues such as the politics of remediation, gendered approaches to administration, TA/tutor training, the relationship of administration to research, social action, and professional development. We will be examining extensively the writing program administrator's positioning with respect to the current labor crisis in the academy, manifested in the university's increasing dependence on cheap and temporary labor. (Prendergast)

These courses may not deal with writing center issues exclusively, but they do address writing programs as sytems, viewing writing centers as inherent, important, and equally complex components within these systems.

What we don't see is writing program administration, including writing center work, reduced to a set of skills, devoid of intellectual substance. Instead, these courses work to (re)shape students' ideas about administrative work in rhetoric, to prepare them—as fully as any course can—for the teaching, service, research, and intellectual dimensions of writing program administration, and for the political issues that typically attend these facets of writing program work.

GRADUATE COURSES IN WRITING CENTER THEORY, PRACTICE, AND ADMINISTRATION

The six courses we examined devoted exclusively to writing center work share important features of their counterpart courses in writing program administration. Courses are theoretically and practically grounded, emphasizing the shifting, often contested, theoretical and practical frameworks that have shaped and continue to shape writing center work. Each foregrounds the importance of writing center research, empirical research in particular, while at the same time exploring conflicting perceptions about the value of such work. Each focuses, as conflicts and points of disagreement between the writing center and other communities suggest, on the politics of writing center work, on our attempts to view and talk about ourselves as professionals, while at the same time preparing aspiring members of our community to recognize and challenge attitudes, policies, and cultures that reflect the view that writing center work is neither professional nor professionalized. This last move is what we describe as acculturating students into the paradox of professionalization.

Descriptions taken from the syllabi we collected give us some idea of the range and depth of these courses. For example, "The English Writing Lab" offered at Texas A&M "covers the basic components of writing lab administration, including lab management, tutoring, and the development of learning resources" and offers students opportunities to actually engage in these facets of writing center work. Topics of discussion in this course include the "politics of basic writing, critical pedagogy. . .computers in writing centers, peer tutoring, and collaborative learning." Valerie Balester, who teaches this course almost exclusively, observes that a good deal of class discussion focuses, as well, on professional issues—tenure, promotion, status of writing center directors—especially as literature on these issues has begun to emerge. The graduate-level writing center course, "Administering a Writing Center,"

offered at Washington State takes on similar issues, in particular the evolution of writing center theories and practices and the professional concerns that attend writing center work. The University of New Hampshire's course, "Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing Centers: History, Theory, and Practice," offers what might be called a more particularized account of writing centers and the work they do, yet it also focuses on the relationship between theory and practice, and on the multiple contexts within which writing centers are situated: "[in this course] we will use a variety of lenses to understand the past events and movements, present theories and practices, and possible futures of writing centers and WAC programs as aspects of large cultural and educational trends as well as local and contextualized narratives."

Requirements in these courses vary—from reading journals, observations/analyses, and "mini projects" to longer, more substantive research projects for conference presentation or publication—and are designed to encourage students to think and act like writing center professionals. The following table lists required activities in order of their frequency (see Table 3).

Table 3
Required Assignments in Graduate-Level Writing Center Courses

Activity	*Courses Requiring This Activity*
Research Project	6 out of 6: Florida State, U of New Hampshire, New Mexico State, Texas A&M, Washington State, Wright State
Mini Projects (observations, transcriptions, theory application, interviews, etc.)	4 out of 6: U of New Hampshire, New Mexico State, Florida State, Washington State
Proposal (conference, research)	2 out of 6: Washington State, Wright State
Annotated Bibliography	2 out of 6: U of New Hampshire, Washington State
Book Review	1 out of 6: U of New Hampshire
Profile of a Writing Center	1 out of 6: Wright State
Administrative Project	1 out of 6: New Mexico State
Final Exam	2 out of 6: Texas A&M, Washington State

Two of the courses include a lab component: at Texas A&M, students enrolled in "The English Writing Lab" must work a minimum of six hours a week in the writing center and keep a tutoring journal (listed above) in which they discuss and reflect on their experiences; at Washington State, students are required to work in the writing center a minimum of two hours per week. Other daily and/or weekly require-

ments include leading discussion and consulting with a writing center tutor about a paper they are writing for class. These course requirements illustrate that writing center professionals must know the scholarly literature that represents a nationally sanctioned view of writing centers, but must also understand the ways in which writing center work is defined by local conditions.

THREE CASE STUDIES: WRIGHT STATE, FLORIDA STATE, NEW MEXICO STATE

In the three brief case studies that follow, we reflect on our own individual graduate-level writing center courses, taking a more sustained look at the way the intentions expressed in syllabi and course descriptions have been translated into practice. In addition to demonstrating the ways in which these courses attempt to define writing center work in terms of both disciplinary knowledge and institutional politics, we also examine the impact of the local institutional contexts in which those courses were offered. While the shape and content of these courses bear witness to the increased professionalization of writing center work, an examination of the institutional context suggests that the professional status of that work—and of those who carry it out—continues to be questioned.

Wright State University

Wright State University differs from the other universities considered here in that it does not offer a PhD in English. It does, however, offer an MA in English with a concentration in composition and rhetoric as one of the options. Students who follow this track tend to remain in the area, many of them teaching in primary or secondary schools or becoming instructors at the community colleges and universities in the vicinity. As even this brief a description suggests, students are likelier to favor the seemingly practical over the kind of explicit "theorizing" described in connection with other courses. In this class, that orientation meant that discussions usually began with issue of practice, then moved to uncover the assumptions underlying those practices.

Otherwise, in its general outline, this course resembles other graduate courses on writing centers. Like Becky and Carrie's courses, for instance, Joe's course devoted early class meetings to examining the history of writing centers, presenting it as an emerging discipline with a distinct identity. The class began with accounts of the origins of writing

centers—including some individual accounts of early writing centers as well as Peter Carino's essays (1995, 1996) in "thick description" (Elizabeth Boquet's historical essay was not yet available). Those histories were read in conjunction with what Becky calls "first generation theory." Subsequent sessions dealt with administrative issues before we took up "second generation" theory. Because of the practical orientation of his students, one of his goals was to suggest how "theory" and "practice" impinge on each other within specific institutional contexts, and he arranged the course to reflect the interconnectedness of these concerns. The sequence made it increasingly difficult to discuss any of these topics in isolation from the others.

To emphasize the importance of local exigencies, Joe asked students to investigate how various writing centers reflected (and sometimes resisted) the cultures of which they were part. After looking at the differences evident in the case studies presented in Joyce A. Kinkead and Jeannette G. Harris's *Writing Centers in Context* (1993), students developed a profile of a writing center in the area. After those profiles were completed, a number of writing center directors in the area (including some of those profiled) joined the class for an evening to discuss the nature of their work and how it varied from institution to institution.

Some of the talk was about day-to-day practicalities, such as keeping records and managing a budget, and part of it took up larger issues, such as program assessment. To some degree, those students with experience working in a writing center were already familiar with topics of that sort and were not surprised when they encountered them. What *did* surprise them is the enormous range of "political" complications attending the administration of a writing center. One example will demonstrate how that played out. For one class meeting, the assigned readings included two "historical" pieces—Gary Olson and Evelyn Ashton-Jones's "Writing Center Directors: The Search for Professional Status" (1988) and Jeanne Simpson's "What Lies Ahead for Writing Centers: Position Statement on Professional Concerns" (1985). Also included was the more recent "War, Peace, and Writing Center Administration" by Jeanne Simpson, Steve Braye, and Beth Boquet (1995), a three-way conversation showing that the issues raised in the earlier pieces were still unresolved. By that point in the quarter, most of the class had visited a writing center at another school and talked with the director; in addition, the interim director of the writing center at Wright State attended the class that evening. In the discussion that followed, it was immedi-

ately clear that the larger structure of the university was invisible to the students. Once they began to discuss their reading and observations, however, they were surprised, perhaps even alarmed, at what they were discovering. For instance, the question of whether a writing center is housed in an academic department or in some other administrative unit has a tremendous impact on its operation, as does the question of whether the director is classified as faculty or as staff. These questions—even those distinctions that amount to an academic caste system—were new to Joe's students, and these are questions unlikely to be raised in a course that does not focus on administration. Students in such courses will soon be seeking positions in colleges and universities, perhaps asked to be responsible for a writing center or some other program. Those who have had an opportunity to learn how to look at the context in which such programs must operate will be better prepared to expect (and thus deal with) the paradoxical demands they will face.

Florida State University

The graduate course in writing center pedagogy taught at Florida State represents well the paradoxical professional status of writing center work, particularly in the way it negotiates the troubled division between "service" and "scholarship." Florida State prides itself on having one of the first writing centers in the Southeast, founded in the 1960s. From very early on, the writing center was tied directly to the academic mission of the institution, providing for-credit individualized instruction in writing to students who were deemed "at risk," based on SAT and ACT scores, and to students who had difficulty passing the state-mandated College Level Academic Skills Test. What came to be known as the "writing center course" was officially titled "Teaching English as a Guided Study," and served originally not as an introduction to writing center theory and practice but as an official mechanism for providing financial support to graduate teaching assistants as they prepared to teach first-year writing. While students were enrolled in their summer pedagogy course "Teaching College English," they also enrolled in "Teaching English as a Guided Study," which required that they work in the writing center in exchange for a stipend. At that time, working in the writing center meant overseeing students' completion of grammar worksheets. When the first faculty member trained in Rhetoric and Composition was hired at Florida State in the late 1980s, he quickly turned the writing center into a real center for individualized instruc-

tion in writing and turned "Teaching English as a Guided Study" into a real graduate course in composition pedagogy. Aside from a few brief discussions about writing centers and the continued requirement that new teaching assistants tutor in the writing center during their summer training, the course did not focus on writing centers as a separate and unique site of writing instruction, but emphasized composition pedagogy more generally. Like many writing centers in the 1970s and 1980s, the Reading/Writing Center at Florida State eventually came to be directed by a graduate student, while "Teaching English as a Guided Study" continued to be taught by Composition faculty who were no longer tied to writing center work.

When Carrie was hired to direct the Reading/Writing Center, she also became the faculty member designated to teach "Teaching English as a Guided Study." Given that the course continued to be required of all TAs during the summer before their first year of teaching at Florida State, Carrie wanted to prepare graduate students to be effective tutors in a very local context. The ultimate shape of the course, which she subtitled "Teaching for Multiple Literacies," was determined primarily by her analysis of the kinds of work that tutors needed to be prepared to do in this local context. For example, because of the writing center's mandate to teach students deemed at risk based on SAT scores as well as to prepare students who had failed the language portions of the CLAST, Carrie organized one unit around the politics of testing. Other units included attention to cultural and language differences, and to the challenge of working with writing from multiple disciplines and of meeting the needs of graduate students.

At the same time, the course was also influenced by the accumulating body of writing center theory and research, as well as the professional conversations Carrie participated in on the discussion list WCenter and at regional and national writing center conferences. Indeed, although Carrie had specialized in Rhetoric and Composition for her PhD, she had no experience or training in writing center work before she began to direct the Center at Florida State. Becoming a part of a professional community—joining NWCA and WCenter, reading the latest writing center publications—shaped Carrie's sense of what her writing center should be and do, which also shaped her sense of what graduate writing tutors should learn in their required writing center course. For example, Carrie began the course by asking students to read a set of essays that outlined various models for writing centers: Stephen North's "The

Idea of a Writing Center" (1984), Andrea Lunsford's "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center" (1995), and Marilyn Cooper's "Really Useful Knowledge: A Cultural Studies Agenda for Writing Centers" (1995). These articles helped students see writing centers as sites of research and theory as well as practice and, because these articles situated writing centers in relation to English departments and universities more broadly, helped them see the course as part of their professional training in English.

Although the course units were organized around teaching issues, each unit required scholarly reading and critical response journals in addition to examining student writing and practice conferencing with classmates. This emphasis on the professional was also manifested in the requirement that students complete a ten- to twelve-page paper proposing a theory of literacy learning and teaching. In the paper, students had to include material from their experience, from the course readings, and from their observation of tutorials. (New graduate students were no longer required to provide tutoring while enrolled in their summer training on the grounds that tutors needed some training first—another mark of the professional status of writing center work.)

Such apparent marks of professionalization may be deceptive, however. For instance, the fact that "Teaching English as a Guided Study" was required of all new TAs in English may seem evidence that writing center work is considered professional, as signified by a specialized body of knowledge taught by experts. However, it is important to note that the three credits students earned from taking the course did not count toward their degree unless they were concentrating in Rhetoric and Composition. In other words, the course was required of graduate students, but for most, it didn't "count." It should also be noted that since Carrie has left Florida State, her former faculty position has been converted to a non-tenure-track administrative line, and "Teaching English as a Guided Study" has reverted to its former status as a composition pedagogy course without an emphasis on writing centers. The history of "Teaching English as a Guided Study" illustrates the paradox of writing center professionalization. For those inside the writing center community, a case can be made that writing centers constitute a valid site of specialized knowledge, but such a case has yet to be made convincingly within the university or departments of English or even within the larger Rhetoric and Composition community.

New Mexico State University

The graduate-level writing center course ("Writing Centers: Theory, Practice, and Administration") Becky developed in 1998 at New Mexico State University addresses the complexities of writing center work quite explicitly: it is designed to acculturate aspiring writing center directors into "the profession" by focusing, in part, on the paradoxes of the profession. As Director of the Writing Center and Assistant Professor of English in a department offering both the MA and PhD in Rhetoric, Becky was eager to introduce graduate students to the richness of writing center theory and practice, and to the opportunities writing centers offered for empirical language research. As an Assistant Professor working to integrate her teaching, administrative, and research lives, Becky also wanted to prepare students for the unique demands, complexities, and political dimensions of writing center work, to give them a venue for active problem solving and reflection. Her own interests dovetailed nicely with growing interest among graduate students and faculty in rhetoric and professional communication in developing a core of courses in various areas of writing program work, including writing center and WAC administration.

Students began the acculturation process by becoming familiar and comfortable with the conversations taking place in key areas of writing center studies: historical perspectives, "first-generation" theory, "second-generation" theory, writing center practice, writing center administration, writing center research, and the numerous professional issues that attend writing center work—tenure and promotion, for example. The goal here was to expose students to the range and depth of conversations among the writing center community before moving to discussion of specific local practices, an absolutely necessary move if students were to understand the context-specific nature of writing center work. A good example of this would be the evening the class discussed the shift from "first generation theory"—Bruffee's "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'"(1984), North's "The Idea of a Writing Center" (1984)—to "second generation theory"—Cooper's "Really Useful Knowledge: A Cultural Studies Agenda for Writing Centers" (1995), Grimm's *Good Intentions* (1999)—and its relationship to and possibilities for the NMSU Writing Center. Students looked closely at the departmental and institutional contexts within which the NMSU Writing Center is situated and explored the potential and desirability of preparing consultants (and the students with whom they would work) for a more postmodern writing center practice. Simply put, classroom

activities and written projects were designed to bring relatively remote disciplinary conversations to life, to encourage students' thinking about these conversations in relation to local realities, and to provide them with opportunities to imagine various ways of responding to various writing center issues in context.

Another example helps to illustrate this movement—from current conversation, to local realities and practices, to extensions or alterations in conversation that might result in material change at both the local and disciplinary levels. Those of who us who direct writing centers know how difficult it can sometimes be to integrate our teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities into a coherent (or somewhat coherent) whole. This is especially difficult when departments have difficulty seeing the local kinds of research writing center directors must do as legitimate, something more than "service." To help students better understand and grapple with the complexity of this issue, Becky asked them to read "Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Program Administration," and Muriel Harris' "Presenting Writing Center Scholarship" (1997). She also distributed copies of the annual evaluation form the department uses to document faculty work, asking students to look closely at the categories—teaching, research, and service—within which different kinds of work might be legitimately placed. Writing center work, which we had discussed throughout the semester as embodying teaching, research, and administration, was relegated to the "service" section of the evaluation form. So-called "local" or "in-house" research—studying patterns of use to determine the need for workshops on working with ESL writers, for example—was difficult to place at all. If it couldn't be considered "research" in the traditional sense, and the evaluation form makes clear that it cannot, what is it? More importantly, what can we, as writing center directors, *do* about this? Publishing the findings of local research—making it relevant to writing center folk outside of our own context—was one of the many options the class explored for addressing this situation. For example, a local survey of consultants' attitudes toward record keeping (an actual study completed by two of the students in this class) might be discussed at a writing center meeting, but it might also be reworked and submitted as an article that other writing center directors would find interesting and useful.

Clearly, graduate level writing center courses like the one Becky developed and taught at New Mexico State serve to "credential" stu-

dents and, perhaps, make it easier for them to find jobs. More than that, they help to prepare students for the unique and often highly political positions they will find themselves in as writing center directors: they may have a title but no real status; they may be asked to conduct research but find they have little time to actually do it; they may conduct research but find that it has little value; and they may work hard toward promotion and tenure only to find that those who evaluate their work know little, if anything, about it. From Becky's point of view, her responsibility in this kind of course is to expose students to the paradox of professionalization and, in response to this reality, provide opportunities for them to work through issues methodically and strategically. We must prepare students to participate actively in conversations that may affect them and their work in writing centers, but we must help them discover ways to critique, perhaps even transform, these conversations (and realities) as well.

(RE)SHAPING THE PROFESSION

In this essay, we have interpreted the growing number of graduate writing center courses as evidence of the increased professionalization of writing center work. At the same time, a close reading of these courses demonstrates the degree to which the professional status of writing centers continues to be questioned, especially within local institutional contexts. Such is the paradox of professionalization, that while writing center specialists can now point to an extensive body of scholarship as a sign of the status of their work, much of that scholarship addresses the problem of not being treated as status equals in the academy. Exposing graduate students to this literature, and to the institutional politics and local contexts that motivate such scholarship, will prepare these newly minted writing center teachers and administrators to address head-on the gap between writing centers' rightful claim to professional status and the often blatant dismissal of that claim by others in the academic community. Preparing future writing center workers in this way will also, we hope, produce a new generation of scholars with the knowledge and skills to contribute to the continuing professional conversation about the paradox of professionalism. The future (professionalization) of writing centers depends on those willing and able to define their work as both situated within local contexts and also as part of a larger disciplinary project. Graduate writing center courses that make clear this dual obligation go a long way in helping to (re)shape

the profession as a viable discipline, albeit one that continually questions the relative merits of disciplining and being disciplined as writing specialists.