

9

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

Who Should Teach First-Year Writing?

Richard E. Miller and Michael J. Cripps

Who is qualified to teach the first-year writing course? Only scholars who have earned doctoral degrees in rhetoric and composition studies? English professors? Part-time lecturers with an interest in literacy? Graduate students working in the language arts? Anyone who wants to? Anyone who can be made to? Anyone who will?

One could argue that the discipline of composition studies was brought into being at the moment institutions for higher education began to explore all available solutions to the perennial problem that is student writing. Or put another way, one could say that composition studies as a field is simply the concatenation of local institutional responses to the challenge of providing fundamental writing instruction to first-year students. Seen in this light, the teaching of writing is always ultimately a local matter, and so too is the question of who is best suited to do this work, since the answers to this question can only be sought within the inevitably narrow field of possible solutions that are marked out by local institutional constraints. Thus, we contend that treating the question of who should teach composition as a philosophical, pedagogical, or (most commonly) moral matter distorts the reality that prevails in every writing program in the country; the question of who teaches first-year writing is determined not only by the local WPA's philosophical, pedagogical, and political commitments, but also by a host of variables entirely beyond the local WPA's control; the pool of possible applicants in the region; the home institution's history with writing instruction; the financial well-being of the home institution; and who happens to be department chair, area dean, and provost at any given moment. By drawing attention to these local constraints and the role they play in shaping the available solutions to the problem of staffing the first-year course, we maintain that all WPAs are always working in a compromised space—one that is never fully under any one person's control, never

fully a reflection of one's own sense of what is best or ideal, never anything more than a temporary realization of what is best (under the circumstances) for the time being.

While we don't see our position as distinctly postmodern, the fact that we have chosen to eschew a single, overarching narrative in this essay in order to provide a multi-perspectival account reflects our own unease with grand narratives. Our four overlapping versions of the Rutgers Writing Program's approach to staffing freshman composition are meant to foreground both the multiple forces at play in the narrative and the locally relevant measures of success. Our contention is that this condition of local responsiveness is common to all WPAs.

WHO IS THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING COURSE FOR?

How Graduate Students Outside the English Department at Rutgers University Found Themselves Working for the Writing Program

Version One: It's All About the Numbers

In 1991, the Writing Program at Rutgers University first opened the doors of its many classrooms to doctoral candidates from across the academic disciplines. Since that time more than 250 future teachers and scholars with training in fields including history, political science, sociology, linguistics, philosophy, classics, economics, art history, physics and astronomy, French, and Spanish and Portuguese have spent two years teaching freshman composition. Thus, in little more than a decade, the Writing Program has made it possible for more than twenty thousand entering students to receive training in how to generate successful academic prose from advanced graduate students whose primary specialization is neither in English nor in composition. While we recognize that many professionals in the field will see this fact as a betrayal of the noble effort to professionalize the work of writing instruction, we feel that such responses are unwarranted. Likewise, we see little value in touting the approach the Rutgers Writing Program has taken to solving its staffing problems as either an unqualified success or a model that can and should be transported to other locations. For us, praise or condemnation of what might be termed the "Rutgers Solution" is beside the point: the only response to the "Rutgers Solution" that we see as having any intellectual merit rests with understanding how this particular response to the challenge of staffing the first-year course emerged as both a reasonable and a possible alternative within the local context.

To this end, it is best to begin with some facts about how the Writing Program has grown since 1991. In the fall of 1991, the Writing Program ran 177 sections; in the fall of 2003, the Writing Program ran 308 sections. In 1991, the Writing Program had one tenure-track faculty member on staff: Kurt Spellmeyer, the program's director. In 2003, the Writing Program had a total of three faculty members: Kurt Spellmeyer, in his nineteenth year as the program's director; Richard Miller, who served as the program's associate director for seven years before becoming chair of the department; and Mary Sheridan-Rabideau. Between them, these three faculty members staff four sections of writing a year—two in the fall, two in the spring. That is, while the Writing Program now offers 130 more sections each fall than it did a decade ago, the number of courses staffed by its tenured and tenure-track faculty has grown by two sections. This is one way to describe the contours of our local staffing problem: putting aside the question of how those 177 sections were staffed in 1991, how do you staff the extra 130 sections each fall?

The answer that comes immediately to mind, of course, is to hire more faculty. With the 2/2 teaching load at Rutgers, the math here is quite straightforward: sixty-five tenure-track faculty would do it. That's it: just hire a faculty larger than the entire English Department, larger even than any other department in the entire Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Setting aside the cost represented by such a proposal, the fact that hiring on this scale is unprecedented both at this university and in the discipline of composition nationwide, and the entirely justified moral imperatives that the working conditions of writing teachers be improved in just this way, one is still left with the harsh reality that over the past decade the *total* number of faculty lines allocated to all the disciplines in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) at Rutgers University has only increased by ten. Ten lines total to accommodate the growth and development of areas of research as diverse as biomedicine and women's and gender studies. Ten lines to accommodate a FAS-wide increase of thirty-five thousand student enrollments annually. What this means, in short, is that both within the Writing Program and outside it in the other departments, the phenomenal growth in the student population has not been—and cannot be—absorbed by faculty on the tenure-track.

So if faculty lines are not a possible solution in this context, what's the next best approach? From a purely managerial perspective, one might think about getting those already teaching in the system to take on a heavier teaching load, but here local conventions make such a thought quite literally unthinkable: while class sizes have grown

dramatically across the disciplines (a development that amounts, obviously, to a de facto increase in teaching load), union rules and the conventions at research universities nationwide guarantee the maintenance of the tenure-track faculty's 2/2 teaching load. And indeed, locally, the problem of staffing all those additional writing sections was made all the more challenging by the university's decision—a decision, needless to say, that everyone in the Writing Program strongly and actively supported—to *reduce* the teaching load of TAs from three sections a year to two sections a year. This, then, is the local situation: at the very moment that enrollments in Writing Program courses are skyrocketing, one of the program's primary resources for meeting student demand—TAs in the English Department's graduate program—had its teaching capacity reduced by one-third. In concrete terms what this meant was that, at the very moment the Writing Program found itself scrambling to cover those extra 130 sections, it lost coverage in 72 sections formerly taught by TAs on a 2/1 load. That's a swing of more than 200 sections in need of staffing; that's a swing larger, in itself, than nearly every writing program in the country.

More students seeking a college education and TAs receiving a lightened teaching load: these entirely laudable developments combined to produce a local staffing crisis of truly extraordinary proportions. As union negotiations for the reduction in TA workload proceeded throughout the early 1990s, the Writing Program sought relief from the university's central administration. What might have been the most obvious response, that is simply increasing the number of TAs allocated to the English Department to make up for the shortfall, was impossible in the event: with seventy-two TAs assigned to the department, English has a resource pool that towers over all the other disciplines in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Under the circumstances—where the History Department, for example, has only sixteen TAs to work with—there was no credible way to argue for adding thirty-six more TAs to the English Department to assist with covering the staffing shortage exacerbated by the reduction in the TAs' teaching load. And so it was decided that the best solution was to allocate to the Writing Program thirty-six additional TA lines that would then be distributed to qualified advanced ABD graduate students in the other FAS disciplines. That's one version, then, of how TAs from outside the English Department came to be teaching in the Writing Program. In this version, it's primarily a matter of the numbers, of fooling with the ledger to move the available labor around to get the job done.

Viewed from the perspective of sheer scale, successful writing program administration is the ability to put qualified instructors in front of students. In this respect, the program has done pretty well. At a time when the annual number of sections offered grew by 86 percent, the Writing Program tripled (from one to three) the number of composition faculty. What of adjunct labor, a perennial solution to the problem of staffing the first-year course? In 1991, adjunct faculty taught 34 percent of the courses offered by the Writing Program; in 2002, a year in which 329 courses were offered during the fall term, adjunct faculty taught 29 percent of the sections. Remarkably, the Writing Program also came to rely less on TAs over the same period, from 50 percent of all sections in 1991 to 45 percent by 2002, as a result of the program's success in securing more than fifteen full-time, non-tenure-track WPA and instructor positions to assist in covering the increase in the total number of courses offered annually. In fact, by 2002 nearly one-third of all composition courses were staffed by instructors with a full-time commitment to composition research and/or instruction.

Version Two: A Matter of Scale or Increasing Capacity to Do More of What We've Always Done

This partial solution to the Writing Program's staffing problems didn't arise unbidden from Zeus's skull, though: since the late eighties, the Writing Program had staffed a handful of courses with doctoral candidates from history, political science, and art history. And indeed, one graduate student in anthropology, Darcy Gioia, so distinguished herself during this time that she was assigned control over one of the Writing Program's three writing centers, then over the Writing Program's first computer classroom. She steadily rose through the ranks to become one of the program's first permanent administrators, coordinating the basic writing course, designing and overseeing the university-wide placement test, and handling all matters having to do with scheduling. Gioia's success, and the program's success at placing a handful of advanced graduate students from disciplines other than English in the first-year course, suggested to all involved in thinking through these staffing problems that the Writing Program could pull off placing roughly a fifth of its curriculum (70 sections out of 500 total) in the hands of teachers who had no previous experience either with English as a discipline or composition as a field of research.

To some it might seem that this set of decisions represents a betrayal of the first-year student, since it places the needs of the Writing Program

beneath the needs of the graduate school—where the goal is just getting more students from across the disciplines to complete their degrees, whatever the cost. Such a judgment might be warranted, were it not the case that the Writing Program's highly evolved administrative structure depends on having all of its teachers submit their work in the classroom to regular review. This administrative structure was already in place when the TAs from disciplines other than English arrived en masse precisely because the staffing of writing courses at Rutgers has *always* required the employment of a teaching faculty whose primary commitments rest somewhere other than with the teaching of writing. That is, even before the explosion in course offerings over the nineties, the Writing Program's courses (like those in many writing programs nationally) were almost entirely staffed by a teaching faculty composed on the one hand of graduate students working in an English department whose course offerings are exclusively focused on literary studies and, on the other, of an ever churning and changing pool of part-time lecturers whose qualifications were almost exclusively drawn from the literary and creative arts. Given this local history, Kurt Spellmeyer, the program's longtime director, designed and put in place an administrative structure that applies the same grading standards across all the sections and ensures the program's teaching faculty provide consistent instruction. Spellmeyer has achieved these goals by adopting a single required textbook for the required writing course; by mandating attendance for all new teachers in the program at a weeklong, extensive training session in the program's pedagogical approach; and by instituting regular one-on-one meetings with *every* teacher in the program *every* semester to assess the work being produced in *every* classroom.

This well-established administrative structure, unique among writing programs of this scale, was ready and waiting when the TAs from the other disciplines arrived. And so, in a certain way, there was little about how the program went about its business that needed to be changed by this new arrangement: the new TAs just needed to queue up for fall orientation, regularly attend the mentoring sessions, and sign up for mid-term and final folder review and everything would proceed as it always had. To be sure, scheduling became considerably more difficult, since the program had to work with 108 TAs to staff the same number of sections that had been previously been staffed, under the heavier load, by 72 TAs; and there was the additional problem of expanding the number of mentoring sessions offered for new teachers outside the English

Department, since this sector of the teaching faculty had increased dramatically. But these are primarily problems of scale. That is, nothing *new* had to be built to accommodate this change.

In this version, success is measured not in the number, educational level, or scholarly commitments of writing instructors but, rather, in terms of curricular integrity. Can a Writing Program expand by well over one hundred sections, draw in thirty-six ABD student-teachers with no background in writing instruction, and still remain basically the same? The Writing Program had a highly articulated professional development apparatus that provided instructors with the tools necessary for writing instruction and students with a consistent educational experience. But the apparatus of intensive weeklong orientation workshops for one hundred new instructors each August, hour-long midterm and final folder reviews for instructors in each course, and mentoring sessions for new instructors is administratively labor intensive. The challenge was to expand the number of administrators capable of handling this responsibility. Over the period from 1991 to 2002, a time when the number of courses offered grew by 86 percent, the Writing Program expanded its staff to fourteen, a 100 percent increase in WPA positions.

So at the local level, over the last decade the size of the Writing Program grew dramatically because of demographic shifts and shifts in admission standards, two developments over which the program had no control. Fiscal constraints and the broader commitments of the central administration resulted in the provision of some relief from this growth in the number of sections offered in the form of TA lines designated for advanced (ABD) graduate students from disciplines other than English. Because of the Writing Program's administrative structure, we were confident that we could provide the TAs from the other disciplines with the training they needed to succeed in the classroom; we were confident because we had years of experience training creative writers, journalists, and screenwriters to work within our system; we were quite prepared to handle resistant teachers, given our many years working with graduate students in English who saw the composition classroom as a distraction from their scholarship. In sum, we fashioned a viable solution out of the available options, and we did so thinking that the TAs from the other disciplines were the only players in this game who were going to have to change; at the time, none of us could see how dramatically bringing a cohort of teachers with different perspectives, commitments, and disciplinary biases would change the program itself.

Version Three: On Unintended Consequences

Although no one involved in administering the Writing Program saw it coming, introducing nearly forty interdisciplinary TAs to the revolving pool of teaching faculty in 1996 set in motion a host of internal adjustments that have done nothing less than transform how the Writing Program defines its mission to itself, to the English Department, and to the university at large. This didn't happen all in a flash; it wasn't the end result of a summit meeting, a faculty retreat, or even a flurry of engaged memos. No, the change came about slowly, occasioned by the commodity that has, historically, been prized above all else in the field of composition: experience.

There is no way to provide a full or an accurate account of how the subtle and substantial changes in the program's mission came about. With the arrival of a new force of teachers, new training challenges arose and new conversations were started. One place these challenges and opportunities surfaced was in the one-on-one folder reviews, where the new TAs brought their papers and their assignments in for review with one of the program's many administrators. For new instructors, folder review is primarily a mechanism for professional development that supplements the large summer orientation and the ongoing meetings of the smaller mentoring groups. Under the best of circumstances, during midterm folder review problems with assignments, comments, evaluation, and classroom practices can be detected early enough for the instructor to make the necessary pedagogical adjustments to bring the affected section back in line before final grades are submitted. Final folder review is less concerned with faculty development than with ensuring that instructors have normed their evaluations of their students' work to the program's standards.

Because folder review serves both a pedagogical and an evaluative function, it is inevitably a site where learning occurs and conflict arises. When the TAs from outside the English Department joined the program, the required text for the first-year course was David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky's *Ways of Reading*, long the industry standard for programs committed to providing an intellectually demanding writing course driven by challenging readings. The Writing Program's adoption of this text in the mid-1980s and its steadfast defense of a writing pedagogy that asked students and teachers to read some of the university's most respected theorists secured the program's reputation as a site where serious work was being carried out. The view of the program's

strengths was altered, incrementally, by the accumulation of reports of folder reviews with TAs from disciplines other than English. Prior to the inclusion of scholars from across the disciplines, we saw *Ways of Reading's* focus on the close textual analysis of cultural studies texts as a universally valued literacy skill; TAs from outside English showed us that this approach was really a discipline-specific methodology that did not readily transfer to writing for history, philosophy, or political science. Because the program is founded on a commitment to taking student writing seriously, it followed as a matter of course that the reports of these student-teachers warranted attention.

Partly in response to the concerns raised by TAs from other disciplines and partly in response to Spellmeyer's and Miller's weariness with having worked out of the same text for more than two decades between them, the Writing Program began to pilot a new set of readings for its first-year course. This eventually resulted in Miller and Spellmeyer's coedited volume, *The New Humanities Reader*, which brings together essays and book excerpts by prominent scholars across the disciplines writing for a broad, educated audience about some of the most pressing concerns of our time. Although it didn't start out to do so, *The New Humanities Reader* represents the coeditors' dawning recognition that the discipline of composition has largely been shaped by the question of who should teach the first-year course, when a better question to ask is: who is the course for?

If the first-year course is for all students, regardless of intended major, then one could argue that the course shouldn't serve as an implicit proxy for the English Department or its values. If the course belongs to all the students and is staffed by a teaching faculty with an expertise drawn from across the disciplines, then, it seemed to follow that, since the first-year course could never prepare students to write in every discipline, the best pedagogical response might well lie with challenging students to build connections *across* disciplinary boundaries to generate responses to pressing contemporary problems. So reconceived, the first-year course moved from being a course centrally concerned with close reading and close textual analysis to a course that asked students to use their writing to engage with a set of problems that belong to no one discipline: the place of religion in secular society; the fate of democracy in the jobless future; the biogenetic engineering of food and the prospect of environmental devastation. So whereas early in the 1990s, a first-year student at Rutgers might well have started her year reading and writing a response to Stanley Fish's "How to Recognize a Poem When You

See One”—working with a text, an author, and a methodology readily familiar to graduate students in English—first-year students at Rutgers this year might well have started the semester reading and writing about the roots of human compassion, drawing on essays by the cultural anthropologist Jonathan Boyarin, the zoologist Stephen J. Gould, and the primatologist Franz de Waal. Recognizing that the first-year course belongs not to the English Department or to its graduate students, but rather to the first-year students—in all their heterogeneity—thus reflects a parallel acknowledgment that the ability to teach the first-year course does not reside exclusively with the English faculty, its graduate students, or even (more broadly) with those who have studied the literate arts.

This was not the only unintended consequence that followed from trying to find other sources for staffing the first-year course, though it is certainly the most intellectually stimulating result, since it has meant that the program’s deliberations about how best to serve the first-year students have been relieved of the need to maintain fidelity to something as abstract and as distant as “the profession.” Although Spellmeyer did foresee that bringing graduate students outside the discipline of English into the Writing Program would assemble a whole cast of stakeholders from outside the department who would develop a commitment to the program’s success, no one involved in managing the program over the past decade foresaw just what would happen when the TAs from the other disciplines completed their two years in the Writing Program and returned to their home departments. While we are only now collecting data on the lasting effects of this experience, we have considerable anecdotal and circumstantial evidence that shows this initiative has influenced the teaching of writing across the disciplines at Rutgers, enhanced the employment opportunities of the advanced graduate students who have participated in the initiative, improved the completion rate of these same students, and materially changed the composition of the Writing Program’s administrative team.

While coauthor Michael Cripps is in the process of a fuller analysis of this initiative, we can report with confidence that informal conversations with TAs from disciplines other than English confirm that there is, almost inevitably, some transfer of the program’s process pedagogy as well as its commenting techniques; many participants report in addition that they have returned to their home departments with a greater willingness to assign papers in discipline-specific courses. In effect, the practical experience of teaching writing puts these TAs in a position to break down the conventional wisdom in many disciplines that either

their undergraduates already know how to write a sentence, paraphrase, summarize, organize ideas, and develop an argument or they'll never be able to learn. At Rutgers University, this interdisciplinary TA experience may be the only, and therefore the best, way to spread writing across the curriculum.

We also have evidence that suggests the Rutgers Writing Program's initiative has materially improved the job prospects for advanced graduate students and newly minted Ph.D.s from disciplines other than English with experience in the composition classroom. Given the conventional wisdom in all disciplines other than composition regarding the writing abilities of undergraduates these days, a young scholar who comes to a job interview with both expertise in a discipline *and* experience teaching writing clearly has an edge over a candidate who has no such experience and can only join others in lamenting the current decline in literacy. In political science, a discipline with which the Writing Program has a particularly close relationship, graduate students are routinely told that a two-year position as a TA in the Writing Program will certainly improve their chances of landing a tenure-track position in political science. This narrative is not a fiction. No one would claim that the experience working as a Writing Program TA is the primary reason political science Ph.D.s secure good jobs: the program in political science and the research records of its graduates are obviously the most important factors in determining which candidates secure access to permanent employment. However, in a highly competitive academic job market, aspiring scholars need any edge they can get and two (or more) years as a composition instructor seems to provide that edge.

If the evidence of this initiative's influence on writing across the curriculum at the university and on job placement is mostly anecdotal at this point, the evidence within the Writing Program that this initiative has had a profound impact on the career trajectories of a number of graduate students is quite easy to document. As the Writing Program grew during the nineties and the number of teachers involved in this grand project increased, the only way to maintain the supervisory structure that lies at the heart of the program was to increase the number of assistant directors of the program as well. Soon, advanced graduate students from disciplines other than English began to compete with advanced graduate students in English for these prized administrative positions and for the growing number of full-time instructor positions in the program. And sure enough, because the ability to teach writing successfully within this local system is not tied to a disciplinary affiliation,

advanced graduate students from art history, comparative literature, history, and political science have, over the past decade, joined advanced graduates from the English Department as being the most qualified candidates to carry out these central administrative jobs and these full-time teaching duties.

The value of gaining experience helping to administer the Writing Program is clear. Over the past decade, every single one of the more than twenty assistant directors of the Writing Program who have gone on the market with a completed dissertation has landed a job: nearly all of them have accepted tenure-track positions with a WPA component, positions in English departments teaching literature, or positions in composition; some have gone on to be university administrators (assistant program director, assistant dean, program director); and one is a managing editor in the textbook industry. Out of this group, five WPAs have come from disciplines other than English: one now holds a tenure-track position in the University of North Iowa's History Department; two are associate deans, one at Rutgers, the other at Pace; one, a graduate from the political science department's doctoral program, teaches writing full-time at the Penn State-Erie, the Behrend College; and another graduate of the political science program (a coauthor of this essay) is an assistant professor of English in the CUNY system. To our way of seeing, it is unmistakable that this experience adds value, improving the employment opportunities of those who acquire the skills required to teach first-year students effectively and the skills required to handle all of the administrative challenges that rise in the wake of such a large, complex pedagogical effort.

One final unintended and welcome consequence of this initiative is worth noting: the political value that comes with extending support to graduate students from other departments. When the Writing Program offers eight TA lines to history or political science, year after year, those departments become potential allies of the program. In political science, those eight lines nearly double the number of graduate students the department is able to fund through TAs in a given year! Indeed, when one adjusts for the ABD requirement, the Writing Program TA funds more graduate students each year for some FAS departments than any other source. Graduate program directors recognize that this arrangement enables more doctoral candidates to make significant progress on their dissertations and that everyone benefits from it. The obvious material benefits the interdisciplinary TA program brings to graduate programs across the Faculty of Arts and Sciences translates

into both broad-based, generalized support for the Writing Program and a deeper understanding of its policies and procedures. While the Writing Program has not actively sought to mobilize this support from other disciplines, this arrangement yields a potentially important source of political capital that helps insulate the Writing Program from having its TA lines cut. More importantly, this initiative has established the Writing Program as a central player in all university-wide initiatives that involve undergraduate education: indeed, in 2003 the vice president of undergraduate education worked in concert with the directors of the Writing Program to craft a grant proposal that called for integrating the program's pedagogical approach to intercultural issues into introductory courses across the disciplines. This effort, in turn, attracted a \$365,000 grant from the Bildner Foundation to establish a program for advising university faculty interested in constructing a more coherent undergraduate curriculum. Who would have thought such developments would have followed from being driven to reconsider the question of who should be allowed to teach first-year students how to write?

In this version of events, success is defined as the ability to establish effective administrative and pedagogical connections within the local context. Has the Writing Program established a web of institutional affiliations that enable its administrators to influence decisions made outside the program's own structure? Is the Writing Program engaging the university community in conversations about writing in which the WPAs listen, learn, and adjust? These questions are central concerns of WPAs charged with Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) (and of WAC programs generally), and the ability to provide and modify structured responses to these questions is essential to the health of any writing program. The impact of the TA experience on the job prospects for new Ph.D.s in a variety of disciplines, the inclusion of doctoral candidates and recent Ph.D.s in the ranks of full-time instructor and WPA positions, and collaborative grants to improve linkages between courses in the undergraduate curriculum are all indicators of a healthy program. Success in "A Matter of Scale" is measured by absorption and institutional continuity; in "Unintended Consequences" success requires a willingness to listen and to change. The inclusion of TAs from disciplines other than English led Kurt Spellmeyer and Richard Miller to reframe a fundamental question in composition, from "Who should teach the first-year course?" to "Who is freshman composition for?" This alternative perspective led, in turn, to the eventual publication of a

reader that encourages students to read and synthesize ideas in multiple disciplines.

Version Four: It Ain't All Roses

Obviously, not everyone involved in this initiative has rated it an unqualified success. Indeed, course evaluations consistently show that some students do not value TAs from outside English; in this way, they reflect the broader assumption that such work is the proper preserve of those who teach English, rather than of any intelligent person in the process of entering a profession where writing plays a central role. What these students don't—and can't be expected to—know is that, in terms both of formal training in and actual experience with writing instruction, there is no clear or discernable difference between first-time English TAs and the first-time TAs from other academic disciplines. That is, a first-time English TA, drawn to Rutgers by its outstanding graduate program in literatures in English, is not, a priori, better prepared than an advanced graduate student in art history or political science or physics and astronomy to begin the hard work of teaching first-year students how to read with care, how to draft a thoughtful response, or how to use revision to produce a supple argument. That there is no clear and consistent difference between the performance of beginning graduate students in English and advanced graduate students from the other disciplines is evident from the folder review process. Administrators in the program consistently find that the alchemical mixture of an aptitude with language, an interest in its problems, and a desire to assist others in acquiring greater fluency on the page is much better at predicting success in the composition classroom than is one's disciplinary background. What the students don't know, the discipline of composition also doesn't know: no discipline can claim exclusive ownership of or access to this alchemy.

Of course, not all the graduate students who have participated in this initiative have relished the experience of teaching in the ways the program requires, of reading and responding to student writing, and of working closely with first-year students. For the vast majority of TAs in the Writing Program, composition instruction is a job they perform so they can make progress on their research. Since the program is realistic about the place of the TA in graduate students' conceptions of their professional aims, it does not ask, require, or even expect instructors to agree with its pedagogy in any philosophical sense. Everyone knows that most TAs from disciplines other than English will work for only two years

in the Writing Program, teach their requisite four sections of freshman composition during this time, and then return to their disciplines to pursue their careers.

The interdisciplinary TA program is not designed to recruit future compositionists; it is designed to help meet the staffing demands of the first-year course. The weeklong orientation at the end of the summer, the ongoing meetings of the mentoring groups, and the folder review process work together to ensure that everyone involved in this enterprise has the support necessary to meet the Writing Program's standards. The Writing Program's concern is not to convert any of its teachers to its method; it does demand, though, a practical adherence to its pedagogy during the term of employment. Consistency in the number and type of writing assignments across all sections of the program's writing courses, consistency in pedagogical approach, and consistency in the application of the shared evaluative criteria are all that is required; these three consistencies make it possible to provide over ten thousand students each year with a common learning experience in their writing classes.

Given these constraints, as one would expect, some of the program's new instructors simply do not work out because they are unwilling or unable to adhere to the pedagogy. Some TAs (in English, as well as in other disciplines) chafe against the organizational apparatus that secures a consistent pedagogy. Some interpret folder review to be an unwarranted intrusion into their classroom, a violation of intellectual freedom, which some understand as the right to teach or do whatever they want in the course. For others, the issue is less philosophical than practical: to teach writing well is hard work and nothing can be done to change that fact. And still others, although overtly willing to give the program's approach a try, struggle to learn the pedagogy and implement it effectively in the composition classroom. These familiar challenges, which accompany any serious pedagogical venture, don't go away just because one has redefined the available labor pool. But in this case, we can also say with confidence that the challenges don't get any steeper than they ever are. In this version of our narrative, success is best measured by the program's institutional response to the question: who should teach the first-year course? Does opening the course up to instructors from fields as diverse as art history and physics mean that anyone can teach freshman composition? Yes, and no. There is no disciplinary prerequisite, and the program does not demand loyalty oaths. But all instructors must demonstrate in summer orientation the ability to work within the Writing Program's pedagogy. Instructors are taught

to read and comment effectively on student writing; they learn to draft focused writing prompts that enable students to explore their own positions in relation to a set of readings; they discuss and draft lesson plans that can engage students in conversations on both issues in the readings and specific writing skills; and they practice norming to the rubric that all Writing Program instructors follow. Instructors who either come to the orientation with these skills or develop them over the course of the week are deemed qualified to teach in the Writing Program, with the understanding that twice each term they will meet with an administrator to share teaching strategies, to discuss student writing, and to ensure that grades are normed to the program standard. In our experience, we have found that over 90 percent of TAs from outside English are capable of meeting these criteria for teaching writing, so long as we provide them with a week of orientation and support them with a semester of mentoring and several hours of folder review.

CONCLUSION

In their introduction to this volume, Sharon James McGee and Carolyn Handa identify *chance* and *process* as two features of postmodernism that apply to WPA work. While our approach to administration may not be distinctly postmodern, our narratives of the Rutgers Writing Program's inclusion of TAs from disciplines other than English demonstrate just how much writing program work is open to chance and how much a writing program is always a work in process. The university's decision to reduce the annual teaching load for Writing Program TAs from three to two courses created a potential staffing crisis over which the Writing Program had almost no control. And the solution, a decision to enlist TAs from outside English in the teaching of the first-year course, was hardly foreordained. We made up our solutions as we were going along, arguing for additional resources and responding to new problems as they arose. The dream of administration is that it is always possible to plan in advance; the reality of lived administration is that improvisation—of making do with what is at hand—is always at the heart of this work.

Does it matter who teaches the first-year writing course? This is one of the questions that has propelled the abolition movement in composition, because to suggest that the answer to this question might be no is to imply that there may be no deep or lasting scholarly merit to the field. We think that this question can only be answered locally. At Rutgers, the structure of the program that Kurt Spellmeyer has designed and

overseen for nearly two decades makes it possible for graduate students with no more training than one can receive in a weeklong orientation to begin teaching the first-year course; ongoing mentoring sessions provide carefully timed pedagogical support to assist with faculty development; and the midterm and end-of-term folder review sessions provide oversight and quality control. This highly elaborated program, which itself was constructed in response to how Rutgers has historically handled the challenge of staffing the first-year course, provides the structure first-time teachers require to succeed in our classrooms. That may sound like a solecism, but it is the solecism that resides at the heart of any writing program: the program, designed in response to and in concert with local constraints, defines what success means locally and then cultivates the conditions whereby others can succeed according to local standards. Or perhaps put in more familiar terms, all we've really been arguing is this: the field within which any writing program works is a rhetorical one populated by real people, real histories, and real institutions—and that field both constrains and helps define the range of possible options at any given moment. Our sense of what was possible changed dramatically when we stopped asking who should teach the first-year course and began to ask who the course was for. While our answer to this question is a local one, the question is one that can travel.