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CREATING TWO DEPARTMENTS OF WRITING

One Past and One Future

Barry M. Maid

It's tempting to start this piece by invoking Martin Luther King's famous "Free at last. Free at last." The temptation to celebrate once given the opportunity to be "out on your own" is great. It's not unlike the feeling many of us may have had when we found ourselves at age eighteen at college and "on our own." We were free to live our lives the way we wanted without parental intervention. As some of us learned the hard way, just doing what we wanted or what felt good at the moment was not the most prudent course. Likewise, when given the opportunity to build a new academic unit—a full-fledged independent writing department—the temptation is to celebrate and "create brave new worlds." For good or ill, the reality of putting together a new academic unit is hard work and fraught with pitfalls. What I hope to do here is to give those who may find themselves in the situation of creating a new unit some sense of what happened at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) and how that experience is helping me to shape things at Arizona State University East. Recognizing what others have done will help those forming new units better understand the task that lies ahead for them.

I've been fortunate in my career to now be building my second completely independent writing department. Initially, I was thrust into the position of helping to develop a new department in the late spring of 1993 when Joel Anderson, the provost at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, decided to split the English department, which I chaired, into English and rhetoric and writing. It was an exciting time. I had spent almost an entire year attempting to restructure the English department in order to keep it together—despite an increase in the number of faculty and expanded diversity in the programs we offered. As chair, I saw it as part of my job to keep the unit together. I can't begin to count the number of times I touted the department as a "microcosm of the university—encompassing linguists, who worked like scientists;

compositionists and folklorists, whose work was like social scientists'; literary scholars, who did humanities work; and the creative writers, who were artists." It was wonderful public relations. In fact, on closer study, it reveals lots of people thrown together whose only commonality was that they somehow shared this indefinable mythical umbrella called "English Studies." I created multiple new structures that attempted to give more autonomy to individual programs—especially the writing programs, which were expanding and drawing large numbers of students.

I think the defining moment of the futility of my effort occurred at one faculty meeting where the entire faculty was discussing my proposals. Listening to my colleagues, I had one of those moments of insight. I thought, "This unit has over one hundred people on the payroll. Its budget, including salaries, is more than \$2,000,000 a year, we serve over six thousand students a year, and they want to run it like the junior high school English Club." From that moment on, I felt there had to be a better way. So, when the continued discussions led to the flashpoint that ultimately split the unit, I had done significant thinking of how to reshape an academic department—especially one whose strength was its writing programs. As a result when the unit was split, it was relatively easy for me to put together a proposal of how to implement the split and take it to the dean. Suffice it to say, the dean ignored my proposal.

It's tempting to say that if the dean had only listened to me, many of the problems the newly formed Department of Rhetoric and Writing faced in its first few years wouldn't have happened. I know better. However, I do think that some problems could have been avoided and others lessened. Although I certainly won't claim any powers of prophecy, the fact that I had been struggling with these issues for over a year—developing multiple scenarios and attempting to envision their consequences—gave me some advantage in making suggestions. Now, watching the Department of Rhetoric and Writing at UALR and some of the other new departments across the country, I have a fairly good idea of how I want to help create whatever we decide to call the new department here at Arizona State University East, which will house the new program in multimedia writing and technical communication.

FUTURE AND PAST

In order to look to the future, the creation of a still unnamed new writing department at ASU East, I think we first need to look to the past. History, and the context in which history happens, plays a much larger

role in the present and the future than we usually surmise. In a recent Writing Program Administration listserv (WPA-L) post, Ed White, who has consistently preached caution when it comes to leaving English departments, had this to say:

So I don't mean to cut off the discussion of the issue, which is really an interesting one, but rather to suggest that conditions of this "split" tend to be so particular that we should be very cautious about generalizing from what others have done. (2000)

I have to agree with Ed here. We do need to be cautious. We also need to look at each particular case very closely. That's what I propose to do here.

THE SPRING OF 1993

I'm not sure what it was about the spring semester of 1993, but that term saw the creation of three independent writing units. The first one occurred when the University of Texas at Austin created the Division of Rhetoric and Composition. The last one happened at San Diego State. In between those two, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock created the Department of Rhetoric and Writing. What seems interesting to me is that the entire country had been aware of the rancor that was present in the English department at the University of Texas. That split should have been predictable. At San Diego State, Shirley Rose and Sherry Little had been working for several years to institute a split, having to deal with multiple levels of administration and faculty governance before it could happen. Again, it was something that those who watch writing programs would have known was in the works. But, at least outwardly, there was no indication there was something in the works in Little Rock before the spring of 1993. The fact that something may have been brewing at UALR first hit the scene when on March 23, 1993, I posted a message to WPA-L with the subject "Another Program in Crisis." There I said:

Here at U. of Arkansas at Little Rock we're looking at a potential lit/writing split. The whole situation is complex, but from my perspective we're making it even more difficult by focusing on details (such as the role of full-time non-tenure track instructors) rather than what I see are the larger issues (traditional views of scholarship and the proper role of professors as opposed to new definitions of scholarship a la Ernest Boyer). At UALR the lit folks tend to be traditional while the writing people are looking at new models.

Then less than two months later on Friday, May 7, 1993, I posted to WPA-L and every other mail list that seemed even remotely appropriate, the following message:

Subject: YES !!!

As of the Fall 1993 semester, the Writing Center, the Freshman Composition Program, the M.A. in Technical and Expository Writing, and all appropriate undergraduate curriculum at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock will all be housed in the separate (from the English Department), tenure-granting Department of Writing and Rhetoric (tentative name).

I will supply more details later. It's possible I might take the afternoon off to celebrate.

Please forgive me if you get this message on multiple lists. I'm about ready to call CNN to have them announce it to the world.

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WHAT HAPPENED IN LITTLE ROCK IN 1993—A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

I'm aware that any rendition I give of the creation of the Department of Rhetoric and Writing at UALR is going to be only one side of a multi-faceted story. It has been difficult keeping my own story separate from the story of the department, only because I served as WPA from July 1982 to June 1987 and was then department chair from July 1987 until the split in 1993. There is no question that my job forced me into the middle of what happened. What follows, then, is a narrative that I began writing on Saturday, May 8, 1993. I drafted sixteen pages that Saturday. I've gone back to that draft several times over the past seven and a half years. Finally, now, I feel comfortable incorporating some of that original text with my more recent reflections.

The Story Begins

I'm tempted to begin, "Once upon a time." After all, what I'm really doing is telling a story. Instead, however, I think I'm going to begin with a "warning label." What I have to tell is the story of one university. What happened at UALR is specific to the institution. That doesn't mean it can't happen elsewhere, rather it means it may have to happen somewhat differently elsewhere.

From my perspective, the story of why a department of rhetoric and writing exists at UALR dating from fall 1993 really goes back to fall 1981. I was the first writing person hired by the department, and I got there in August 1981. My first year I was assigned to teach freshman composition, codirect the writing center, and supervise part-time composition faculty. A year later, I became director of Freshman Composition—a position I held till July 1987 when I became department chair.

During the five years I was writing program administrator (WPA), some interesting changes took place in the department—some planned, some, perhaps, serendipitous. First was the fact that the department recognized that for statewide political reasons it would never house a traditional M.A. in English. As a result, in the early 1980s the department put forward an M.A. in what we called Technical and Expository Writing. To the surprise of many, the program received statewide approval. And after a slow start (with regard to students finishing their degree), by 1993 the program was accepting around twenty-five to thirty students a year and was granting between fifteen and twenty M.A.'s a year.

Several other things happened in the early and mid-1980s. First of all, we hired five other writing faculty. Part of this was made possible by the fact that in 1984 we wrote a proposal and received continuing money from the Arkansas Board of Higher Education for a project we termed "Quality Writing." We used some of the money to hire faculty and some to run programs—writing across the curriculum (WAC), training of part-time instructors, work with high school teachers. In addition we managed to hire a full-time writing center director, put our first generation of computers in the writing center, and implement a system of peer tutoring. We had also managed to get some state money to begin a small Writing Project site. At that time we had pieces but no whole.

In February 1987, I was elected department chair—slated to take over July 1. That in and of itself was somewhat significant. In 1987 it was exceptionally rare to see a writing person as a department chair, even though the administrative ability WPAs gain make them natural choices. (In fact, I remember having Liz Neeld pull me aside at a party at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in March 1987 and explain to me that I would, at that time, be the only writing person serving as a department chair and how important that was.) In my case most of my colleagues saw the job of department chair, as they had seen the job of WPA, as a clerical one—a paper-pusher. I think they elected me chair for the same reason they liked the way I ran

the composition program. I ran the program so that it was essentially invisible to the tenure-track faculty. They assumed I would run the department in the same way, and they were right.

Being a WPA had taught me much about the university. Unlike most faculty, I understood the importance of support services. I regularly worked with the registrar's office, the dean of students office, the counseling service, and the bookstore, as well as many academic areas across the campus. I was clearly aware that there was a large world beyond the English department.

I learned many things upon becoming department chair, but perhaps one of the experiences that taught me the most, especially in the beginning, was student advising. In 1987 we had a very modest program in English. We had around sixty majors and were graduating fifteen to eighteen students a year. By the time of the split in May 1993, the department had nearly 220 majors and had graduated nearly 80 English majors in the past academic year.

There was really no secret to all of this. I simply gave students permission to want to be English majors. I found many students drifting their way into my office to talk about being English majors but not thinking it was a viable option. Almost all of them asked the classic question, "What can I do with an English major if I don't want to teach?" My answer was simple. I told them that English majors learn only three things—reading, writing, and thinking. I told them if they could use a calculator, they could then do anything. Students' eyes lit up. They almost all became English majors. I recognize that's kind of a reductionist way of looking at things. However, what I emphasized to my students was that we teach them skills and that those skills are marketable. I know this is heresy to many academics, but I completely accept that part of our job is to prepare students for successful lives in the workplace—a workplace that is outside of the academy. Believing this, I was able to connect students to the workplace. We already had several real-world internships in place. I tried to stress those and expand on them. (I am leaving this next sentence intact as it was written in 1993. I realize that my analogy now seems unnecessary. But the world of English departments was different in 1993.) What I told students was that my ideal was to have them graduate with a "portfolio in hand"—just like a graphic artist or a photographer.

Clearly, this concept of real-world connectedness stresses writing. Indeed, when most of our students graduate and look for jobs, they,

more often than not, look for jobs where they can utilize their writing skills. I had one more advantage working for me. We had an eighteen-hour writing minor on the books. It had originally been created for students with an interest in creative writing. By creative use of internships, I was able to have students put together an English major where they would primarily, but not exclusively, take literature courses and a writing minor. That meant they were required to take forty-two upper-level hours in the department. It also created a renewed demand in literature courses. All of a sudden, literature faculty, who had been teaching one section of literature (if it made) and then freshman composition or world literature, were having literature courses with twenty to thirty students. Eventually, most of them ended up teaching nothing but upper-level literature and sophomore world literature.

The Unwitting Role of the First-Year Composition Program

When I took over the composition program in fall 1982, almost all the tenure-track faculty taught in the program. Since we didn't have enough faculty to teach all the sections, we supplemented by using a large number of part-time instructors. In 1982 we probably used around twenty to twenty-five part-time instructors a semester. By the time I left the composition director's position, the numbers had changed only slightly—affected more by the fact that fewer full-time faculty were teaching twelve hours. As composition instructors continued to receive more release time for alternative duties, we staffed the courses by hiring growing numbers of part-timers. I honestly don't know what we would have done if enrollment had risen dramatically back them. I do know that even then we weren't offering enough sections of composition. Finally, in fall 1989 our then chancellor realized that he was talking to a group of around four hundred incoming freshman during an orientation session and that none of them would be able to enroll in composition because the sections were all closed.

We were faced with a crisis. Immediate action was called for. My WPA and I did not have sufficient time to consult with the appropriate faculty committees to get authorization to do extraordinary things. We simply acted on our own—with the full blessing of the administration. First of all, since our graduate program was in technical and expository writing, we authorized the use of our first teaching assistants. (Previously our graduate assistants had been assigned to do clerical work for various faculty.) Second, we received approval from the provost to move six of our

part-time instructors to full-time for one year—at a full-time salary. The dam had burst. The flood gates were open.

Interestingly enough, once this had happened, most of the full-time tenure-track faculty were fairly reconciled to the notion that we would hire permanent non-tenure-track instructors (an idea that was anathema to them several years before). Things were going fairly well in the department. There appeared to be no reason to rock the boat. At that point we just needed to convince the administration that if we were to hire people in such positions, they would be treated reasonably. The sticking point with the provost was course load. Several years before, the previous dean of science had hired full-time instructors in the math department and had given them a five-course teaching load. In what was perhaps their finest hour, the entire Department of English went on record opposing the five-course load. The load issue had us at an impasse until I finally had the good sense to call Ed White and ask him to send us some WPA consultant-evaluators.

Bruce Appleby of Southern Illinois University and John Brereton of the University of Massachusetts-Boston did a thorough evaluation of our composition program. They said some kind things about the program, and they were adamant in recommending that full-time instructors not be allowed to teach more than twelve hours a semester. Our provost decided to follow their recommendations. It was downhill from there. We managed to get the faculty to agree to hire non-tenure-track, full-time instructors to teach composition. We wrote an amendment to our governance document that supposedly defined their role in the department. In many ways the document that was approved by the English department in June of 1990 was flawed from the beginning. While parts of it were very specific, other parts were hopelessly ambiguous. My response back then was to pass the thing, forward it to the administration for approval, and then redo it after the administration kicked it back. In the meantime we would have already hired our first full-time non-tenure-track instructors.

Strangely, that document never got forwarded to the administration for approval—something we discovered only in February of 1993. (For the record, according to departmental governance neither the chair nor the WPA was responsible for sending that document on for administrative approval.)

We hired nine full-time, non-tenure-track instructors in fall 1990. We added two more in fall 1992. These instructors were expected to teach

four sections of composition a semester. They would be evaluated primarily on their teaching. They would also be expected to engage in professional development activities. Through use of the Quality Writing money, we were able to send them to one professional meeting a year. Most became regular attendees at CCCC. A couple chose other rhetoric and composition conferences.

At the end of 1991, my WPA moved to a position in central administration. This left us with no WPA, and none of the remaining writing people had any interest in the job. When I realized my WPA was moving into central administration, I visited with several of my writing faculty to see if anyone was interested in assuming the position. As I expected, no one showed any interest. I recognize that there were also eleven non-tenure-track instructors and a director of the writing center (a staff, not a faculty, position). I made a decision based entirely on politics. My decision was that I felt only a tenure-track faculty member with a Ph.D. should be WPA. I have no question that a number of the other people could do the job well; however, part of the job was to work with the English department faculty and other units across campus. The bottom line was that at this point in UALR's history, a tenure-track Ph.D. would simply have more credibility across campus. As a result of having no internal volunteers, I agreed to serve both as chair and WPA. Finally, in September 1992, the administration authorized a search for a new WPA.

The Beginning of the End—Though No One Knew It at the Time

Ordinarily, faculty are happy when they get permission to search. However, the UALR English department, like many academic units, had a history of wanting to define its own needs. It was clearly upset the year before when the provost had given us a new tenure-track faculty line but dictated that we must hire someone whose main responsibility would be to teach undergraduate technical writing courses. The department also was uncomfortable with the idea of going outside to search for an administrative position.

Having been aware for some time that programs with different interests and values were competing, I had called an open department meeting in September of 1992 in order to begin discussions of departmental reorganization. I had hoped to have the unit recognize the problem and begin working through some kind of innovative structure that would enable curricular units to operate on their own. (I envisioned cluster groups such as composition/rhetoric, technical writing, American studies, British studies,

and so forth.) People would be completely enfranchised in those areas in which they taught and would not have input into areas in which they did not teach. Ultimately, I had hoped we would recruit through cluster groups and also evaluate faculty based on criteria appropriate to the group.

As things worked out, I chose this meeting as the appropriate time to announce to the department as a whole that we had been given permission to search for a director of Freshman Composition. (I had already run this past the department's standing recruitment committee. They had assented, though not all were happy with the provost's directedness.) Many of the faculty were unhappy with the decision to go outside for a WPA. Yet, when I explained there was no viable inside candidate, they had problems accepting that fact. Finally one of the faculty asked directly why a certain member of the writing faculty wasn't going to do the job. I replied that he wasn't interested. (Indeed, I had asked him the previous spring.) Nonetheless, this persistent faculty member specifically asked the writing faculty member directly if he would serve as director of Freshman Composition. To everyone's surprise, the member of the writing faculty said he would be happy to serve as composition director. The original faculty member then instantly nominated the writing faculty member to be director of Freshman Composition. The nomination was instantly seconded.

I was aware that nominations for administrative positions from the floor of an open meeting were clearly out of order and in direct violation of our rules of governance. I also had enough experience dealing with faculty to know that once they build up momentum it is wiser to let them do what they will do. Imprudent decisions can always be, and usually are, reversed. At this point someone raised the issue of who had the right to vote for WPA. The reference was directed toward the eleven non-tenure-track instructors. I frankly had not prepared for this question at this time. I did remember that we had passed something before hiring the instructors that gave them voting rights on issues that concerned them; however, I had no recollection of the details. What I did at that point was consult our governance document, only to find that it had never been officially amended to include the reference to the instructors. As a result, I read to the entire faculty the section on voting rights. It had apparently been drafted sometime in the early 1970s and gave full voting rights to all members of the department (not faculty) who had more than half-time appointments. By my interpretation this

included even the department secretaries, though they were not present for this meeting (and, by my sense of the historical politics of the department, that would have been the intent).

The question was called, and the vote was unanimous. We had just filled a position we were advertising for. I had visions of losing a faculty line. I asked the writing faculty member who had just been elected why he had changed his mind. He responded, as I suspected he would, that given the choice of serving or hiring an administrator from the outside, he felt he had an obligation to the program and the faculty (especially the non-tenure-track faculty).

My next step was to report the results to the dean. Needless to say he was incredulous. Actually, what he said was something like this: "Two years ago your department, which has one of the fastest growing and strongest master's programs on campus (the M.A. in Technical and Expository Writing), elected a specialist in Irish poetry to run that program. Neither I, nor the graduate dean, nor the provost understood that." Actually I had been questioned multiple times by the three named administrators, especially the provost, about the department's sense of stewardship of its own graduate program. The dean then continued, "Now, you want to take the best teacher in the department (indeed, he had been named the best teacher in the entire university the year before) out of the classroom to put him into an administrative slot that has already been advertised." His questions then moved toward what he saw as the inherently self-destructive tendencies of the English department.

I'd prefer not to discuss the dean's observation that the department was self-destructive. I do think, however, that the department's decisions in choosing these particular faculty members to administer writing programs (and, remember, the graduate program was a pure writing program) reflects a lack of understanding and undervaluing of the administrative function, as well a lack of value for writing programs in general. This is not to say the department necessarily devalues faculty members by placing them in administrative positions; rather, it fails to understand that different faculty members have different skills and that the unit will function most effectively and efficiently when faculty do what they do best. To take the best teacher in the department and begrudgingly place him in an administrative slot, where he would do significantly less teaching, says to him that his teaching isn't that important. More importantly, however, it deprives a group of students of the benefit of having him as an instructor. Likewise, to place the specialist in Irish poetry as

the coordinator of a graduate program in writing says that the administrative position is really nothing more than paperwork and that the faculty member's worth is greater doing paperwork than teaching and doing his own scholarship. I thought then and continue to think that these are strange messages we are sending our colleagues. And I don't think the UALR English department was unique in sending these messages.

Finally, the writing faculty member decided it was in the best interest of all concerned if he withdraw his candidacy, which enabled us to continue our search for a WPA. Nothing in an English department is ever easy. Since the department had never gone outside for an administrative position, this raised all kinds of questions and fears. The dominant concern was that the person be above all "a colleague." That translates to a publishing scholar. What the faculty were unaware of was that they were creating the potentiality for the situation that appeared in the *ADE Bulletin* "Case Study" in spring 1993. (This is a situation where people are hired and evaluated on one job but not retained because they didn't successfully do a different job.)

The Search Begins

The UALR English department elected a standing Recruitment Committee each spring, long before we knew whether we would be recruiting and even longer before we knew what specialties we would be recruiting for. People usually decided whether they would choose to serve on that committee based on the location of the Modern Language Association (MLA) Annual Convention and whether they wanted to ruin their Christmas vacation by interviewing candidates at MLA. That year the committee was composed of an eighteenth-century specialist, a Shakespearian, a poet, and a specialist in African American literature—not a composition/rhetoric person among them. In order to get a slightly better sense of what we were looking for, the department allowed (my choice of verb here is deliberate) me to send one tenured composition/rhetoric specialist and two non-tenure-track instructors along to MLA. However, these three extra members of the committee were designated nonvoting members from the beginning.

All of us went off to MLA and interviewed nine candidates. I think we were all clearly impressed by the quality of the people we would be able to choose from. We went home and, though it wasn't easy, decided on one top candidate to bring to campus. At UALR, even though the position has been approved, the process dictates that we get permission from

the provost to bring our candidate to campus. To our great surprise, we were denied that permission. What had happened in the interim was that as of January 1 we had changed administrations. Our chancellor had stepped down as of December 31. The new chancellor wouldn't be on campus until March 1; but the provost (who was serving as acting chancellor) visited with the new chancellor, and they both reviewed the budget. They discovered significant shortfalls and froze all positions.

And Finally the Straw that Broke . . .

The faculty were getting testy over this when we entered another point of crisis. Our rules of governance called for an election for department chair every three years in either January or February. Originally, I had no intention of serving as chair more than six years. That's long enough for just about anybody. However, no other candidate was emerging, and I felt I could continue even though I felt no obligation to serve a full three more years.

I was fairly confident at that time there were no other potential candidates. I will be the first to admit that while most of the faculty were comfortable with my administration, some would disagree with anything I did, just because I was the one who did it. Frankly, most of the faculty were fairly content, and no one else wanted the hassle. I set the date for the election meeting and told some friends that I expected some kind of procedural objection from the floor.

I was slightly surprised. Rather than wait for the meeting, two of the faculty came to my office and informed me that there would be a problem if the non-tenure-track faculty were given the right to vote for chair. I explained to them that, as I understood our governance, the non-tenure-track faculty had that right. I checked with the dean who agreed with me and suggested that I run the matter past the attorney for the University of Arkansas system.

I drove to the system office, armed with governance documents, but feeling a little silly. I probably should have known that lawyers deal with minutiae every day. After explaining the details to the attorney, his first response was to break out into laughter. He then responded with "Leave it to faculty to argue over who gets to vote on what is by board policy a dean's decision." He was, of course, right. Both the dean and I knew that, but in my college the faculty has always elected a candidate, whom the dean has then appointed. After reviewing the documents, the attorney informed me that the right to vote was clear. Since the

1990 document that gave the eleven instructors only two votes was never approved by the administration, my original interpretation was correct. Everyone had a vote.

Having received the ruling of system counsel, I went to what was probably one of the ugliest meetings I've ever attended. Most of the tenured faculty were outraged that anyone could suggest that non-tenure-track faculty could possibly have any rights. An outsider observing the meeting might have thought that people were going berserk. They would have been wrong. What happened was, as I later chose to term it, that faculty were subscribing to what I have come to call "Academic Fundamentalism." The tenets of AF are simple: You can be saved only if you have a terminal degree and are tenured. The longer your vita, the higher up you are in the priesthood.

Understanding this, it came as no surprise when tenured faculty affirmed that, despite the ruling of the attorney, non-tenure-track faculty could not vote. When the non-tenure-track faculty objected, they became the objects of personal insults. Some of them had their jobs threatened. When I informed the faculty that they had no authority to hire or fire, the faculty then said they would abolish the positions. It went on and on, getting more ugly and ridiculous. It was clear that many of the faculty failed to understand that the UALR English department was really governed by UALR central administration, the UA system, and the UA board of trustees. In addition, they failed to understand that we were also constrained to abide by the laws of the state of Arkansas, as well as the United States. Faculty governance to them, plain and simple, meant that they had the final say on everything. Sadly, in the past no one had ever told them otherwise.

Not surprisingly, nothing was resolved at that meeting. Ultimately, faculty started visiting the dean and the provost. On February 17, 1993, Lloyd Benjamin, the dean, sent the English faculty a memo called "Current Events," where he outlined procedures that he and the provost had decided would help remedy the situation. Among other things, he asked that the faculty provide the provost and him with information and that all elections be postponed. Perhaps most telling was this item:

4. I am aware that comments (verbal and written) have been made that have been perceived as threatening, inappropriate and damaging to the academic environment. Such activity is considered unprofessional and should cease immediately.

Then on March 18, 1993, Joel Anderson, the provost, sent a memo titled “Where We Go From Here” to the English faculty. It begins with “Twenty eight of you sent me 79 pages of letters and memoranda, exclusive of a number of attachments.” The provost continued in his memo asking me to call a meeting of the department, which the dean would attend and where he (the provost) would preside. Finally, in that same memo the provost asked the English faculty to consider the following four scenarios: “Status Quo,” “Composition Sub-Unit Within Department,” “Reassignment of Composition Program and Writing Center,” and “Two Departments—One Literature, One Writing.”

That meeting was held on the morning of Thursday, April 15, 1993. The day before, at the provost’s request, I had turned in to him and the dean a short report on my findings from talking with national leaders in composition/rhetoric (see “The Decision” in Appendix A). The provost listened while faculty spoke on all sides of the issue. This time the discourse was professional. The provost said that he and the dean would come to a decision shortly. We adjourned just before noon. I remember getting in my car shortly after the meeting and driving to Stillwater, Oklahoma, to attend the South Central Writing Centers meeting. Sometimes it’s especially good to get out of town. However, I was back in the office on Monday morning, where I submitted, again at the provost’s request, a final memo (see “Some Final Reflections” in Appendix B). Then, like all the rest of the faculty, I waited.

On the morning of Thursday, May 6, I was called to the dean’s office. The dean asked me to read a memo he had written, “Futures,” which he said he was going to distribute to the English faculty on the next day. The third paragraph of the long memo read as follows:

The conclusion I have reached and shared with the Provost is that it is time to create two distinct departments. While this may disappoint some, the comments suggested that opposition to creating two departments was less intense, that most faculty were resigned to change and some faculty looked forward to it.

It was over. The Department of Rhetoric and Writing was born.

The Devil’s Not in the Details But in Not Attending to the Details

In his “Futures” memo, the dean also outlined a complex set of details for the transition to two departments. The key was a transition advisory committee (TAC), which was to be comprised of six faculty,

three from each of the two new units. The committee was to be chaired by the associate dean. The dean asked for volunteers to serve on the committee, but he purposely chose to exclude anyone who had any administrative experience. After two meetings, I received a call from the associate dean. Since none of the faculty had had any administrative experience, none of them understood some of the institutional complexities they were dealing with. As a result, he asked me to serve as an unofficial staff member to the committee in order to provide him with the information he needed. My first duty was to send him a long note dealing with the specific issues of curriculum, staffing, and majors. Several days after sending him that note, he announced he had been named dean at another institution. He left UALR within the month.

The TAC continued to meet but never resolved any issues. The dean decided simply to have the faculty choose which department they wished to belong to. Finally, because courses had to be divided, I (then interim chair of rhetoric and writing) and the interim chair of English met in the student union over coffee and agreed to a division of almost all the courses in the curriculum. The several courses we disagreed on were assigned to units by the dean. The real sticking point was the budget. The dean was firm that he would make that decision himself. What seemed to me to be most important was that some of the money the department received had been specifically earmarked for the writing programs. The Quality Writing budget from the mid-1980s still existed and in 1993 was at \$21,000 a year. In addition several years earlier, the M.A. in Technical and Expository Writing was named one of three "Centers of Excellence" in the university and as a result was given \$10,000 a year, which was added to the regular English department maintenance (operations) budget. To begin with, a result of the budget problems discovered in January, all budgets were cut 15 percent. That meant that the main budget dropped from \$51,479 to \$43,757 and Quality Writing's budget dropped to \$17,850. The dean's final decision was that both budgets would be split equally. He refused to listen to arguments that moneys earmarked by the university and the state specifically for writing programs should not go to literature programs. I lost that one.

The Chaos Continued

During all of this, I was trying to organize the new department. I was especially concerned that faculty begin work on curricular issues leading to a major and on governance. Perhaps because they knew money

would be especially tight, the faculty wanted to focus on budget issues. In fact, some suggested that no money be spent without having the entire faculty approve the expenditure. They were also concerned with the schedule. I remember one of those early faculty meetings where the faculty kept insisting that their names be placed in the printed schedule next to the sections of composition they would be teaching instead of the generic "Staff." They refused to listen to my reasoning that the schedule was printed several months before the actual faculty assignments in composition were finalized. Meanwhile, the man who was acting as chair of the curriculum committee kept refusing to call a meeting. I realized we were in disarray, yet felt that every time I tried to bring us together, something else would get in the way.

Finally, while meeting with the dean on another matter, he simply informed me that two of the rhetoric and writing faculty had visited with him and told him that I had lost the confidence of the department. He said he saw no reason not to believe them so he had informed the provost that he was going to make a change in the interim chair. With that brief discussion, my more than eleven years of administrative work at UALR came to an abrupt halt.

While I had the luxury of returning to faculty life, the new department needed to progress. The man who had been recalcitrant about calling curriculum committee meetings became interim chair for the rest of the academic year. The department then went into "receivership" (being overseen by the new associate dean) for a year while we searched for an outside chair.

Despite its rocky start, the Department of Rhetoric and Writing at UALR seems to be in a good position. Though still underfunded, partly resulting from the dean's original decision, both its undergraduate and M.A. programs are strong. One of the healthiest signs is that in the last several years five new tenure-track faculty have been hired. These new hires, who have no history of the time of the split, are beginning to move into leadership positions in the department. I think that bodes well for the department.

THAT WAS THE PAST, NOW THE FUTURE

In the interim between Christmas and New Year's of 1999, when all good English faculty were attending MLA, I loaded up my SUV and literally headed westward. Then at the start of the new millennium, I began to lay the foundation for what would be a new independent

writing department. (Please forgive me, but how many times do we get to invoke so many mythic allusions in our writing?) My first task at Arizona State University (ASU) was to draft the Proposal to Implement for the B.S. in Multimedia Writing and Technical Communication, which needed to be submitted to the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR). Part of the process of writing that proposal was the creation of thirteen new courses—the curriculum that makes up the new program. That first step was accomplished, and the program was approved by ABOR on June 30, 2000. We taught the first courses in the program during the spring 2001 semester, but even before we ever taught one course, we had seven students signed up as majors.

In many ways, it's easier to start a new program from scratch than to try to piece together remnants of other programs. This is one of those times when not having a history can be a virtue. I had two other advantages as we developed the curriculum in the spring of 2000. First of all, I had a dean, David Schwalm, who not only understands the nature of writing programs but also understands the Byzantine administrative structure that defines ASU. His help was invaluable in getting the new courses through the system for approval. The other advantage was that there was already one other faculty member in place in the program, Marian Barchilon, a tenured associate professor of technical communications, whose previous homes at ASU were in engineering and technology. She has never been a member of an English department.

The Curriculum

As we were developing the new courses, we kept several principles in mind. Perhaps the most important was that we expected no one faculty member to “own” a course. While some faculty may be more likely to teach certain courses because of their individual expertise, we want ownership of the courses to belong to the program—not individual faculty. In addition, we created a set of issues that would cut through every course in the curriculum in order to stress their importance and to present a sense of programmatic cohesiveness. Some of these issues are ethics, the global nature of technical communication, and the appropriate use of visuals and technology. Finally, I modified the WPA Outcomes Statement so that it constituted an appropriate set of outcomes for technical communication courses. Doing so gives a beginning to later engage in programmatic assessment activities.

The other issue we faced and are continuing to face is our commitment to tie our program to local industry. Marian has been an active member of the Phoenix chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) for years. Since I've arrived here, I've made a point to attend STC meetings regularly and work with the membership. While it is too early in the program to require an internship, we are already working on establishing the relationships that are required to develop internship possibilities. We already recommend all our students have some kind of intern experience. In addition, all graduating seniors will be required to take a capstone course. Part of that course will require them to prepare a professional portfolio to help them with their job hunt at graduation time.

The Faculty

At this moment we already have two tenured senior faculty. We advertised for another associate professor whom we had hoped to start in August 2001. Unfortunately, a protracted budget debate between the Arizona legislature and the governor prevented us from completing the search. Along with a new search (rank presently undetermined), our agenda for next year will be to draft promotion and tenure guidelines so that they will be in place when assistant professors come on board. While we've only begun the most preliminary discussions concerning the issues of promotion and tenure, we are all committed to drafting a document that will value a much broader definition of scholarship than is usually found in English departments. I fully expect that we will draw on Boyer and on Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff as we move through that process. I know from my experience helping to draft the tenure and promotion guidelines for rhetoric and writing at UALR, we will definitely draw on the WPA "Intellectual Work" document as well the MLA Commission on Professional Service report. In addition we will pay close attention to the CCCC "Promotion and Tenure Guidelines for Work with Technology."

While I, of course, can't guarantee a document that won't be written for another year, I am very confident that when we try to recruit junior faculty we will be able to show them that we will value a wide range of scholarly activities as they move towards promotion and tenure. I expect we will think it normal for faculty to coauthor articles and books, to write textbooks as well as scholarly articles, to use their professional expertise to help develop our curriculum (which will include helping to develop appropriate discipline-based assessment strategies), to regularly engage in consulting activities with industry, government, or nonprofits,

to be active in integrating emerging technologies into their teaching—whether local or distant—and to publish not only in print but in electronic forms. In other words, we plan to evaluate writing faculty on the kind of work that is appropriate for writing faculty to do and for which they will be hired. By doing so, we hope to create an academic home for all our faculty, where they will be able to be creative as they work with students, develop the program, work closely with local practitioners, and engage in their own scholarship—a place where they'll feel comfortable enough and supported so that they wish to stay. Keeping an active, stable faculty is important to the life of any department; independent writing departments should be leaders in this endeavor.

HEADING HOME

Having invoked the metaphor of the home, I think perhaps that's the best way to close. I can remember back in graduate school in New England seeing the old, traditional homes there. Most were small. The rooms tended to be small, and the windows were usually heavily draped. There was, however, much history and tradition. Now, I find myself in the Southwest and see very different homes. Here, the homes tend to have large rooms with open spaces and fewer walls. The windows let in the sun, and when you look outside, the big western sky seems to go on forever. There's certainly nothing wrong with tradition. For many it provides much needed comfort. But for some of us, breaking away, building new, more open homes is not only all right, it's better.

NOTE

All original UALR documents concerning the split are now in the composition archives at the University of Rhode Island.

APPENDIX A

To: Joel Anderson and Lloyd Benjamin

From: Barry Maid

Subject: The Decision

Date: April 14, 1993

As you both know, I have spent much time over the past month or so communicating with people all over the country about our present situation and how it compares to other institutions. I have attached a narrative of my notes with some of the more important national figures and an e-mail response from David Schwalm, currently Associate Provost at Arizona State and former Writing Program Director there. I will be happy to continue the conversation, but the purpose of this memo is to try to give you a synopsis of what I've discovered. (I am focussing only on issues of separate Writing Units as opposed to large, whole English Departments. I understand that we have personality issues as well that cannot be ignored; however, I'd prefer to focus only on the positive, substantive issues.)

- What we see at UALR (the tension between lit and writing) is present in almost every program in the country. It appears to be most significant wherever writing programs have become large and successful. Writing Faculty almost everywhere see a separation as inevitable. Literature Faculty are desperately trying to hold on to Writing Programs because they are concerned that if they lose the Writing Program the only way to maintain the quality of academic life they enjoy will be to engage in activities they feel are inappropriate for academics (program building and professional service, perhaps even more teaching).
- Almost everyone in some way referred to the real distinctions between Writing Programs and English Departments were centered in what many called "Boyer Issues." It seems to be almost universal that English Departments are not likely to reward faculty for participating in the kinds of activities that are most appropriate for Writing Faculty to perform (i.e., teaching, pedagogical research, program development, and professional service). Indeed, most English Departments (and UALR's does this) create disincentives for faculty who chose to participate in those activities.
- To a person, everyone I have communicated with, once they understand the nature of the UALR situation (the fact that our graduate program is purely a Writing Program is a crucial factor here) recommended the creation of a new, autonomous unit encompassing the entire Writing Program (developmental to graduate, including the Writing Center).

- While it is theoretically possible for applied programs to remain in units with traditional academic disciplines, unless the traditional faculty are willing to allow the applied area to be rewarded and to grow, ultimately the faculty in the applied area will be forced to give up their applied work in favor of traditional research and publication. The UALR English Department has consistently not rewarded the work of the Writing Faculty, both tenure-track and non tenure-track. Indeed, it consistently places limitations on what they can teach and what part of their work can be rewarded. I do not see this changing without significant personnel changes which are unlikely to happen for the next ten to fifteen years.

COMMENTS FROM FORMER PROGRAM CONSULTANTS

I was frankly amazed at the enthusiasm and unanimity colleagues around the country expressed for the creation of a new unit at UALR. I think two of the most telling comments came from Bruce Appleby of Southern Illinois University and John Brereton of UMass-Boston. They had been consultants to our Writing Program three years ago before the creation of the instructor positions. I spoke separately, though they told me the same thing. Both commented on the strength of our program and emphasized that its strength came, to a great degree, from the fact that there is a programmatic whole from the developmental to the graduate level. They both pointed out that because our graduate program is a pure writing program we could maintain this whole in a new unit. Both said that this gives us a tremendous advantage over most programs in the country.

Based on my research and my own observations, I see the only logical option for our current dilemma to be the creation of a new completely autonomous unit (The Department of Technical and Expository Writing?) encompassing the entire Writing Program, developmental through graduate, and the Writing Center, reporting to the Dean of AHSS. In terms of the current options for solving the present crisis, it is the only solution which will prevent the present situation from recurring again over another issue in six months or a year. Perhaps, more importantly, it is the only way to confirm that UALR is now firmly committed to the model of the Metropolitan-Interactive University. Deferring to the voices of traditionalism at this juncture merely shows the faculty that traditional academic values, not new definitions of scholarship, are what really matter at UALR.

APPENDIX B

To: Lloyd Benjamin and Joel Anderson
From: Barry Maid
Subject: Some Final Reflections
Date: April 19, 1993

Surely, there were no unbiased participants in last Thursday's meeting. All I can hope to add, therefore, are my admittedly biased observations.

- I observed a group of people who really have very little in common with one another and who seem to want to stay together only because there appears to be something sacrosanct about the notion of an "English Department." I guess I now know how it felt to go through the Reformation.
- Russell's suggestion of two autonomous, parallel units joined only by a liaison but with a common title is, of course, intriguing. Actually, it sounds remarkably like my notion of around a year ago which when I thought it through seemed untenable. (If you have two separate units, both with a unit head reporting to the same dean, why don't you simply call it two departments? Unless, of course, there really is one unit head—then the issue of individual unit autonomy becomes questionable.)
- I am more and more convinced that most of the arguments we continue to hear evolve from mythic rather than real premises. (For example, the claim that if senior faculty no longer teach comp then the program will lose majors. The fact, as I assume you know, is that when most senior faculty were teaching in the comp program we had between 60–65 majors. Now when almost no senior faculty teach in the program, we have nearly 220 majors.)

Obviously, I can go on and on. I am convinced of the direction the writing program needs to take in order to better serve our students, the university, and the greater community. It will be most difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish these goals unless it is free to determine its own future.

A final word: It is not unusual for people sending e-mail messages to sign with an aphorism or quotation. Perhaps it's an attempt to interject a human touch in an electronic world. This morning while reading messages someone closed with the following quotation from Rabbi Hillel. I expect most of the writing faculty will echo his words.

"If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"