



Letter from the Editors

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This is the inaugural issue of *Language and Learning across the Disciplines*. It accomplishes our major goal: to be a forum for discussion and debate about issues of concern to all of us involved in the enterprise of helping both students and professionals to learn the languages they will need for lives as good people, speaking and writing well.

Yet, the creation of this journal has proven to be a daunting endeavor, all the more daunting because the conversations we have had (both between ourselves and with other colleagues) about the journal's shape, goals, and primary emphasis has illustrated the rather -- how shall we say -- *eclectic* opinions about what interdisciplinarity is, what WAC is, what discourse communities are, and even what counts as worthwhile, publishable research in each of these areas. Though we initially found this diversity quite troublesome as we tried to define our goals for the journal and identify its prospective audience, we gradually began to suspect that diversity and eclecticism were what the journal should actually be *about*..

As we see it, the current theoretical interest among scholars in our field in issues concerning interdisciplinarity, situated discourse communities, and writing across the curriculum programs indicates a pressing need for a forum in which these issues can be explored in detail and disseminated to scholars and others with similar interests. In that sense, we envision *LLAD* as a scholarly journal in the "traditional" sense.

But we also see a need to include work on classroom practice. Pedagogy is, ultimately, at the heart of much of what we do. When we question the ways in which students, members of diverse professions, and even we, ourselves, navigate the multitude of language contexts and communities that we encounter every day, we are, in fact, questioning

how we *learn*, *teach*, and *are taught* the rules of situational discourse. To ignore -- or even slight -- pedagogy in this journal seems, to us, to be both myopic and illogical. At first we thought of dividing the journal into sections on “theory” and “practice,” but these categories aren’t quite symmetrical and might have led some readers to misinterpret *LLAD*’s particular focus. To clarify: we are particularly interested in the implications of theory and research on practice (and vice versa) rather than in the errata and details of practice itself. In other words, we hope to see reflective thinking (and writing) about how language theory and/or research results might impact the structure of a classroom, a course of study, or an entire program; we are less interested in seeing daily lesson plans.

The same general credo holds for issues of administrative practice. We see the need for much discussion of the social, intellectual and political locations of WAC programs, and descriptions of specific programs may contribute to that discussion, but we want to focus, for the most part, on the larger issues. How can theory inform program design, and how does it do so at particular institutions? What is the relationship between discourse practices and administrative concerns? We envision a journal with articles that explore the general issues of language use, administrative practices, classroom practices, curricula, learning theory, critical thinking, composition theory, and educational technology.

We see a need to invite in all those who participate in today’s writing programs: those who teach, whether in the disciplines or in interdisciplinary studies, or who specialize in rhetoric and composition studies; those who conduct research in any of these areas; administrators, however they may fit the other descriptions; and students, too, especially undergraduates whose reflections on discipline-specific language practices may provide some useful insights and fresh perspectives.

We see the need to draw upon diverse critical stances including, but not limited to: ethnographic research, cognitive approaches, feminist and gender-based perspectives, rhetorical theory, genre theory, and cultural and international studies.

We worried, too, whether we were attempting too much for a fledgling journal, taking such a big bite out of such a huge pie that we would end up choking ourselves rather than savoring the taste. It could be easier to focus on specific issues traditionally thought of as WAC issues and the scholars who have been associated with that movement

for a long time. We think about the politics and wonder whether, in principle, it would be easier and better to have one journal for the most traditional approaches to disciplinary writing, and another dedicated to the most radical anti-disciplinary stances.

But what we want to read and think about must, in some way, take place in a language of public discourse. What that language is, or will be, is a question the journal will address. That is why we call it a “forum,” and focus on the space in which we all come together. That is why the name is *Language and Learning across the Disciplines*. And that is why our editorial board is so extensive and diverse. We want manuscripts and readers from people like all those on the board, to join the debate as we have represented it by asking these specific speakers to take a leadership role in the project.

In this issue you will find Paul Prior’s article “Girl Talk Tales, Causal Models, and the Dissertation: Exploring the Topical Contours of Context in Sociology Talk and Text,” a piece of discourse analysis which studies the language(s) of a discipline, finding there much that the discipline has not said about itself, and that we would surely never know without disciplined inquiry.

You will find a written version of our favorite presentation at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in San Diego last March, Cheryl Geisler’s “Literacy and Expertise in the Academy,” a critique of modern schooling, as it prepares students to be producers and consumers in the culture of professionalism.

You will find Russell Durst’s reflective investigation of students studying history, “Coming to Grips With Theory: College Students’ Use of Theoretical Explanation in Writing About History.”

You will find Art Young’s plenary address to what may turn out to have been the first ever national “Writing Across the Curriculum” Conference in Charleston (February 18-19, 1993). We name it last because it seems to bring us back to the goals we named at the outset. In his address, titled here, “The Wonder of Writing Across the Curriculum,” Art told the audience that he uses writing-to-learn in the classes he teaches because that keeps him honest, makes him, he believes, a better person. Maybe even a good person, we suggest, speaking and listening well.

And speaking of good people, we’d like to thank our willing and able editorial board. We chose them so as to include the many visions of writing, teaching, and learning the languages of our time. That, we think, is an excellent piece of work.