



Letter from the Editors

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A graduate student in psychology who teaches in the Jr./Sr. Writing Program at the University of Michigan e-mails me: What do you consider to be a proof in your discipline? How do you determine whether a proof is valid? And what do you consider to be your discipline, anyway? English? Rhetoric? Composition? Linguistics?

Dear Paul:

Those are reasonable questions, that writing specialists ought to answer for you. But experts, of course, disagree. The co-editors of this journal do not entirely agree. And talk about “proofs” is much less fashionable among writing specialists than it used to be. Still, some of us who do writing-across-the-disciplines consider a proof in “our discipline” to be a proof in “your discipline.” That is, some rhetoricians and some linguists study proofs in other disciplines/situations, asking, “What criteria do people in those disciplines/situations use to evaluate proofs?” “What counts as a valid proof in chemistry? In history? In psychology? In feminist research?” Broadly speaking, rhetoricians and linguists often focus on the language and practices of mature practitioners in the disciplines, and identify themselves with writing-in-the-disciplines or “WID.” Compositionists seldom use the word “proof.” They focus on students and on their whole composing process, broadly conceived. Compositionists are more closely associated with writing-across-the-curriculum, or “WAC,” and are often very interested in social and educational reform. These are the extreme positions—most interesting research and practice is carried on in sites which employ some complex configuration of these elements.

And that is why we named this journal “*Language and Learning across the Disciplines*,” and subtitled it “A forum for debates concerning interdisciplinarity, situated discourse communities, and writing-across-the-

curriculum programs.” That signals our commitment to the range of theoretical positions among writing specialists, instructors of writing from all backgrounds, and the various institutional settings—from graduate programs dedicated to research in rhetoric and composition to applied programs whose enterprise includes areas as diverse as developing peer tutors and outreach to schools and communities.

In this issue, the articles take up, one way or another, questions arising out of the distributed nature of WAC/WID writing instruction. Kathryn Evans’ article speaks squarely from a compositionist position to the disciplinary instructor. Brian Sutton’s review of the literature on teaching the research paper in introductory composition is mixed: it incorporates a rhetorician’s attention to specific language practice, while staying within composition territory. Gottschalk’s history of the John S. Knight writing program makes an administrative case for the distribution of writing instruction across the university, and the profiles of other programs that follow all describe writing programs in which instruction is offered by practitioners in other disciplines. Baum-Brunner’s article confronts the internal contradictions of an introductory writing course that includes teachers of composition and teachers trained in other traditions. David Fleming’s article draws more deeply than the others on rhetorical traditions, putting them to work at the interface of the university and industry.

Language and Learning across the Disciplines has the particular mission of focusing attention on writing programs and research agenda that are university or college wide. Most of the conversation among writing specialists—the literature on evaluating faculty, for instance—proves to be aimed at English faculty. We have much to learn about writing-based courses in content areas, as well as much to offer.

It is now seven years since Art Young and Toby Fulwiler published their collection *Programs that Work*, where one can find a wide range of programs described. And programs change—innovation is the rule, as Katie Gottschalk’s history of the John S. Knight Program reminds us. Administrative issues in these writing programs are quite different from the issues confronted by WPAs in English Departments. We begin to address those issues by surveying the territory: inviting directors of writing programs across the curriculum to send us descriptions of their programs. Someday this may become an encyclopedia, but for the moment we see it as a process of collecting information. We expect to publish such descriptions with some regularity.

If you head a WAC program, and especially if it is an upper-division program or includes upper-division courses, and we haven’t asked you yet for a description, send it any way. In this issue, we begin the process of making these institutional structures more visible, in a section we have entitled “Programs Across the Curriculum.” Here Jane Perkins tells about the program at Clemson, Marty Townsend about the University of Missouri, Patricia Williams about Sam Houston State University, and Joan Hawthorne about the University of North Dakota.