

Undisciplined Writing

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The first time I heard a chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication address its membership was in 1985 when Maxine Hairston urged us to "break our bonds" with English and create a new discipline centering on the study of writing. A few years later, in 1988, I listened as another chair of CCCC, David Bartholomae, responded to Hairston by voicing a suspicion of such "calls for coherence," suggesting instead that "most of the problems of academic life—problems of teaching, problems of thinking—come from disciplinary boundaries and disciplinary habits" and urging us to resist the "luxury of order and tradition" (49). I admired such irreverence then and continue to do so now. Unfortunately, though, Bartholomae failed to extend his distrust of disciplines very far, instead arguing—quixotically, it now seems to me—for professors of English to take on the teaching of writing as an integral part of their work, and concluding his address by urging those of us in composition to "acknowledge our roots in English, not deny them" (49). And so an argument for resisting disciplinarity somehow became one for remaining within the discipline of English.

This is the form that most debates over the status of composition have continued to take for the past two decades—with one group arguing for establishing a new discipline and the other for reforming English to include the study of writing. Both sides of the argument locate the teaching of writing as part of a disciplinary project—as taking place under the auspices of either a new department of writing and rhetoric or a refigured department of English. But I think that Bartholomae hinted at a more compelling view of composition in describing it not as a branch of English, but as a more open (if perhaps less coherent) form of intellectual work that seeks out the margins, crosses borders, mixes methods, and disdains the status and order of the traditional academic disciplines. I believe that we need to imagine composition not as a new discipline,

but as a kind of intellectual work that takes place *outside* the conventional academic disciplines, that resists the allure both of English and of becoming a separate field of its own.

In this chapter I will describe how we have tried to put such a view of composition into practice in an independent first-year writing program at Duke University. I want to be clear, though, that in doing so I am arguing not for a particular structure for writing programs, but rather for a way of thinking about the work of composition. We have shaped the Duke University Writing Program in strategic response to a set of specific institutional constraints and opportunities; simply trying to replicate this structure at a different site would almost surely be a mistake. But while I am not presenting Duke as a model for other writing programs to follow, I do want to argue for a view of composition that is centered not on graduate programs, scholarly journals, and academic conferences, but on the *labor* of teaching basic and first-year writing.

Most recent attempts to define composition as a discipline have worked from the top down; it is now possible to be a credentialed PhD in composition studies in the same way that one can be an expert in eighteenth-century literature or postcolonial theory. We have distinguished professorships, university press series, and refereed journals cataloged by the Modern Language Association (MLA). We also have the daunting task of teaching the moves and strategies of academic writing to hundreds of thousands of beginning college students each year. Whether many of those students will stay in college or not depends on the work they do with us. For me the most pressing question facing our field is thus not how to build a discipline but how to deliver, in a broad and effective manner, what we know about writing to the beginning and often underprepared undergraduates whom we are asked to teach.

Such a ground-level view of our work raises issues that are as much political as intellectual: Who actually teaches first-year writing? What are they paid and how are they trained and supported? Who evaluates their work and on what basis? In speaking of the *labor* of teaching writing, then, I refer both to the intellectual work of teaching and to the workers who do it. In rereading Hairston and Bartholomae, I am struck by how neither has much to say about the problems of staffing first-year writing courses with qualified teachers. Both were instead preoccupied, at that moment in the mid-1980s, with defining the intellectual agenda of our emerging field. Two decades later I can't imagine trying to define the work of composition in such terms alone. We now know a lot about how to teach academic writing—not everything, but a lot. And yet each year too many students pass through too many writing courses taught by indifferent, underprepared, or overworked instructors. To deliver what we know about writing to a wider range of students, we need a better qualified and better supported labor force.

Composition has long been a textbook-driven field precisely because so many of our programs are staffed by inexperienced teachers. The usual response

to the problem of inexperience has been to hand the novice instructors under our charge a course—in the form of readings, assignments, exercises—that we compose for them and whose execution thereof we can monitor. I want to argue here for a shift from this focus on curriculum to one on labor—from designing preset and teacher-proof courses to be implemented by underprepared adjuncts or graduate assistants to finding ways of attracting and supporting faculty who are interested in the work of teaching writing. Let me turn to how we have tried to do so at Duke.

Creating a Multidisciplinary Writing Faculty at Duke

In 2000 Duke University put into place a new curriculum that requires all undergraduates to take a seminar in academic writing in their first year and two writing-in-the-disciplines courses afterward. Writing 20, Academic Writing, is the only course at Duke taken by every undergraduate. There are no prerequisites and no exemptions. Almost all of the sections of this first-year course are taught by a group of twenty-six postdoctoral fellows whom we have recruited across a wide range of disciplines. In the last five years our fellows have held PhDs in African American studies, architecture, biology, communications, cultural anthropology, cultural studies, economics, education, engineering, English, epidemiology, forestry, genetics, history, human environments, linguistics, philosophy, political science, psychology, queer studies, religion, rhetoric and composition, sociology, theology, and women's studies. Fellows design and teach five sections of Writing 20 per year. Sections are capped at twelve students for a total of sixty students per year. Most fellows design two different writing courses each year—one for the fall and one for the spring.

Our fellowships are not tenure-track positions, but neither are they dead-end jobs. Fellows join our program because they want to work intensely on their teaching before moving on to other academic positions. And indeed, in the past few years, several have won tenure-track jobs at other colleges or universities. The salary is reasonable (\$38,200 to \$41,200 per year), the support for research strong, the environment for teaching excellent, and the collegial support of the other fellows extraordinary. Fellows are offered an initial three-year contract. In the second semester of their second year at Duke, they undergo a rigorous review of their work based on a teaching portfolio that they have assembled. If this review is positive, their contract is extended to five years.

I like and admire our faculty immensely. While most have not taught first-year writing before coming to Duke, we tend to attract people who want to center their careers on teaching undergraduates and who are interested in working as part of a collective intellectual project. We tell prospective fellows that we do not want them to teach a staff course that we have composed for them, but rather we want them to draw on their interests as scholars to introduce students

to the difficulties and pleasures of academic writing. And while we work closely with new fellows as they design their courses, there is no template or rubric for them to follow in doing so, no assumed pace or sequence of assignments or activities. We do, however, expect faculty to write out their course materials with a level of care and thoroughness that many at first find surprising. Before they begin their first semester of teaching at Duke, fellows participate in a three-week summer seminar on teaching writing. In this seminar we offer our new colleagues a quick sense of the history and politics surrounding the teaching of writing, model some key moves as teachers (responding toward revision, workshopping student texts), and help them draft the materials they will use in working with students in the fall. Since we represent our intellectual work as teachers in our course materials, we argue that such materials should be written with the same care we give to our scholarship. We thus spend a good deal of time talking about how fellows phrase the writing projects they set for students and how they describe the aims and concerns of their courses. As a result, we have as a program an unusually rich and varied archive of the work that goes on in our courses, and our fellows, when they look for tenure-track jobs, have strong textual evidence of their skill in teaching undergraduates.

All sections of Writing 20 are listed on the Duke Web catalog by title, brief description, and teacher. Many of these courses are centered on the ways academics and intellectuals have responded to public controversies. In 2003–4, for instance, students in Writing 20 were asked to take on such issues as the Origins of Darwinism, Church-State Conflicts in Education, Revolutionary Visions in Art, Communicating Science to the Public, Science in the Popular Media, Writing About the Web, Hippies in American History, Imagining the African Diaspora, and Academic Writing and Political Dissent, among many others. Students thus do not simply sign up for “English 101/Instructor: Staff,” but rather select a section of academic writing as they would any other course—that is, by what most grabs their interest. Many fellows also post their course materials on the Web, making their work as teachers public in a sense usually reserved for scholarship. And that work has been a strong success by all measures: In their course evaluations, students report that they work harder and are more stimulated intellectually in Writing 20 than in most of their other courses at Duke. Some of their work as writers is showcased annually in *Deliberations*, a journal of first-year writing that is itself often used as a text in our courses. The teaching portfolios put together by second-year fellows form a rich archive of the range of work in our program, and we also post course materials designed by the winner of our annual Award for Excellence in Teaching Writing to our website. In the spring of 2003, with the guidance of assessment expert Richard Haswell, we conducted a programwide analysis of early and late essays in Writing 20 that offers textual evidence that students make significant progress over the course of the semester in how they draw on other texts in their own writing, moving from uses that are largely descriptive to those that are more critical and assertive.

Composition as Pedagogy

In *The End of Composition Studies*, David Smit argues that composition may have a stronger and more interesting role to play in the university than simply becoming a traditional academic discipline. What if, he suggests, rather than assuming full responsibility ourselves for teaching writing to all undergraduates, we instead defined our task as helping faculty across the disciplines take on this work? He thus proposes a curriculum in which the universal general skills course in composition is replaced by a range of discipline-specific, writing-intensive seminars. To teach such courses, Smit argues, faculty would require three kinds of expertise: (1) They'd need to be proficient writers themselves in the genre they're teaching; (2) they'd need to be able to explain the rhetorical moves and strategies that underlie such writing; and (3) they'd need to know about the ways people learn to write and how to design courses that could help them do so. The job of compositionists would be to consult with faculty on the second and third of these tasks—that is, to help them surface the rhetoric of their disciplines and to design and teach what for many of them would be a new sort of course.

And indeed that is pretty much what I now do as director of the Duke Writing Program. Working with a multidisciplinary faculty has offered me a new sense of what composition has most to offer to our colleagues in other fields—which is, in a word, *pedagogy*. The fellows in our program are ambitious and talented young scholars. They come to Duke with strong ideas about the sort of writing they'd like to see undergraduates do, but a less developed sense of how to help them learn to do so. They need help with things like figuring out how much reading to assign, how to help students use writing to come to terms with complex texts and ideas, how to compose writing projects that are well defined yet open-ended, how to comment toward revision, how to structure a course to make room for drafting and revising, how to lead a strong class discussion of student texts, how to set up useful peer response groups, and so on. And even if what I have to say to them about teaching sometimes strikes me as quotidian, as the sort of thing anyone in comp would know, that's not a complaint I've heard from our faculty. They want to learn how to do a certain kind of intellectual work, one that has a real impact on students, and they look to me to help them do so. There is a satisfaction in such work that I have seldom felt in teaching graduate seminars or in serving on dissertation committees. And so, while I understand why many of us wish to see composition solidify its status as an academic discipline, I am drawn instead, along with Smit, to a more centrifugal view of composition, to the impulse to reach out to initiatives in writing in the disciplines as well as to other reform efforts in general education, service learning, community literacy, academic ethics, and the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Before I came to Duke, I directed the composition program in a large university English department. I experienced that job as an ongoing siege: How much training do graduate teaching assistants really need just to teach comp?

Who gets to offer graduate courses and on what topics? Who directs dissertations? Why should research on teaching count toward tenure? And so on. A set of questions and anxieties about the intellectual status of work in composition seemed to define everything I did and thought. It wasn't until about two years into my new job that I realized that I simply didn't have those worries anymore. Our program is defined not by a set of disciplinary concerns but by a collective teaching project. We all teach the same course, albeit in very different ways. The focus of our talk together is thus on teaching—and, at least to me, such talk seems more useful, collegial, focused, and sane than the familiar and internecine struggles of disciplinary argument.

Negotiating Coherence

We offer about 140 sections of Academic Writing at Duke each year, and we work toward coherence among them in a number of fairly loose and informal ways. One of the first tasks we took on as a faculty in our first year of work together was to articulate a set of four teaching goals for Writing 20: (1) *reading closely and critically*; (2) *responding to and making use of the work of others*; (3) *drafting and revising texts*; and (4) *making texts public*. In crafting these goals, we tried to define both those aspects of writing that we thought were teachable (drafting and revising, making texts public) and those qualities that distinguished a certain sort of writing as *academic* (a close attention to texts, a responsiveness to the work of others). Each year since, we have returned as a faculty to these goals in order to debate what they mean and to share our various ways of working toward them. In particular, over the last few years, we have moved from an understanding of the goal of making texts public as one centering on the tasks of editing and document design to one that takes on the question of how and where student texts *circulate*—within a seminar itself, on the Web, in class or program publications, and perhaps beyond. What seems crucial to me in this process is not that each of us interprets these four goals in the same way, or even that the goals always remain the same, but that all of us position our work as teachers in conscious relation to a vision of Writing 20 that we have collectively defined.

In addition to the summer seminar for new fellows, we also hold an annual retreat for all of the teachers of Writing 20, along with a series of symposia throughout the year, designed and led by the fellows themselves, at which we talk about various issues in teaching. We visit one another's classes frequently, and there is a remarkable amount of hallway conversation about students and courses. We try to form a sense of identity as a program, that is, not through imposing a fixed syllabus or a set of mandated classroom practices (small groups, portfolios, grading rubrics, etc.), but through sponsoring a set of ongoing conversations about the course we are all teaching.

But in fact our versions of Writing 20 are far from the same. On the contrary, the success of our approach rests in large part, I think, on the sense of our

faculty that they and not the program own their courses. Why should one expect a writing course taught by an epidemiologist or an architect to follow the same template as one designed by a historian or a political scientist? And so students in the various sections of Writing 20 often end up reading and writing very different sorts of texts, considering very different kinds of problems, and talking about their work in very different ways. Some teachers have students look closely at intricacies of phrasing; others tend to work more at the level of paragraph and essay. Some make extensive use of the Web in circulating and responding to texts; others continue to handwrite comments in the margins of essays. Some ask students to imitate the forms of writing in their disciplines, others ask for something more like critical essays or literary journalism. Some ask students to do substantive research; others work with assigned texts alone. Some divide students into groups all the time, others never do. And so on. There are, however, some practices that we do insist on: Since our charge is to teach *academic* writing, we expect that students will be asked to write on complex issues and texts, that they will have the chance to revise their work in response to the comments of readers, and that they will discuss the work they are doing as writers with their peers—in the form of workshops, discussion lists, seminar discussions, or the like. In short, we expect the work of the course to center on the writing of the students in it, and that the writing that students do will engage the work of other thinkers. But beyond that, we want faculty to own their courses, to shape the work that goes on in them according to their own sense of what is involved in learning to write as an academic and intellectual.

Encouraging Faculty Ownership

What I want to argue for, then, is a willingness to tolerate a good bit of programmatic diversity and even incoherence. Of course you can do so only if you trust both the abilities of your faculty and their commitment to the goals of your program. And so we've worked hard to offer fellows a sense of ownership of our collective project. A subcommittee of fellows drafted formal bylaws for the Duke University Writing Program, which the fellows as a group then approved. We meet as a faculty each month both to share information and to discuss and vote on questions of policy concerning issues like student evaluations and course archives. Fellows hold four of the seven seats on the program steering committee that implements such policies. Fellows serve as members of our Executive Steering Group and on the Editorial Advisory Board of *Deliberations*, the annual journal featuring the work of students in Writing 20. Three fellows also serve each year as associate directors of the University Writing Program, with no one holding such a position for more than two consecutive years. More experienced fellows are often paired as mentors with newcomers to the program—visiting classes, reading materials, and talking informally about teaching. And perhaps most importantly, fellows hold five out of the seven positions on the search committee charged with recruiting new members

of our program, giving them a very strong voice in deciding who will actually join them in teaching writing at Duke. Fellows who serve on this committee often seem, perhaps through finding themselves talking to candidates about what “we” do, to form a stronger attachment to the program. They also report that the experience of reviewing some 350 applications, and of interviewing about twenty-five candidates for the six or so fellowships that we have to offer each year, gives them an invaluable set of insights into how people gain (and lose) academic jobs.

Near the end of their second year at Duke, fellows are required to put together a teaching portfolio for review by the directors of the program. If this review is positive, their contract is extended from three years to five. We have structured this review to offer fellows a chance to represent their teaching as complex intellectual work. This involves both *documenting* that work—through selecting examples of course materials, student writings, letters of observation, and standard course evaluations—and also *interpreting* it in an essay that discusses how their aims and practices in teaching writing have evolved over the past two years. In writing such an essay, fellows somehow have to situate their own work in relation to the goals of our program, to define for themselves the ways in which they both do and do not identify with our project. We also hope, on a practical level, that composing such a portfolio will prove of use to fellows when they look for jobs in their home disciplines.

But while I think this process of review is both fair and appropriate, it also points out the considerable gap in status between the directors of the program, who are regular-rank faculty, and its fellows, who are on limited-term contracts. Fellows know that they can only teach in our program for at most five years. These are positions that one takes on in order to prepare to move somewhere else. Even still, I have been struck by the energy that fellows bring to the program and their commitment to it. These are, for the most part, people who are interested in learning both how to become better teachers and also how programs and departments get run. And while there are, to be sure, the occasional complaints about meetings and programmatic chores eating into time needed for teaching or research, these are no more frequent than those voiced by tenure-stream faculty in other departments I’ve worked in. In any case, not being eligible for tenure, it seems to me, is not a reason for being denied a voice in the academic workplace. We want fellows to be involved as much as they want to be in shaping and governing our program.

Creating Alternatives to Tenure

Since I agree with many of the concerns voiced about the growing use of non-regular-rank faculty in the academy, let me say a little more about the thinking behind these limited-term positions. Would it be better if these were not postdoctoral fellowships but tenure-track professorships? Well, yes, of course. But I also need then to note that such a proposal—which would turn the writing

program into one of the largest departments in the university—has never been a remote possibility at Duke or at most other American universities and colleges. So the real question is: Do postdocs offer a stronger labor force for teaching first-year writing than the usual mix of graduate teaching assistants and adjunct instructors? At Duke, the answer has been an obvious yes. But then more questions follow: Why limit the term of these positions? If you have good teachers of writing, why not just keep them?

This is the case made by Michael Murphy in “New Faculty for a New University,” and I can well imagine that at many schools it would be desirable. However, since promotion at Duke hinges almost entirely on scholarly publication, I would worry about creating a permanent underclass of teachers who, when asked to work year after year with only minimal raises and recognition, might become increasingly prone to burnout and resentment. On a more positive note, I also think that a program like ours, charged with training a young multidisciplinary faculty in teaching writing, can hope to influence higher education in ways that extend both beyond our local campus and beyond first-year composition. In the last few years, we have had fellows leave Duke for assistant professorships at other schools in cultural anthropology, education, English, history, linguistics, psychology, public health, science communications, women’s studies, and writing. Still others have taken jobs in university programs or centers focusing on service learning, multiculturalism and diversity, and teaching and learning. Most past fellows report that their experiences in our program have profoundly shaped the work they are now doing at other sites in the academy.

As someone who holds tenure, I don’t want to slight the problems—both practical and psychological—that fellows face in being required to find and move to new positions. Indeed, managing a faculty composed entirely of inexperienced and anxious young teacher-scholars can pose challenges faced by few department chairs. But if the pattern of the last few years holds, and fellows continue to land good jobs in a tight academic market, then I think we will be able to say that we have not only established a strong first-year writing course for Duke students, but also influenced undergraduate teaching at other universities.

Duke is an affluent and prestigious university. We can offer material and intellectual incentives for young PhDs to come work with us that many other institutions cannot, and we have resources to help our fellows develop as teachers and scholars that few universities can rival. In addition our program has also been supported by a generous grant from the Mellon Foundation. So I don’t want to suggest here that other composition programs should also be staffed by postdoctoral fellows. But I do want to argue for an approach to our work that begins with the needs and the interests of first-year writing students. I realize that this may seem a truism, but in fact most university writing programs serve several competing interests and constituencies. And so, for instance, I’m not asking what serves the best interests of the tenure-stream

composition faculty, or the graduate program, or the English department, or even the current cadre of writing instructors. Nor am I asking what is best for rhetoric and composition as an academic field. (If such a starting point seems far-fetched, remember how the “new abolitionism” of the 1990s was fueled in strong part by worries that the intellectual credibility of composition would be tainted by its association with the service role of first-year writing.) I’m asking what is best for students in basic and first-year writing courses.

This is not an argument, I need to insist, against the value of scholarship in composition or against its establishment as an academic discipline. All of my own writing as a scholar has been in composition, and I think that the best recent work in our field—of Marilyn Sternglass, Deborah Brandt, Jackie Royster, Richard Miller, Linda Flower, Tom Fox, Bruce Horner, Mary Soliday, Suresh Canagarajah, and others—is clearly as rigorous as most of what I now read in literary or cultural studies while at the same time far more lucid and useful. And I’m glad that graduate programs in rhetoric and composition like those at Syracuse, Southern Florida, Purdue, Texas, and Rensselaer now exist to promote such scholarship. But I don’t believe that first-year writing programs should belong to the discipline of composition studies any more than they should be owned by English. The teaching of writing should be a university-wide and multidisciplinary project, not a departmental fiefdom.

Good Teaching for Fair Pay

This returns me to the question about who teaches in our programs, to questions of labor. But I do so, I think, with a difference. For me, the argument for better working conditions is better teaching. I can’t imagine how a writing program can exploit its teachers and still hope to serve its students well. But I don’t think we will improve how writing gets taught simply by raising salaries. We also need to change how we select and train the teachers in our programs, and how we support and evaluate their work. We need, that is, to connect our demands for better working conditions to clear plans for improving the quality of instruction, to link good teaching directly to fair pay.

I am thus worried by how the 2003 CCCC resolution “Standards to Support High-Quality Professional Instruction” insists that “all full-time writing positions will be tenurable or covered by continuous employment certificates” (384) but says nothing about the sorts of expertise teachers of writing should be expected to bring to their work and little about the sorts of support they should be given. This resolution almost exactly mirrors the position taken by the 1989 CCCC “Statement of Principles and Standards for Postsecondary Writing Instruction,” that much-debated attempt to implement the Wyoming Resolution. The 1989 statement argued that the teaching of writing should be made the responsibility of tenure-stream faculty; the 2003 resolution simply asserts that all writing teachers should be made tenure-stream. Like Hairston and Bartholomae before them, both of these documents respond to the problem of who should

teach writing by trying to normalize that work within the familiar structures of departments, disciplines, and tenure. While I have long argued for involving tenure-stream faculty in teaching writing whenever possible—and continue to, do so—I think we also need to admit that the odds are overwhelmingly against a widespread return of such faculty to the basic or first-year course.

If that is the case, then I suspect it will prove counterproductive to insist on a principle of tenure that, on the one hand, few programs can ever hope to implement and, on the other, seems to put us in the position of censoring other, more immediate ways of improving the working conditions of writing teachers. I’d note, for instance, that our program at Duke is in clear violation of both the 1989 statement and the 2003 motion. Our fellows don’t accrue tenure, and they aren’t paid as much as regular-rank faculty at Duke. And yet, I think, we do an excellent job of teaching first-year students and an ethical one of supporting our faculty. My sense is that, as a field, we have to learn how to think less in terms of ideal structures, of disciplines and tenure lines, and more in terms of possible reforms. We *should* argue for tenure for good writing teachers whenever that is a realistic option. But we also need flexible and strong ways of delivering composition, that is, of supporting the teaching of writing in situations where tenure is not possible.

The principle I’d insist on is not tenure but this: *To teach academic writing, you should have to be good at it—or at least show a strong promise of becoming good at it.* This means that decisions about who teaches in a writing program need to be made by someone whose main concern is with the quality of instruction in that program—and not with supporting graduate students, or with balancing faculty workloads, or with finding work for the protégés or spouses or friends of powerful professors. It also means that we need to put into practice ways of assessing the work of faculty that account for the complexities of teaching writing and that are as open and transparent to the people involved as possible. It means, in short, that we need to structure our programs so it is clear that the only way to advance in them is through teaching writing well.

I can imagine such programs existing within the framework of university English departments—although their directors would need to be given much more control over staffing than they are usually allowed. I can also see them as part of departments of writing and rhetoric, or in other sorts of interdisciplinary units, but with the same caveat that first-year writing needs to be staffed by the best teachers available. Jane Hindman has recently shown, for instance, how simply creating a separate writing department does not in itself solve the problem of finding and supporting strong teachers for the first-year course. On the other hand, Daniel Royer and Roger Gilles offer their experiences at Grand Valley State as an example of how one can structure such a department to make sure that both first-year and advanced courses in writing are taught by the same faculty. Or such programs could be freestanding, unaffiliated with any particular department or discipline, like ours at Duke. My

sense is that, in the end, the disciplinary location of first-year writing programs doesn't matter that much—that what really counts is our ability to recruit good teachers of writing and to support their work. And that problem is less disciplinary than political.

Making Our Own Mistakes

Near the end of *The Remains of the Day*, Kazuo Ishiguro's protagonist, the consummate butler Mr. Stevens, finds himself sitting by the sea, reflecting on a life that he has focused on the careful observance of the forms and rituals of dignified behavior. The irony is that the fastidious Stevens has spent his life working for a philistine aristocrat with few interests beyond sport, drink, and conservative politics. And yet, Stevens comes to realize, it was not his employer whose life lacked dignity but his own. "At least he had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes," Stevens admits of the man he served.

He chose a certain path in life, it proved to be a misguided one, but there he chose it, he can say that at least. As for myself I cannot even claim that. . . . I can't even say I made my own mistakes. Really—one has to ask oneself—what dignity is there in that? (243)

Teachers of writing also need to be allowed the dignity of making their own mistakes. Those of us charged with directing writing programs have too long accepted a view of our task as one of delivering a *curriculum*. I am arguing that we should instead see our job as recruiting and supporting a *faculty* who can design and teach their own, strong courses in writing. The status of disciplinarity means little for first-year teachers if it doesn't come with a practical authority over their work. I'd rather have an undisciplined writing that supports good first-year teachers than a discipline that doesn't.

In interviewing candidates for fellowships at Duke, I've been struck by how many of them tell some version of what I once thought of as the "comp story"—the one that begins, "Well, I was the one who actually *liked* teaching this course that everybody else said they hated." I've also had the chance to work at Duke with faculty members from departments like biology, mathematics, physics, music, and German who share my political commitments to teaching beginning undergraduates and my intellectual interests in the complexities of doing so, far more than do most of the English professors whom I've met. As a faculty consultant to our Preparing Future Faculty Program, I've seen how graduate students and postdocs in fields as diverse as biomechanical engineering, marine biology, and art history urgently want to structure their careers around teaching undergraduate students. Composition has many friends in the academy (and the public) beyond English. My experiences suggest that many faculty across the disciplines are interested in and good at teaching first-year writing. We should ask them to join us in that work.

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