



Scripting Writing Across Campuses: Writing Standards and Student Representations

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In this chapter we respond to the question, “What makes a piece of writing college level?” by investigating the institutional history of Miami University of Ohio. Why Miami? We believe it is a productive site of inquiry into changing definitions of college-level writing because the evolution of its composition program parallels in many instances the development of the field of composition and rhetoric.¹ What makes Miami even more useful for a case study is that its selective and two-year open-admissions campuses allow us to look through dual lenses. This comparative vision lets us examine two different kinds of institutional sites and consider how the tiering of institutions alters expectations for writing.

Taking up Mary Soliday’s call for more local material histories and Gail Stygall’s challenge that rhetoric and composition scholars “take seriously those public documents that educational institutions . . . produce” (7), we first examine documents in Miami’s English department to study changes in its definitions of college-level writing. In the second part of our essay, we turn to one of Miami’s open-access branch campuses (Miami Middletown) and its scripting of students for work-based competencies. We describe a composition class designed to develop rhetorical skill not only for work, but also for academic and community

life. We aim to historicize and make visible the multiple, often competing desires of teachers, students, institutions, and communities that intersect in a writing classroom. We believe this institutional history and comparison sheds light on the structuring effects of socioeconomic differences in the academy, especially as those differences become translated into debates over standards and the kinds of writing curriculum students need. The history we compose from our archives shows how a two-year open-admissions college became identified with the *remedial* student, who then becomes scripted as needing a technical education and simple communication skills.

In *The Politics of Remediation*, Mary Soliday traces the history of remediation and the changing material conditions of the City College of New York (CCNY), arguing that the politics of access are at least as important as curricular reform in shaping the direction of writing programs. Our local research led to a somewhat different twist in the story of the politics of access and standards. Similar to Soliday's findings, we argue that our institution has used *access* and *standards* for its own purposes—to craft an ever more selective marketing profile for itself—by creating open-access campuses and then over time more sharply differentiating their missions and students from those of the “main” campus. However, in addition to the politics of access and standards, we posit the importance of the politics of assessment. We identified assessment as a crucial third element in the story of access and standards. The history we recount shows that assessment has always been embedded—but often remains invisible—in curricular decisions and often is driven by institutional needs, rather than to benefit students or improve curricula. We end by arguing that educators need to develop richer ways of assessing the complexity of rhetorical knowledge and skill of students, so that assessment serves students, improving their learning, as well as leading to improved curricula and teaching.

Tiering Campuses, Tiering Student Writing

Miami University, a state-assisted university founded in 1809, is located in a rural area of southwest Ohio. The university remained

small and focused on undergraduate education before World War II: In 1941 it had about 3,500 students, mostly undergraduate, and no doctorate programs (Shriver and Pratt 197). By 2004 the university had about 15,000 undergraduate and 1,700 graduate students and offered 50 areas of study for the master's degree and 11 for the doctoral degree ("About Miami"). In the period of postwar expansion, Miami developed graduate programs and off-campus instructional sites that in the 1960s evolved into two open-access regional campuses. The main campus in Oxford, Ohio, today bills itself as a selective liberal arts "public ivy." When Miami Middletown, located twenty-five miles away in a steel town, was founded, locals hoped it would evolve into a four-year college, while the university's goals for the campus were more limited (Shriver, Letter). Today, with about 2,500 students, Miami Middletown emphasizes a two-year curriculum, although its mission continues to undergo changes.

As early as 1960—at a time when the momentum to create the regional campuses was coalescing—an exchange of memos between an English department faculty member and the president of the university makes clear that the institution was planning for increased selectivity among both future students *and* faculty members. The exchange began with a long letter to the university president from an English department faculty member, proposing a new kind of first-year writing course with lectures, increased class size, and a reduced number of papers. In his reply, the president acknowledged the burden of teaching many sections of composition and expressed the hope of recruiting new faculty with PhDs and reducing the number of composition classes that new hires would have to teach (Houtchens 2; Millett).

This and other documentation from the late 1950s and early 1960s indicate that the English department and university were promoting a growing selectivity in admissions and faculty recruitment. The language of these memos suggests the acceptance of a culture of hierarchical tiering, a culture also evident in the practice of assessing students for placement into regular or advanced tracks. Standardized assessment before and during a writing course served the purposes of sorting students, primarily according to their knowledge of mechanical writing conventions. The presumed "standard of excellence" was maintained by seg-

regation based on “ability,” purportedly measured by national standardized test scores, or demonstrated by a student’s knowledge of mechanical conventions as measured by the department’s qualifying test.

Yet, amid this traditional test-based curriculum, a thread of a more complex story of writing pedagogy also appears in the small details. We’ll turn below to a discussion of pedagogy, but it is important to note that the actual practices of writing instruction contained a mix of approaches and philosophies that the official syllabi and tests sometimes belie. Based on our research, the story we compose of Miami’s composition curriculum can be neither a triumphal tale of constantly progressing pedagogy nor an ironic institutional critique, delivered from a present-day position of enlightened hindsight.

Other department documents suggest that the changing idea of the first-year writing course occurred over a long period of time within the context of wider institutional changes and desires. The 1960 exchange of memos cited above, for example, employs rhetorical arguments about the university’s goals of attracting doctoral-level research faculty by freeing them from the perceived drudgery of teaching writing through the marking of weekly papers. The memo writer argued that his proposal would make the course more intellectually challenging and more college level, apparently referring to the lecture method of delivery. Such a scheme would have restructured the writing course along the familiar lines of other college lecture courses such as history and shifted focus away from grammar and mechanics, but not toward any specific writing instruction.

In 1969–1970, shortly after the English department developed a PhD program in English, it did change first-year writing, moving to themes—for example, *alienation*, *pollution*, *the black experience*—as a way to respond to a university report that was critical of the curriculum (“Proposal”). However contemporary the themes approach may appear, memos about the new curriculum did not specifically address writing instruction either, focusing mostly on what students were to read (primarily fiction, poetry, and drama). This curricular reform marks a further shift away from a composition and rhetoric focus to one on literary study, and writing continues to be defined by models extrinsic to writ-

ing instruction. This is not just our critique but was also pointedly raised as a question by the University Requirement Committee. A committee member from the Communication department objected that the first-year English courses taught literary criticism rather than persuasive writing and attention to specific audiences, while the committee's representative from English argued that students should learn to write logically for a universal audience (Minutes January 31; Minutes February 7). There was soon a widespread backlash against the theme model. The lack of a common curriculum became fodder for those wishing to change the core requirements and snatch the universal first-year courses from English. But the debate sketched above seems more than a mere power grab, as it touches on key conceptual differences that still fuel debates about a single standard of logical writing versus a rhetorical view of writing.

The English department responded to the threat of losing the course by claiming its expertise and commitment to composition: First, it set a new policy, requiring all English faculty to teach composition; later in the 1970s it added composition and rhetoric graduate courses and moved toward the creation of the composition and rhetoric PhD. These measures solidified the English department's control over the first-year composition requirement. Ironically, a nearly complete reversal had occurred in the approximately fifteen years since the president's 1960 memo in which he expressed his wish that in the future English faculty "would not be required to take more than two sections of freshman English" and "could have at least one advanced section of English" (Millett).

Miami's history thus confirms a number of Soliday's claims. As elsewhere, it was also true for Miami: "midlevel institutions struggled to upgrade their status by shedding a pure teaching mission, offering more professional and graduate education, and requiring some research as conditions for faculty hiring or advancement" (Soliday 13). And, just as at CCNY, Miami's main campus has always had a "remedial" population of students, before *and after* the creation of its open-access campuses and the growing emphasis on selectivity on the main campus. Soon after the opening of the Middletown Campus in 1966, the chair of the English department and his counterpart at Middletown proposed

creating a basic writing class for the Middletown campus only. Students would be placed into it based on the American College Test (ACT) scores. Yet, despite the fact that 20 percent of the main campus students' scores fell below the cutoff, the chair and his counterpart did not suggest that the Review of English Fundamentals course proposed for Middletown should also be offered at the main campus in Oxford (Peterson).

By locating basic writing only on the regional campuses, Miami's tradition of sorting students into different tracks took on a main campus/regional campuses distinction, with different rules and expectations for the different student bodies. From the 1950s to the present, writing curricula on the Oxford campus evolved from a grammar and skills focus (defined in internal memos as "remedial") through many different iterations of what a college-level course should be—from the study of rhetorical modes, to the reading and interpreting of literary texts, to a focus on the improvement of student texts using sentence combining, to expressivist and process approaches, and in the 1990s to socially oriented critical inquiry and currently a new rhetorical emphasis.²

With the inception of the PhD in Composition and Rhetoric in 1980, student writing became the centerpiece of composition courses in Oxford, national scholars came to lead workshops on the teaching of writing, and Miami hosted national writing conferences. The department ended its testing of basic grammar conventions and later a timed essay proficiency exam. Today each campus handles placement of students in its own way.³ No advanced first-year composition classes are available on the open-admissions campuses, and no basic writing course is available on the Oxford campus, although there are students on all three campuses who could benefit from both of these options. We conclude that composition curricula generally flowed from the center to the periphery (from Oxford to the regional campuses). When discordances became visible, Oxford allowed the regional campuses to develop their own solutions, as long as those solutions operated solely on the regional campuses so as not to disfigure the portrait of the selective main campus.

The development of the Miami Middletown campus echoed the national trend that Ira Shor argues was one of the strongest

forces for the institution of two-year colleges. According to Shor, universities themselves saw it as desirable to split off the first two years of general education from the university so that the university could devote itself to the research and training of professionals, which was becoming its desired mission (51). While initially all of Ohio's universities practiced open-door policies, today most have moved to selective admissions for the main campus and relegated open-admissions students to branch campuses and community colleges. Burgeoning enrollments from the 1960s on and "the responsibility of developing more extended graduate programs for able college graduates" ("Education Beyond the High School" 7) were claims used to argue for this tiering of access, but economic and political aims may have been operating as well. Shor contends that universities may have wanted to slow "the upward rise of the non-traditional student" (51).

Our archival research suggests to us that the mission of the Middletown campus has been and continues to be in flux, waxing and waning according to how the major players in its existence construct its market(s)—and therefore its functions—from servicing returning vets to deferring admission of "less able" students to the main campus ("Education Beyond the High School" 7), from fanning a small city's hope for the campus's intellectual and cultural drawing power to relegating technical education to the less-visible branch campuses. Competing views about the campus's mission remain unresolved to this day. Nonetheless, how the mission of a two-year college is defined may have enormous material consequences for its students and for the continuing inequality of wealth and power in our country.⁴

We turn in the next section to bring the two stories together—composition curricular change and campus histories—by suggesting that the way students are scripted by institutions for intellectual or technical futures can be used as a point of inquiry in a writing classroom. On the two-year campus, for example, where composition classes are expected to prepare students for work-based communication competencies, these expectations can themselves become the subject of rhetorical inquiry. We argue that composition curricula should not script student writers as needing *only* academic *or* workplace writing skills, depending on their social and economic location, but should serve to develop rhetorical

skill needed for any writing situation by foregrounding and investigating the demands and desires of self and others for the writing that they produce. In the next section, we show how the demand for work training on a two-year campus can be turned on its head and used as the fulcrum for developing rhetorical skill and intellectual inquiry, preparing students for work *and* academic *and* community life.

Teaching Rhetorical Skill and Illuminating the Material Conditions That Organize Learning

In every writing class, teacher and students discover themselves in always specific and complex rhetorical situations with a multitude of rhetorical forces pressing upon them. Teachers bring a curriculum that has been shaped by particular and general forces—by their own interests and accumulated practices, departmental programs, and extradepartmental pressures for academic writing or workplace communication skills. Other forces that press upon the writing classroom might include the institution's position in a community: What does a community expect from this institution of higher education? Is it expected to produce a trained local workforce, business leaders, professionals, informed citizens? To what segment of a population does the institution market itself and what kind of educational profile does it construct of its students and graduates? Intellectuals? Artists? Technical workers? Job seekers? And what about students' own rhetorical expectations or assumptions about writing in college and the realities of their lives outside the classroom? Whether or not a space is made for students' desires to surface, they are surely a force in the writing classroom.

This complex rhetorical knot makes the notion of standards in “the plural singular sense of the word” (Fox 6) counterproductive because a single standard erases the many rhetorical demands writers face. As students learn to juggle these demands and make choices that meet their own purposes *and* those of the many other interested parties to their writing, they are developing rhetorical skill.

A pedagogy that foregrounds the knotted conditions of writing offers students opportunities to unravel and identify the strands of exigencies, and reweave them for their own rhetorical purposes. The following example of such foregrounding grew out of the actual material conditions of a specific two-year campus and student body and should not be taken as a model of an ideal pedagogy, but as an example of how a composition class might be focused.

A large National Science Foundation (NSF) grant designated for the development of learner-centered education on the Middletown campus provided the framework and funding for Ellenmarie to develop this first-semester composition curriculum. The knotted conditions of this writing classroom included many strands. The class's students were diverse, ranging in age from seventeen to fifty years and older; they were black, white, biracial, Appalachian; urban, small-town, farm, and suburban; first-generation college (and even high school) students; public high school graduates as well as General Education Development Test holders; workers—in one or more jobs in factories, construction, medical support, restaurants, banks, delivery services; women and men, with more than half of the class being parents. Their diversity is typical of two-year campuses nationally.

Their purposes for being in the class were, more often than not, driven by the desire for a “better” job, which for some meant more money while others “just wanted something more” out of their work and their lives. Several were aiming for a two-year degree—in nursing, for example, or business technology, with sometimes the hope of eventually completing a four-year degree. Others did not have a plan but were responding to the twentieth-century version of the American dream: a college education equals upward mobility.

The Miami Middletown faculty's perceptions of college-level writing were also an ever-present strand, whether surfacing through students talking about the evaluation of their writing in other classes or through complaints overheard in the faculty lounge bemoaning the dismal state of student writing. Ellenmarie brought her own frustration into the classroom: The campus, in fact the university, construed the branch campus students as cut

from a different cloth than those at Oxford, and this construction lent itself to the replication of class structure.

The NSF grant was especially targeted for, but not limited to, educational innovation in the teaching of science, mathematics, engineering, and technology (SMET). The SMET proposal stated that its primary goal was “to create an active, learner-centered educational community,” but a close reading of it revealed the impetus behind the initiative as well as the opportunity to turn that impetus on its head (Governanti and Lloyd 4).

Of the seven desired learner outcomes, four explicitly targeted work readiness competencies or technological skills called for by the corporate world. The others promoted the development of critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving learning strategies, as well as increased opportunities for cooperative and collaborative work. The proposal claimed that two-year colleges are “uniquely qualified to carry out learner-centered curriculum reform”; should maintain “strong ties to the needs of area business and industry”; and should “provid[e] services of both an academic and technical nature, [offering] curricular choices that blur distinctions between the pursuit of ‘academic’ and ‘technical’ learning” (Governanti and Lloyd 4–5).

This “blur” hid several disturbing assumptions about the curriculum of the two-year college: that technical learning is an end in itself, linked to the goals of business and industry; and that the strategies learned could be used in any context, thereby construing learning as decontextualized from any larger concerns (e.g., ethical or political). The “blur” covered over the glaring absence of one of the key aims of Miami’s liberal education goals—understanding contexts—goals stressed on the main campus that supposedly apply to the branch campuses as well. This emphasis on decontextualized skills embedded, at a fundamental level, hierarchical class differences in expectations about the human potential, career opportunities, and civic responsibilities of the main and branch campus students.

The opposing realities identified here are not new; in fact, this struggle between vocationalism and professionalism existed within the two-year college movement from its inception to the present. In a larger sense, this struggle over the purposes of edu-

cation in a democracy reflects the underlying dynamic of how equality has variously been construed in the service of the economy and social order. Two-year college faculty are urged to shape their curricula and evaluation practices to ensure work-ready students, whereas the work of the university lies down another path, creating critical thinkers who will carry on the higher order thinking of the academy and the critical work of the culture at large.

The opportunity presented by the NSF grant for curriculum development allowed Ellenmarie to juxtapose several persistent questions facing the Middletown English faculty: Must this institution's composition instructors consider their students only as future (or advancing) workers? Could the critical thinking that is central to the university's work be taught hand-in-hand with work-based competencies? To answer these questions, she designed a first-level composition course that would attempt to address these two goals: a course based on a dual approach to the theme of work. This critical inquiry-based course would investigate work itself while integrating workplace activities into the classroom.

If work was the dazzling vision that drove student ambition, curriculum design, and corporate and foundation support, the curriculum developed with the support of the NSF grant would not try to divert the collective gaze but would instead put work right into the center of inquiry in the course: How do we construct the work we do? How has it been constructed for us? What are its satisfactions, injustices, aesthetic pleasures, ethics, politics, and purposes? The class would study the actual work situations of students' lives through reflection, critical inquiry, problem posing and problem solving, decision making, talking, and sharing workplace, personal, and academic writing—including the writing produced by the academy necessary for it to do *its* work. Through interweaving academic, campus workplace contexts for writing, and students' own life and work locations, the notion of workplace competencies would be complicated by examining how they are embedded in real social and historical locations. Another benefit was that students' workplace knowledge would be validated as learning and accomplishment and also would be open to revision and improvement. Students would draft workplace writing—meeting minutes, memos, and proposals—all in the

context of a problem-based scenario; write personal narratives and self-reflections; and read and critique campus and academic documents, as well as drafts of Ellenmarie's research on the history, functions, and mixed results of the two-year college movement in which they were now knowingly participating.

A writing curriculum that supports the development of rhetorical skill situates instruction in actual classroom conversations. For example, Ellenmarie drew on the class's surprised and thoughtful responses to two essays on Black English to set up the situation calling for minutes. In an excerpt from "Linguistic Chauvinism," Peter Farb traces the history of Black English, arguing that Black English is a language in its own right, with a complexity of structure and rules comparable to those of Standard American English, and expressive of a rich, if painful, cultural heritage. Conversely, Rachel Jones argues in "What's Wrong with Black English?" that she doesn't speak "white" but "right," and that those who do not become articulate in Standard American English hurt their own chances for success in a white-dominated culture. Most of the class initially found the Farb essay daunting to read, with its interweaving of linguistic explanation, history of the development of Black English, and argument for the legitimacy and value of Black English as a language. The class met in small groups to analyze the main points of each author's argument. Then spokespersons from each group led the class in an evolving understanding of the language issues at stake. What came up again and again was Farb's illustrative example of a young African American girl's ability to read fluently a story written in Black English that she could not read in Standard American English. His point was that this student would have to learn a new language while learning how to read in order to succeed in the school system she was in, and that this need would not be recognized as the demanding additional learning situation it entailed but rather as a deficit.

To move the discussion into their everyday lives, Ellenmarie asked students to form work groups hypothetically composed of parents, teachers, and administrators from an elementary, middle, or high school. Their task would be to develop a policy and related program for addressing the concerns raised by both authors. How would their school recognize and value the home

languages of all of their students and also address their students' needs to become fluent in the dominant culture's language? Their added task would be to write minutes of their meetings, which came to be numerous and complex. Their working groups became so involved in their discussions and research that Ellenmarie organized time at almost half of the weekly class meetings for the issue groups to continue to meet. Some researched what their own school districts were doing concerning language issues and brought back what they found to their groups.

Near the end of the semester when the groups critiqued each other's proposal rough drafts, however, they were dismayed to realize that they had reduced the complexity of language issues explored in their group discussions and research to one of deficit. All of the plans were based on remedial instruction with just a token nod, if any, to the value of students' home languages. Their group minutes, however, traced the circularity of some of the discussions, the research done, and the struggle to design a policy and program that addressed the concerns raised by the readings. The minutes thus had a substantive writing function; the groups could go back to them and use them to revise their proposals to more fully reflect their group conversations. These students experienced collaborative problem solving as a complicated, rich, frustrating, and ongoing rhetorical situation, as in out-of-class life, not artificially tied up into a neat solution, as the traditional academic form of the argumentative research paper imposes.

Facing and discussing the widespread tendency to reduce differences to deficits also provided an opportunity for reflection: In what ways did their own positions at an open-admission campus create the perception of deficit? In what ways did the material conditions of their lives—families, work, school systems, money, etc.—lead them to the campus? What did *access* mean literally and figuratively in their lives? How could they sort out what and who defined them?

Students at first resisted this move to study their own positions. Many have internalized derogatory attitudes toward two-year college students that are common on both the main and branch campuses. Yet the course focus on critical inquiry into work led students to a deeper contextual understanding of how

they were positioned. For some students this eventually became empowering, leading them to more confident self-reflection and voicing of their own views and interests. One student wrote that the critical inquiry into work had helped him understand more clearly what he valued—“personal contact with people, high ethical standards, job security, the ability to work outside, competence in my job, and respect from those I work with” (Slusser 4). He included this personally meaningful story in his final reflective essay:

Recently at work, my co-worker and I had a meeting with a prospective client. I had worked with this gentleman [previously] . . . so I had already established a relationship with him. During the meeting I actually felt a stronger confidence in myself and in my ability to provide this customer what [he] desired. . . . I know this increased measure of confidence is largely due to what I have learned during this class. I have been asked several times why I am going to college at forty-five years old. My normal response was . . . for a higher position at work and also for personal fulfillment. My perception of work has changed so drastically; now I cannot imagine success at work that doesn't include a large measure of personal satisfaction. I no longer just think of my “paid job” when I think of work. Webster has at least fourteen definitions of the word “work” and only a few of them are concerned with employment. An athlete *works* to develop his or her body; an artist displays a body of *work* whether it be a play, a movie, a painting, or a song; a cabinet maker *works* to turn a cherry tree into a beautiful hutch; teachers prepare their students for *work*; and parents *work* every day to prepare their children for their own life's *work*.—Work consumes a tremendous portion of our lives and we cannot afford to let it be all about money. (Slusser 6)

Other students did not feel empowered but worried. They were still grappling with the nets and snares they had uncovered in their research. For example, the two-year college's push for work-readiness training tangled with the dreams of some of the students who hoped to pursue bachelor's degrees on the Oxford campus after completing an associate's degree on the Middletown campus. One assignment asked students to map their educational goals and university pathways to those goals. In doing their research, they uncovered the fact that a number of courses counting toward an associate's degree in business would be useless for

meeting the requirements of a bachelor's degree in business, should a student plan to go on.

This example of discouraging four-year degree expectations is, unfortunately, not an anomaly. Though most who begin their higher education at a two-year college may say they expect to earn a four-year degree and the advantages it accrues, their ambitions are "cooled out," as Burton Clark noted nearly forty years ago. He claimed that failure to achieve their aspirations may be "inevitable and [actually] structured" into the higher education system itself (qtd. in Brint and Karabel 10).⁵

After reading some of Ellenmarie's research on two-year colleges, one student wrote poignantly of the pull to give up:

As I look back I see myself at the beginning of the longest road you can imagine, but I have only [gone] a short ways down it and now I am thinking I should have taken the short cut through the woods instead of taking the long route around the woods (school). It has been really rough working long hours, then going to school [in] the evenings . . . I still love work and learning new stuff at school, but nobody's body should ache like you're 70 when you're only 20. I got this feeling that I might be one of those junior college dropouts. I just have to get my priorities on track before I derail myself and really mess up my future. (Swank 1)

Revising the Script, Assessing Writing for Learning

The "cooling out" effect Clark described results not only from the structure of the two-year college but from the university's refusal to address the material conditions of students' lives (so eloquently voiced by the student above). Composition curricula and methods of assessment that limit rhetorical knowledge to a narrow set of easily measurable grammatical skills and a narrow range of writing further compound this cooling out effect.

Assessment is both conceptual, like curricula, and material, like institutional practices such as access, and it may work for the institution's benefit and purposes rather than for the benefit of students or improved curricula. When we assess and fail students based mostly on correctness of a decontextualized writing

sample, we are—in effect—closing the doors even further, dropping or *stopping students out*⁶ of higher education before they have had the opportunity to develop and apply rhetorical knowledge and skill.⁷

It is not that correctness and workplace communication skills are unimportant or unreachable goals, but that these goals are too limited. Students need opportunities to voice their own passions and interests and to struggle with the complex rhetorical demands of writing for work and life, as well as for the academy.

It is possible to assess what students can *do* and what rhetorical skills they are able to apply to different writing situations but not by basing assessment on a single text taken out of its rhetorical context.⁸ In response to the question of what makes writing college level, we pose other questions: What kinds of rhetorical knowledge and practices are expected of students in future writing situations inside and outside many kinds of classrooms? Can more complex and accurate ways of assessing students' rhetorical skills be designed so as to encourage more effective ways of teaching those skills? Pursuing answers to these questions will lead to different kinds of assessment practices requiring more than reading and scoring discrete texts against a concept of a universal standard.

Notes

1. A Miami composition director was active in the formation of the Conference on College Composition and Communication and served as its chair in 1966; its English department developed a PhD in composition/rhetoric in the late 1970s and since the 1980s has been home to the Writing Program Administrators and a site of the Ohio Writing Project.

2. The current first-year curriculum contains elements of Miami's expressivist and socially oriented past syllabi, while emphasizing the interanimating tensions among writer, audience, purpose, context, language, and genres. Students write in a number of different genres, and study, practice, and reflect on how to make rhetorical choices that can serve their own (and often other) purposes in a writing situation.

3. The Middletown campus has developed its own placement process; for a description of it, see Lewiecki-Wilson, Sommers, and Tassoni. The

Hamilton campus uses ACT's COMPASS test. On the Oxford campus, students may be placed into Advanced College Composition or exempted from both sequences of the first-year composition requirement through scores on advanced placement (AP) exams or the Miami Writing Portfolio Program. Students on the branch campuses may also earn AP or Writing Portfolio credit, but have no options for taking Advanced College Composition.

4. The American Association of Community Colleges reported that the median earnings for a person eighteen years or older in 1999 with an associate's degree was \$29,457 as compared to earnings of \$36,525 for those with a bachelor's degree ("Median Earnings"). The disparity in economic value between a two-year and four-year degree persists over a lifetime, according to Kathleen Porter in "The Value of a College Degree." She cites Day and Newburger's 2002 statistics that "associate's degree holders earn about \$1.6 million; and bachelor's degree holders earn about \$2.1 million."

5. Ira Shor is blunter: "Working-class and minority students are being cooled-out en masse in the lesser institutions and lesser tracks set up just for them" (qtd. in Tinberg 56). See also Brint and Karabel: The two-year college offers the masses the promise of upward mobility while also managing their ambition by serving as a gatekeeper for further education and diverting, with greater or lesser success, many of its students to terminal programs which lock in their positions in the class system (9-11).

6. *Stopping out* is a term used to describe the process of students leaving college before completing a program or earning a degree but who intend to return. Many students at our two-year campus at Middletown stop out and reenroll—sometimes more than once—usually due to financial circumstances and their multiple family and work responsibilities in addition to the demands of their academic work.

7. Longitudinal studies such as those by Marilyn Sternglass and Anne Herrington and Marcia Curtis show that students develop writing fluency, confidence, and skill over the course of several years, not in a single course.

8. William Condon and Diane Kelley-Riley, reporting on large-scale assessment at Washington State University, found that student writing often showed an inverse relation between correctness and critical thinking; that is, correct papers tended to be superficial, and papers rated higher on their critical thinking rubric were not as error free (66). They note that teaching writing must occur all across a campus and involve faculty from all disciplines since writing and critical thinking are rhe-

torically situated; excellent writing is different for different contexts and purposes. They conclude that “multiple measures within robust assessment systems yield a more complicated portrait of what faculty teach and what students learn” (69).

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