

# FOREWORD

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It's been fourteen years since *Field of Dreams: Independent Writing Programs and the Future of Composition Studies* was published. Much has changed in the world in general and in higher education in particular. My sense is that the chapters that comprise this volume demonstrate the reality of the new world of higher education. The collection's title plays off of the optimism of *Field of Dreams* yet still acknowledges that there are, indeed, "Triumphs" amidst the very real "Tra-vails." The reality is that after feeling the exuberance of attaining a goal, all of us are faced with the necessity of implementing the vision into a workable reality. That's not always easy and is often fraught with danger.

I also think it's crucial for us to remember that when talking about specific academic units like departments and programs such as Independent Writing Programs (IWP), we are really looking at micro-levels within an institution. All academic units also exist within the macro-environment of the institution as a whole and within the whole changing nature of higher education. Since most of our day-to-day existence exists within the academic unit, we have a tendency to focus on the micro-level. All the chapters in this collection tend to do so, though some clearly position themselves more within their own institution's macro-level structure and mission. Taken as a whole, they give us a wider picture of what it means to be an IWP within the broader structure of both American and Canadian institutions.

Before turning to some of the individual chapters, I think it pays to make a few comments about higher education in general. For most of the past century or so, higher education has changed slowly and has a tendency to be conservative (in the sense of holding on to myths of the past). We are now seeing large changes being forced on higher education from the outside. Budgets are being slashed and institutions are forced to respond. On the surface, the current climate of austerity might make it seem that new independent departments are the last thing an institution would consider. However, I think, if conceived and presented within the current climate, independent writing departments might better fit the emerging model than traditional academic units. That doesn't mean it will be easy or obvious or that the same strategy will work at all institutions. The chapters in this collection help to give us a range of options.

While the editors of this collection have placed the chapters into four identifiable sections, the reality is that there is much overlap. In many ways, they are all stories. They all talk about location, the methods they've used for getting to where they are (though not always where they'd want to be), and they have all enacted some kind of transformation. Interestingly, key chapters are about separations that didn't happen. Rhoades, Gunter, and Carroll tell the story of how they transformed a writing program and were well on their way to independence when numerous administrative changes and uncertainties led to no organizational changes. I suspect this is a story whose final chapter has not yet been written. Likewise, Lalicker relates how he courageously, with the help of a supportive dean, helped to create an environment where writing can stay in English and still be productive. Clearly, the situation within Lalicker's department has improved. Yet, it is unclear whether the current situation is sustainable. While the increase in tenure line writing faculty helps, it's also possible that the unit might create a critical mass where more change is inevitable.

While some of the stories told here are about units that are relatively new, many have been independent for some time. Like most academic units they have had some growing pains and some successes. Royer & Schendel, Thaiss, et. al., Gopen, Hjortshoj, Johnson, and Filling-Brown & Frechie all bring us up to date on how their programs and departments have met the challenges of independence and have succeeded. Likewise Kearns and Turner and MacDonald, et al. do the same for the Canadian context.

While it would be relatively easy to comment in detail on all the chapters, I do think there are several chapters which uniquely show the real power of independence. One of the "Five Equities" Lalicker writes about is "governance." For academics, a part of "governance" resides in curricular issues. Writing Studies faculty must be able to shape their own curriculum in the same manner as other disciplinary faculty. No one would expect history faculty to have more say in psychology curriculum than the psychologists. Yet, that is often what happens in English departments where literary faculty control writing curriculum. And as Royer and Schendel explain, Writing Studies focuses on text production not the final product. That makes a tremendous difference. For example it's much easier when the focus is on text production, rather than on the finished product, to be comfortable with different kinds of digital documents—creation processes tend to be similar even though final products may be very different.

Along the same curricular lines, but perhaps even more powerful, are the curricular changes Hanganu-Bresch articulates. While Writing about Writing (WAW) is slowly making its way into many writing programs, the reality is that creating writing as content for writing courses becomes much more sensible and attainable when it is initiated by an IWP. In her analysis of WAW and

Rhetorical Education and its potential impact, I think Hanganu-Bresch really gives us a glimpse into the future. Despite the general challenges facing higher education that I alluded to earlier, the fact that IWPs can shape curriculum that will address both transfer and professionalism gives them a potential upper hand in surviving in the face of austere philosophies.

I think while Hanganu-Bresch provides us with the content, that's not enough. We need to be able to convince others that what we do is valuable. We can find a sense of how to do that in Everett's chapter. The reality is that creating a new IWP, though fraught with all kinds of challenges, is doable (despite the Appalachian State narrative). What's even more difficult is implementing the change and then maintaining the integrity of the unit. Everett explains all of that and focuses on something most academics pay too little attention to: branding. The fact remains that having others know who we are and what we do is crucial to success in an independent unit.

In her chapter on employing effective change management techniques, Ross begins by taking on the accepted notion that all situations are local. While there are always unique local contexts based on history, personalities, and the like, she is right. Institutions do tend to respond in similar ways. In many ways my earlier distinction between micro and macro-level concerns at an institution makes the same point. If we are going to achieve and maintain significant change, we need to understand how institutions respond in our current situation and how to best communicate our needs within that greater context. I would suggest that Ross' argument is another piece of what Everett has called on when he invokes branding. Too often people outside of Writing Studies simply don't know who we are, what we do, and how we fit (or might fit) within an institution. Helping others to better understand us seems to be one of the best ways to navigate institutional minefields.

Finally, Davies takes on one of the thorniest problems that impact IWPs—labor issues. There is kind of a paradox when it comes to the relationship of IWPs and labor issues. On one hand, there is the myth that once Writing Studies is independent, they will be better situated to better address labor issues. The other side of it is the one that Davies alludes to in her beginning paragraphs where she refers to the independent model that is led by a “real” faculty member and primarily staffed by contingent faculty—the ultimate potential “boss compositionist.” Davies presents an alternative model where full-time (but non-track) faculty took part in the shaping and start up of a significant program.

Sixteen years ago, the turn of the twenty-first century, was a time of hope for higher education—especially for academics in Writing Studies. All of that optimism now feels like ancient history. Public higher education is now being starved by the same entities that have already starved the public schools. I hope

there is still time for the general public to wake up and stop the forces destroying the great public universities. Yet, while that battle is being waged at the national political macro-level, folks in Writing Studies can still work at their own local and disciplinary micro-levels. The title of this volume is apt. All of higher education, if not all of society, has become a minefield. Still, if we pay attention to the narratives related here, Writing Studies faculty, no matter where they are organizationally located, can continue to teach their students successfully. However, they must pay attention. It is imperative that they define themselves as Writing Studies, and carefully educate all their constituencies both inside and outside their institutions who they are and what they do. They should be defined positively as Writing Studies and not negatively as “not English.” I also think, and again this is shown in the chapters in this collection, that Writing Studies faculty need to be both flexible and pragmatic.

The reality is that higher education does need to change—though not in the ways that we seem to be moving. We, and all of society, would be better served if higher education were not seen as being separate from the rest of society but more fully integrated into it. Writing Studies, especially when it is independent and controls its own destiny, is positioned to help be a part of that change. As the authors in this collection have stated, we can't always get exactly what we want. However, we can, when we take chances and are willing to do some things differently, positively impact the perceptions which surround our field and even more importantly improve the education of our students.