18 REPRESENTING WRITING: A RHETORIC FOR CHANGE

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To articulate the central role of writing in the production and sharing of knowledge, we, as Writing Studies scholars, teachers, and program administrators, must acknowledge the importance of universities in this process since they constitute important sites of knowledge creation and dissemination. At the same time, many institutions in Canada have not reflected seriously on the role that writing and communication play in this process of knowledge production and dissemination. In fact, universities act as microcosms of the wider community, especially when instructors of writing and communication prompt their institutions to focus on discursive practices, and are therefore particularly important sites for enacting a "rhetoric for change." The lessons gained in the effort of enacting a "rhetoric for change" within universities can reveal important insights into the challenges that writing studies scholars face in the larger community. Yet, aside from Smith's account of such a rhetoric for community building (this volume) and Procter's diachronic analysis of such efforts in the case of a writing centre (this volume), few accounts exist from writing program administrators at Canadian universities that detail how their programs seek to create space for themselves within their home faculty, within their university, and on the national stage. In this chapter, I present a case study of my work as a writing program administrator at one university and review some of the lessons learned through my efforts to foster a "rhetoric for change" to contribute to the discussions of how writing programs can make their place and value known in a knowledge-based society.

I am using my work as a relatively new (less than three years) director of a writing program as a case study to explore the rhetorical challenges faced by individuals in this type of position at Canadian universities virtually every day. It is not only the directors that face these challenges, but the programs themselves and those who work within them. My own experience and that of my

program reveal something important and useful about the challenges involved in helping university colleagues, administrators, students, and others to see and accept writing as central to knowledge-making. I believe others who face similar challenges may find my experience and insights useful as they work to overcome similar challenges at their institutions. I flesh out the case study by analyzing four different documents that I have had to draft over the past three years as I try to develop and strengthen the writing program at my institution.

My goal has been to use writing—the drafting of official institutional documents—as a means of making the value of writing instruction known throughout the campus and beyond. Recently, for example, I worked on a submission to the committee that will select the next dean of our faculty. Over a dozen people on the appointments committee will review this document, starting with the vice-president (academic) and including representatives from across the university, including students. What issues do I highlight for them? How do I present myself and re-present the Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication program to them? What values and conception of writing (as grammar, as epistemic, as practical career training) can I count on them holding? What knowledge about writing should the next dean have? What do I want our program to accomplish in the next five years, and therefore which applicant will best help me to accomplish these goals?

This sort of rhetorical challenge comes my way routinely. While some of these documents must be written, many opportunities to write can be safely ignored or reduced to brief, unsubstantiated, and ineffective missives. And yet, if these documents are not written, we have little hope of changing the circumstances we find ourselves in: part-time labour forces, under-developed curricula, and under-funded research agendas. The short-term costs are often low, but the long-term effects of failing to engage with the broader communities of the university and the society can be severe.

Our engagement with our publics must be primarily rhetorical. Faber (1998) highlights "organizational change as a discursive process, sparked by a rhetorical conflict in an organization's narratives and images" (p. 217). Porter, Sullivan, Blythe, Grabill, and Miles (2000) also maintain that "institutional critique is an unabashedly rhetorical practice" (p. 612) where "sometimes individuals ... can rewrite institutions through rhetorical action"(p. 613). Too often, however, our field has not articulated "effective [rhetorical] strategies for institutional change" (Porter et al., 2000, p. 616). Porter et al. conceptualize "institutions as rhetorical systems of decision making that exercise power though the design of space (both material and discursive)" (p. 621) and that "these processes (rhetorical systems) are the very structure of the institution itself" (p. 625). The authors provide a case study of obtaining a usability lab for the professional writing program to

show how administrators can open up rhetorical spaces that garner support for their programs (pp. 629-630). Schneider and Marback (2004) reiterate the role of rhetorical action in initiating institutional change for program development:

> the intellectual work of writing administration is best evaluated not as bureaucratic functionalism (or service), nor as ideal reform discourse (or scholarship), but rather as guided institutional action, as introduction of a critical discourse that makes knowledge in, for, and about a writing program. (p. 9)

The sorts of documents I outline below are situated examples of "locations where rhetorical reinterpretation of the structure of institutions is possible" (Schneider & Marback, 2004, p. 10). But as Jurecic (2004) notes in her description of the changes in the writing program at Princeton, the scope of this reinterpretation often means "learning how to work creatively within constraints to alter structures and practices so that the institution becomes more responsive and humane to those within it" (p. 71).

To reinvent our institutions, we need to focus on rhetorics of change: passion, emotion, language, and narrative and how these are used to convey our practices in the writing, rhetoric, and technical communication programs we inhabit. We need to emphasize "development" over "remediation," strategy over skills, narrative over certification. These are just some of the shared places and premises for argument, what Aristotle called special topoi, that convey our values and commitment. In meetings with other administrators, I emphasize the role of rhetoric and judgment over form and skills, of Aristotle and Toulmin over the Harbrace Handbook and reductive approaches to language use. Ultimately, I hope these arguments will help our publics understand the intellectual, interesting, and useful work performed by our discipline and programs.

RHETORIC FOR CHANGE

What would a rhetoric for change look like? In the 21st century Canadian educational context, administrators (especially those with a quantitative research methodology bias) tend to be drawn toward a rhetoric skewed toward quantitative data. National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data, for example, provide one "benchmark" that can be used to compare performance across university departments and faculties. Each "unit" identifies goals, objectives, and deliverables (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2007). This language, however, creates an entire rhetorical world that most faculty engage only when all

other options vanish. An alternative rhetoric for change focuses on constructing a rhetoric that privileges narrative and qualitative data that capture the richness of the intellectual, interesting, and useful work of programs.

The most important challenge of a rhetoric for change is audience. It is telling that, academics expend the vast majority of their words writing to other academics (e.g., see Hyland, H. Graves, Paré et al., this volume). As an administrator, I spend most of my time writing not only to academics, but also to other, non-academic, audiences. Table 1 associates audiences with the genre sets I write:

These last four audiences may include academics, but they are not academics in Writing Studies; the nature of our communications is administrative, not scholarly. Current writing research in genre studies suggests that instead of looking at these audiences as the determining factor, we give primacy to the genre as social action and genre sets. Each text belongs to a set of texts or textual artifacts; some of these are "stable for now" (Schryer, 1993) while others seem stable for longer than I'll be working there (for example, writing calendar copy and proposals to create new courses).

This model of dealing with publics helps keep the focus on social action—what actions do I want to accomplish through the various texts I create day after day? The remainder of this essay explores that question in the context of a series of the texts I have written.

Table 1. Audiences and genres in administrative writing.

Audience	Genre
Students	Brochure Display unit Web site Ads in Gazette (student paper)
Parents	Brochure Display unit
Alumni	Marie Smibert Stewardship Report
Faculty and staff	Western News (university-sponsored weekly paper)
Dean's Office	Budget request Academic plan
Provost's Office	Budget request Academic plan

RHETORIC FOR (AND WITH) STUDENTS

The immediate audience and main participant in the social exchanges of the Writing program are students. They write me frequently—almost always electronically—with questions, requests, complaints, and appeals. In some instances, reproducing what these students write can be the most effective way to communicate with other students:
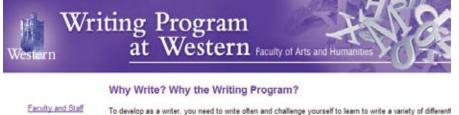
> I am a Western Computer Science alumnus who took Writing 101 in the spring term of 2004. I just wanted to say that it was the single most important and useful course I took in university, and I use the skills I learned in that course every day at work. (personal communication, September 2005, reproduced on program web site)

I reproduced this e-mail message, sent to me by a former student, for prospective students of our courses because I thought other students would be persuaded by it. In this case, one student speaks, indirectly, to others without having the text re-written in the administrative voice of the program. The claim that the course is "important" relies on the further claim that the writer uses what he learned in the course "every day at work." One warrant for this argument connects the value of study with future employment goals, an argument that I thought students would agree with. Another e-mail reported a similar success story:

> I just got a phone call yesterday from the Ontario _____ News saying that my article will probably be in one of the next two issues (the editor just wasn't sure about space, but she does want to use my article). She also said that she thought my writing was very good and is going to recommend me for a job there writing breeder profiles!

The data here—that the student's article would be published—is used to lead to the consequence: the student will be recommended for a job as a writer for this publication. The warrant behind this good news report assumes that one of the purposes of taking this Writing course (Writing for Publication) is to get published and, if possible, hired as a writer.

When I revised the copy for the Writing program brochure and Web site (Figures 1 and 2 below), I engaged the discursive world that these, and other, students expressed with my own arguments.

Writing Program at Western Faculty of Arts and Humanities

Western

Faculty and Staff

Writing Program Policies

Citing Authorities (pdf)

Writing Program Grading Guide (pdf)

Writing 101/121 Examination Guide

2006 Marie Smibert Award Winners

Writing Resources at Western

SDC Writing Centre

"I am a Western Computer Science alumnus who took Writing 101 in the spring term of 2004. I just wanted to say that it was the single most

Why Write? Why the Writing Program?

To develop as a writer, you need to write often and challenge yourself to learn to write a variety of different kinds of documents. The need to develop as a writer doesn't stop when you graduate from high school, or university for that matter. Your professors need to learn to write grant proposals, course syllabi, and annual performance evaluation memos, and students need to learn to write essays, reports, exams, resumes, application letters, feature articles, and more. Students in the Writing Program regularly get published: Recent Student Publications . . .

To get ahead, either in the university or beyond, you will need to improve your writing abilities. Taking courses in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities Writing Program will fast-track your university and work careers by helping you develop as a writer.

Special Topics for 2006-2007:

- Writing 291F Technical Writing
- Writing 292F Modern Rhetoric
- Writing 293G Legal Rhetoric
- Writing 294G Humour Writing
- Writing 295F Creative Non-Fiction

Certificate/Diploma Programs

After satisfying the prerequisite, you can take Writing courses in several different formats:

- just the one or two that interest you
- a Level 1 certificate (101 plus 2 others)
- a Level 2 certificate (101 plus 4 others)

Figure 1. Writing to students: the Web site.

In the texts in Figures 1 and 2, I was concerned with several ideas: that the students see their development as writers as ongoing; that they conceptualize writing as a broad range of kinds of writing; and that they understand writing as both academic and career-related. Beyond this initial introductory argument, the brochure and Web site describe the specifics of what the courses cover and what the requirements are for the certificate and diploma. In the design of these documents, we tried to convey professionalism through the production values (more successfully in the brochure, where we had a budget for a graphic designer).

On my office door, a less formal and more transient discursive field prevailed. At one point I posted the syllogism shown in Figure 3.

Ultimately, the appeal to money in Figure 3 falls short. It works with a portion of the student population, but not generally with the arts students. In fact, money and survival are low on Maslow's hierarchy of needs; at the top is self-fulfillment. With that in mind, I created the advertisement shown in Figure 4) and placed it in the student paper.
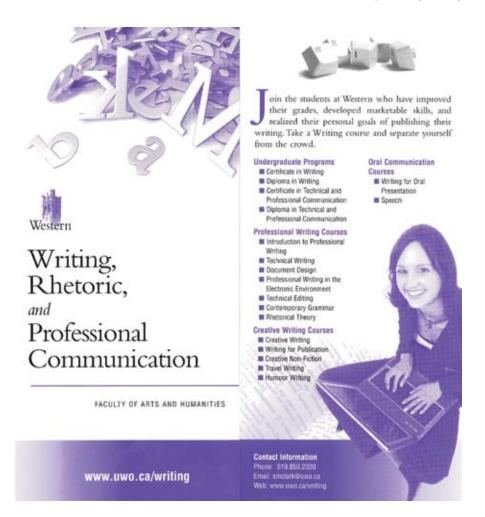
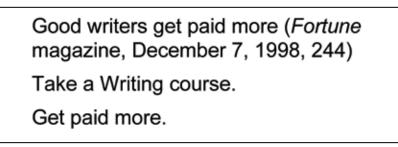Figure 2. Writing to students: the program brochure.

Figure 3. Posting on Writing Program Administrator office door.

Figure 4. Advertisement copy for student newspaper.

In this advertisement, I tried to draw attention to the desire many students have to see their name in print. Getting published, in any forum, validates the

author/writer. About 25% of the students in the "Writing for Publication" class do get published, and their e-mails to their instructors convey the emotional satisfaction that they derive from seeing their names in print.

A RHETORIC FOR ALUMNI

As a graduate student at Ohio State in the late 1980s and early 1990s I witnessed firsthand the power of public discourse applied skillfully to promoting Writing Studies programs. Andrea Lunsford, then vice-chair for rhetoric and composition, led a grant writing effort for Writing Studies initiatives in a series of successful grant competitions both within the state and nationally. One competition involved assembling over a dozen binders of documents in support of arguments extolling the virtues of our program and the vision Ohio State had for extending writing instruction to the city of Columbus and beyond. The money raised from these various grants paid for all sorts of initiatives and research that would not have been possible without them.

At the University of Western Ontario, an alumnus—Marie Smibert—created an endowment for the Writing program. As one of my responsibilities I write an annual report of how this money is spent. One report began this way

> It was a pleasure to hear Ms. Smibert speak at the alumni meeting in late October, and wonderful to witness the standing ovation in response to her inspiring address and call for more attention to the development of writing skills in students. We spoke for a minute or two after the awards ceremony, and I appreciate the depth of feeling and commitment that Ms. Smibert has given to the common cause of improving the writing of students at Western.

> In the past year since I joined Western in July, 2005 we have begun a series of initiatives to develop the Writing Program, including some things that were only made possible through the Marie Smibert Writing Endowment. Last summer we developed a new brochure ...

Ms. Smibert had given a short speech at an alumni fundraising recognition event that I had attended. The speech, the last of 8 consecutive speeches lasting over an hour, drew an extended, standing ovation from the audience of over 200 people. The "depth of feeling" referred to above is not an exaggeration; this gath-

ering of alumni reacted immediately and forcefully to her call for attention to the improvement of writing. By referring to this event I wanted her to know that I had been at the event and shared her goal of improving the writing of Western students. The rest of the document outlines the specific activities in which I had been engaged, including establishing a series of awards for student writers using money that she had donated to the University.

Since then I have written follow-up documents outlining how the Writing Program would spend further money that she was considering giving to the University. I have also met with, brainstormed, and then written proposals for obtaining funding from other potential sponsors to obtain money to support student internships, guest speakers, and course development. These arguments do not delve into the research literature of writing studies. There are no APA-style reference to (Graves 1994b). Instead, these conversations and the resulting documents focus on outcomes: what can we make happen, and why would that be a good thing? These documents are a product of social interactions—phone calls, e-mail queries, site visits by alumni representatives, drafts of documents outlining how gifts of time and money would change the curriculum—and are themselves part of the larger social system of fundraising and curriculum change within the university. Each document offers an opportunity to enact a rhetoric for change, rewriting, as Porter et al. (2000) emphasize, the space and role of Writing Studies in the institution, and changing how our various publics understand our programs and our discipline as a whole.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION

Perhaps the most important group that writing studies scholars must address consists of university administrators. A third core area of rhetorical action takes place through documents discussed, negotiated, and written for various administrative offices of the university. Perhaps the most important of these are budget documents. Budget documents, contrary to their name, are not about money—at least, not directly. They are used to obtain money, but they do not involve sophisticated formulas and spreadsheets for program directors. The key aspect of a budget document is argument: why should the administration fund the writing program/department?

To illustrate this aspect of the discourse, consider the following argument for a new faculty position for our program:

> To support the development of the technical communication
> aspect of the Writing Program, we request a probationary ap-

pointment in the area of technical communication to support the Faculty of Arts and Humanities strategic areas of focus on applied language study and visual culture (new media). This person would enable us to broaden the technical communication curriculum within the Writing Program. This person would also enable us to work effectively with the Faculty of Engineering as it expands its communication curriculum beyond the third-year course they presently offer. For example, this position would enable us to develop a graduate technical communication course that could be offered through the Advanced Design and Manufacturing Institute (ADMI) and at the Sarnia campus. The position would also enable us to run workshops for the graduate students and faculty in Engineering on writing for publication, writing dissertations, and presenting the results of research orally.

This request was not successful for many reasons, not the least of which was competition from within our Faculty. In addition, the link to the study of visual culture, while it made sense to me, was not followed up by conversations and negotiations with the Visual Arts department to get their support for the position. Contrast this request with the following argument that was successful:

To support the development of the technical communication aspect of the Writing Program in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, we request a probationary appointment in the area of technical communication. While this person would be located in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, their work would be interdisciplinary in two ways: first, writing courses draw on communication genres from a wide variety of disciplines: reports, white papers, instructions, letters and memos; and second, these courses teach students from a wide variety of disciplines.

This proposal responds to the Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents (OCAV) Guidelines for University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations, an important outcomes benchmark for evaluating all university undergraduate programs in Ontario. Item 4 on this list is Communication Skills, "The ability to communicate information, arguments, and analyses accurately and reliably, orally and in writing to a range of audiences." This position would also help improve the National

> [US] Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results because it contains four items that measure communication ability: 1c, 1d, 11c, and 11d. When students write in class, they often do so in groups, yet another measure of student engagement on the NSSE survey. Finally, it is imperative that UWO improve the ability of Western students to write because good writers on average earn three times more than poor writers (*Fortune,* December 7, 1998, 244).

The first proposal focuses on how this position would build the curriculum within the Writing program itself and then goes on to make the case that the position would also help with curriculum development in one other faculty, Engineering. While this made sense to me, it does not foreground the more general, widespread goals of the university as expressed in the budget documents sent out to solicit proposals. Those documents identified graduate education and the University's theme of "the best undergraduate experience at a research-based institution." The second proposal links explicitly to another theme identified in the budget—interdisciplinarity. By explicitly and immediately arguing that the new position would contribute to the university's goal of increasing our interdisciplinary work, the second proposal attracts the attention of senior university administrators.

The second paragraph of the second proposal highlights another important theme from the budget solicitation for proposals: the undergraduate student experience. In Ontario, the Ontario Council of [University] Academic Vice Presidents (OCAV) (2005) developed a set of degree expectations for university graduates in all academic programs. These guidelines identify six areas of competence: breadth and depth of knowledge, knowledge of methodologies, application of knowledge, communication skills, awareness of limits of knowledge, and autonomy and professional capacity. All students in every university program are expected to demonstrate "the ability to communicate, accurately and reliably, orally and in writing to a range of audiences." This requirement, set by the universities themselves to head off benchmarks imposed by the provincial ministry of education, creates an obligation to create and staff academic programs. The senior administrators who ultimately allocate budget lines were on the OCAV committee and presumably found this aspect of the argument persuasive.

Another argument targets "benchmarks" or "outcomes" using the National [US] Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) . The University had adopted the National NSSE survey and scores as "benchmark" data to use to compare how successful we were in improving student engagement. NSSE data is

used extensively in the United States and increasingly in Canadian universities to measure how well a particular university, faculty, and even department achieves its mission. The survey is given to students after their first year at the university and again six months after they graduate. Of the 80 questions on the survey, four questions ask students specifically about how well they have improved their oral and written communication skills. The comment about writing in groups links writing instruction to other questions on the NSSE survey and thus was meant to indicate that offering more writing instruction opportunities would improve the scores on other questions as well.

The last sentence of the successful proposal excerpt for a new position refers to an article in *Fortune* magazine. This brief article refers to a study done for the US Department of Education, but other reports could also have been cited to serve the same purpose (Conference Board of Canada, 2007; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006; National Commission on Writing, 2003; 2004). Most recently, the TD Bank Financial Group (2007) issued a report called *Literacy Matters: A Call for Action*. The report identifies university graduates as examples of the startling decline in general literacy levels:

> [I]t is a quite shocking fact that many Canadians lack the necessary literacy skills to succeed in today's economy: a situation that is eroding their standard of living. Surveys show that almost four in 10 youths aged 15 have insufficient reading skills; while more than two in 10 university graduates, almost five in 10 Canadian adults and six in 10 immigrants have inadequate literacy. (TD Bank Financial Group, 2007, p. 2)

The report argues that these levels of literacy have both economic and social affects, including high school drop out, long-term unemployment, and crime rates (2). For writing program administrators, the following passage is of particular interest:

> However, one surprising statistic is that 22 per cent of university graduates do not achieve adequate scores in prose literacy. There is an age and immigration effect within these results. Between 11 to 14 per cent of Canadian-born university graduates aged 26 to 55 have inadequate prose literacy. This highlights the weak literacy in Canada's two official languages of older university graduates and immigrant university graduates. It also poses the question whether it is acceptable that roughly one tenth of Canadian-born university graduates do not have adequate prose

literacy. (TD Bank Financial Group, 2007, p. 8)

Because senior administrators interact with the Senate of the university, the Board of Governors, the press, alumni, and the federal and provincial governments, they must attend to documents like *Literacy Matters: A Call for Action*. By citing them in budget documents and linking writing initiatives to them, writing program administrators can attract budgetary resources to their programs. But to do so, we need to continue to share these documents when they become public. We also need to understand what Aristotle might call the "special topoi" of arguments, that is, the specific resources for argument, that appeal to university administrators and budget decision makers. To some extent these topoi vary from institution to institution, but public policy documents and reports can be used to create and support arguments for our work.

WRITING, KNOWLEDGE, ACTION

As the case analysis in this chapter illustrates, advancing programs in Writing Studies requires a robust effort to enact a "rhetoric for change" in our institutions. To build well-funded, research-based, and intellectually stimulating programs in universities, we need to write ourselves into the narratives of our institutions (Faber, 1998), insert ourselves into the rhetorical practices that affect decision-making (Porter et al., 2000), and create plans and documents for guided institutional reform (Schneider & Marback, 2004) within the constraints of our institutions (Jurecic, 2004).

This is done by working within genres or writing sets of documents that attempt to enact change in how writing is conceptualized (for example, as knowledge-making and not correctness in spelling). We need to create an awareness of how writing works to enhance student learning in their courses across the curriculum—writing is a fundamental part of learning in any subject area. As we continue this work, we need to attract research funding to continue the work by contributors to this volume of demonstrating how writing is a fundamental part of knowledge-making in disciplines throughout the university and beyond. For this purpose, we need to write to a variety of audiences using evidence from think-tanks, businesses, government studies, and students themselves. But most importantly, we need to continue to build a rhetoric for change specific to the worlds we work in so that we can apply the knowledge base of writing studies to improving the material circumstances of our programs and our discipline.

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