

John Brereton

THE DOCTORATE IN COMPOSITION AT WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

Within the last few years, many English departments have begun offering Ph.D. programs in composition. These programs have varied enormously, depending on local needs, institutional capabilities, and the ideologies and beliefs of individual faculty members. This variation seems entirely appropriate. Though composition has been around for a very long time, it is just now becoming a discipline within English, so it is far too early to settle upon a single curriculum for training future teachers and researchers. What follows is a description of one new Ph.D. program, begun in 1980 at Wayne State University. I have provided some historical background on the program's beginnings, for, like programs at other universities, Wayne's has evolved through a unique combination of local conditions and national perspectives and reflects its institutional setting.

THE SETTING

Wayne State, located in Detroit, Michigan, is a comprehensive urban university enrolling some 34,000 students. In addition to a medical school, law school, business school, school of social work, and school of education, Wayne State has a College of Liberal Arts which offers graduate work in some forty-four disciplines, including the Ph.D. degree in fourteen separate areas. The English Department has M.A. and Ph.D. programs which, until recently, offered work only in English and American literature. In 1980 Wayne State began a Ph.D. in English with a concentration in composition.

As a setting for a doctoral program emphasizing composition, Wayne's English Department has certain important assets. Perhaps the most

John Brereton has taught at Rutgers, Columbia, and the City University of New York and is currently Director of Composition at Wayne State University. He is the author of A Plan for Writing (Holt, Rinehart), a basic writing text.

telling is that English at Wayne State includes much more than literature. Linguistics and creative writing have long been integral parts of that Department; recent additions include American Studies (shared with History), film, and folklore. The setting for the program, then, is not a narrowly constituted notion of English as literature only, but instead a wide, encompassing sense of what English as a discipline can mean. Interestingly enough, the early history of English departments reveals that literature came rather late in their development; composition, linguistics, and folklore were all taught before the way was made clear for literature.

Another of Wayne's assets is the important part composition plays in the English Department's work. Approximately 6000 students take writing courses each year, adding up to sixty-five percent of the Department's total teaching load. Besides the regular basic writing and freshman composition courses, we provide an English Language Institute for students of English as a second language; a large Writing Workshop, founded in 1959, which offers tutorial and support services in English at all levels; and a growing technical writing program which serves students in the College of Engineering. Other composition coursework includes Writing from Evidence, Advanced Expository Writing, The Personal Essay, and Scientific Report Writing. Composition is taught at every level, from required freshman courses to electives for seniors and graduate students. In addition, the English Department provides faculty at Wayne's extension division, the College of Lifelong Learning, which offers composition courses at branches all over metropolitan Detroit. (Wayne's creative writing program, not part of the composition program, enrolls over five hundred students annually in courses in the writing of fiction, poetry, and drama.)

This varied effort of teaching different kinds of composition at so many levels is a valuable asset for students interested in the teaching of writing. While Wayne has consistently attracted graduate students on the national level, it has also played an important role in continuing the training of teachers already employed in schools and colleges throughout South-eastern Michigan. Many of these students have been attracted to Wayne for its variety of programs and for the chance to pursue a doctorate while already teaching. Thus, all graduate classes at Wayne have always had students with some classroom experience, and many classes have had very experienced teachers who brought their practical expertise to bear on the intellectual issues at hand.

These three factors, the breadth of the Department, the extent of composition teaching already going on, and the experience of many of the graduate students, were all present well before a decision was made to

offer a Ph.D. with a specialization in writing. The assets were in place, but it took the nationwide interest in writing as well as the concurrent decline in job openings for graduates with Ph.D.'s in literature to focus the Department's attention on devising a suitable program.

DEVELOPING A PROGRAM

The program that eventually evolved was the work of a number of faculty members who approached the issue from different perspectives. Various models of doctoral programs were examined. One model was similar to programs found in schools of education, providing a range of methods courses, coursework in reading, language development, statistics, and literature, all leading to a dissertation of a pedagogical nature. This model did not find favor, since from the first the Department envisioned a degree that would be almost entirely research oriented, with no room for extensive methods coursework or dissertations on pedagogy.

Another model involved linking the composition degree to an already existing program in an established social science, in Wayne's case, psychology or anthropology. Students would get their empirical work in, say, cognitive development or sociolinguistics, while the English Department would provide the pedagogical and theoretical components. Though the English Department spent a great deal of time exploring a formal linkage with the Department of Psychology, faculty felt such a link would provide too narrow a framework for the professional training needed for today's writing teachers and researchers.

Wayne decided to follow a third model, based on a combination of one half literature courses and one half courses bearing directly upon composition. Neither literature nor composition is narrowly defined. For instance, reader-response criticism usually falls into the literature half, while rhetorical theory fits into composition. Additionally, students interested in composition may apply their knowledge of rhetoric and the composing process in literature courses. So, for example, a paper on Renaissance drama might employ rhetorical theories, or an essay on Yeats might examine his revision process. There were three reasons for Wayne's decision to adopt this model. First, the literature program already had a number of staff members with a strong theoretical bent who were doing research in fields—semiotics, rhetorical criticism—that would complement a composition program. Second, there was a distrust of narrow composition specialists who could not make their research available to those trained in more traditional literary fields. Third, it seemed sensible to stress the closely interrelated processes of reading

literature and writing prose in order to give students a full picture of how language may be employed. Finally, and probably most important of all, it was assumed that graduates of the program would be taking their place in English departments and would often be called upon to teach surveys and introductory literature courses. Since composition is almost always based in English departments, it seemed essential that graduates fit in with their colleagues and not be viewed as people unequipped to teach anything but their specialty. It could be argued there are far too many of such types in English departments already, specializing in literature, not composition.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE PROGRAM

A Ph.D. at Wayne State requires sixty credits of coursework, half in literature and half in composition. There are four comprehensive examinations, two in literature and two in fields related to writing. One of the literary fields must be a chronological period, such as Romanticism, while the other can be literary criticism. The dissertation must be an original contribution to scholarship; the research can be empirical or critical, but dissertations with a pedagogical focus are not permitted.

The composition part has as its core three required courses: Survey of Research in Writing, Teaching Expository Writing, and Classical Rhetorical Theory. Additionally, all students must take two of the following three courses: Introduction to Syntax, Psycholinguistics, and Sociolinguistics. The intention behind the core is to provide a common body of knowledge for all students, an overview of the main research areas a composition student might specialize in. Students are expected to pursue their interests with coursework that builds upon the core requirements. Thus, someone interested in rhetoric would also take Rhetorical Criticism, Contemporary Rhetorical Theory, and some criticism courses that stress rhetoric. Someone interested primarily in psycholinguistics could take additional coursework in the Psychology Department, including Higher Mental Processes, Theories of Learning, Development of Intelligence, and Psychology of Language. To secure an adequate foundation, such a student would probably take statistics courses as well. Other options include a wide range of linguistics courses as well as additional work directly in composition, including Writing Theory and Writing as Process. This variety of courses, many of them already offered in other cooperating departments, allows for an in-depth concentration, while the core requirements insure that students in differing areas will have a great deal of coursework in common.

DESCRIPTION OF CORE COURSES*

Survey of Research in Writing introduces students to the current models used in composition research. The first model discussed is empirical, which includes case studies such as Emig's *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* on the one hand, and empirical studies such as Hunt's *Grammatical Structures Written at Three Grade Levels* on the other. The second model is theoretical, which includes work by Kinneavy, Booth, and Corbett in rhetoric, as well as reader-response criticism as practiced by Iser and Fish, to name two of its most prominent exponents. The third model of composition research is developmental, as espoused by Britton, Bruner, and Moffett. Survey of Research in Writing grounds students in the basics of research; they become intelligent readers of writing research and have the chance to develop beginning projects of their own.

Classical Rhetorical Theory, as the name implies, covers writers from Plato to Augustine. Particular emphasis is placed upon Plato's *Phaedrus*, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, on Longinus, Cicero, Horace, Quintilian, and on Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*. Secondary reading provides critical interpretations of the classical theory as well as modern applications.

Teaching Expository Writing, the one pedagogical course in the program, must be taken upon entrance by candidates who do not possess suitable teaching experience. It covers the writing process, curriculum design, and classroom techniques. Readings include Emig, Irmscher, Moffett, Murray, and Shaughnessy.

Introduction to Syntax presupposes some training in linguistics at the undergraduate level. It examines differing approaches to syntactic analysis, including traditional grammar, structural linguistics, and transformational grammar. Readings include Jespersen, Bloomfield, Gleason, for background, and Chomsky and contemporary transformational linguists. This is the basic course of the graduate linguistics program and can lead to advanced work in phonology, case grammar, stylistics, and discourse analysis.

Psycholinguistics treats the mental processes involved in speaking and writing. Students are introduced to a psychologist's point of view in doing

*Lists of authors and texts studied are for illustration only; course content changes with the addition of new courses or instructors. There is, as yet, no "required reading list," though one may be developed as the program—and the discipline—evolve.

writing research. Writing students will concentrate on Vygotsky, Luria, Chomsky, Bever, Fodor, Frank Smith, and Kintsch. This course, currently taught in the Psychology Department, leads to a wide range of work on cognitive development and higher mental processes.

Sociolinguistics focuses upon language users, speech communities, and the role of social context in the production and reception of language. An important aspect of the course is the role of different dialects, both in speech and in writing, with particular attention to Black English and its relations to the standard dialect. Authors studied include Bernstein, Dillard, Labov, Goffman, Hymes, and Stewart.

INTERDISCIPLINARY COURSEWORK

The Ph.D. option in composition is interdisciplinary. Though most courses are given in the English Department, a significant number are taught in the Departments of Psychology, Anthropology, and Speech. Classical Rhetorical Theory, for example, taught in the Speech Department, attracts students of drama, speech, communications, and literature, as well as composition. Sociolinguistics, taught in the Anthropology Department, attracts social scientists as well as writing researchers. This kind of cross-registration is particularly valuable to students who will work in writing-across-the-curriculum programs, for early in their graduate training their advanced courses outside of the English Department expose them to alternative points of view. These mixed classes ideally build a respect for and understanding of the demands of other disciplines, and at the same time train students in a body of knowledge that goes well beyond the standard fare available in most English programs. The alternative method, to provide such courses within the English Department, runs the danger of watering down the subject, making it "sociolinguistics for English students," a dangerous enterprise, at least until writing researchers have produced a body of knowledge large enough to justify such a narrow specialization. A further advantage of the cross-registration is that students in other disciplines can receive a corresponding understanding of the theory and practical applications of English language and literature.

It should be clear that the mix of coursework required and the demands of the very different disciplines inevitably limit the program to highly capable students. The doctoral candidates in the program have to compete with and be held to the standards of literature students in their literature courses, psychology students in their psychology courses, linguistics students in their linguistics courses. This built-in rigor was planned. If composition is to grow as a discipline, and graduates of Ph.D.

programs in writing are to contribute to the body of research, there is no room for an easy curriculum. For too long composition has suffered from the notion that anyone could do it, that thinking about the writing process does not entail much hard work. There is a good analogy with the early days of English literature studies. To counter the common nineteenth-century criticism that studying English would degenerate into "chatter about Shelley," the first English programs required an extraordinary amount of scholarship, including intensive work in philology, Anglo-Saxon, Gothic, and Old Norse. Only such a difficult program could hope to convince skeptics that English as a discipline had enough intellectual content to be fully respectable. Fortunately, those days are past, but the lesson seems clear. Composition studies will gain respect and prominence only to the extent that they produce graduates who can make significant contributions to knowledge, and small, demanding programs are well-suited to providing prospective researchers who can do the kind of work needed.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

No responsible program can hope to train teachers and researchers without placing heavy emphasis upon actual classroom experience. One way to provide this experience is to supply coursework on methodology, as has been done, with mixed success, in schools of education. Wayne's program takes an entirely different approach. Since the degree is designed to produce composition theorists and researchers, adding on methods courses would reduce the time available for other work bearing more directly on writing theory and research. At the same time, theory must connect with practice, and since students are expected to become competent teachers, a full program of supervised classroom instruction is provided.

The pedagogical course, Teaching Expository Writing, operates in tandem with many opportunities for part-time teaching. Candidates can serve simultaneously as tutors or adjunct instructors in the Writing Workshop, working with students, usually freshmen, who need additional help in their composition courses. A full time coordinator oversees the tutoring sessions, holds workshops, and prepares materials. Recently, much of Wayne's tutoring has taken the form of small group instruction, with three to five students signing up for a one to three session sequence on some troublesome aspect of language. These sessions provide prospective composition specialists with practical experience that can enrich their theoretical studies. The Writing Workshop also gives the remedial course for students who fail Wayne's junior year proficiency

examination. Instruction here is in groups of five to seven, and is coordinated by the full time director of the Workshop, who plans the curriculum and works closely with the instructors. Other adjunct work, available for those with a master's degree, usually involves teaching up to two sections a semester of freshman composition, which at Wayne is divided into a two-course sequence, with about half the entering freshmen exempted from the first part.

By their second year, most doctoral candidates can expect to hold graduate assistantships, with a teaching load of three composition courses a year. Assistants receive pedagogical training in their course in Teaching Expository Writing, and also from the Department's extensive mentoring system, in which all full-time faculty participate. Each semester all graduate assistants, whatever their program, are observed once by a senior faculty member and once by the director or the assistant director of composition. Sets of graded essays are examined after every observation, and a detailed report is sent to the graduate assistant. Additionally, the graduate assistant discusses the classes in a follow-up conference with the director of composition. This mentoring involves a good deal of time, but it is deemed absolutely necessary if potential composition teachers are to receive proper preparation for their careers. There are also monthly composition staff meetings focused on different aspects of writing instruction. One of these meetings, required of all writing teachers, is a grading session to determine departmental standards. The assistant director of composition, whose task it is to supervise all graduate assistants, also holds informal gatherings in order to compare notes and discuss teaching strategies. In addition, the Department holds bimonthly composition discussion groups that deal with a book or article the participants select. Attendance at these groups is optional—the only stipulation is that everyone have done the reading—but a large percentage of students find these sessions valuable, for the discussions encourage exploration of the connections between different courses and disciplines as well as an interchange between graduate students and full-time faculty.

Wayne State's Ph.D. program in composition was consciously designed to be modest in scope. Seven full-time English faculty (three in linguistics and four in composition) presently teach in it, and more full-timers may be added in the near future. The composition program, which in 1981-82 will enroll ten Ph.D. students, operates in the context of an entire graduate program of two hundred students, of whom fifty are Ph.D. candidates. It is expected that the first dissertation will be finished in two or three years, assuming those who entered in 1980 continue to make

steady progress. In a department where everyone teaches composition, this small but growing program offers professional training in the branch of the discipline that has always provided the bulk of English departments' work. With this type of program English departments can supply the training in teaching and researching writing that has been missing for so long.