

Harvey S. Wiener

## PREPARING THE TEACHER OF WRITING

In her article, "Those Undertrained Ph.D.'s in English," Gertrude S. Fujii raises important issues about the qualifications of college teachers. Ph.D.'s in English, she says, are not by their intense work in literature overqualified, as some have argued, to teach the freshman writing courses filling most English instructors' programs these days. Her point is that these Ph.D.'s, fresh from graduate school and unskilled in teaching the rudiments of the language, are undertrained. For these teachers, limited in experience with concepts in grammar and spelling, Fujii maintains it is insufficient "to be able to recognize a structural error in a sentence. The teacher must be able to explain why it is an error and must understand the principle that makes it an error."<sup>1</sup> Fujii's point is not unfamiliar: good graduate instruction would train Ph.D.'s to teach freshmen how to correct their mistakes. Yet, anyone teaching basic writing over the last decade knows that before students can address error—and certainly they *must* address it—they must understand and practice the writing process in order to learn to think of themselves as writers. The instructor's task is as much an effort to bring about synthesis as it is a guide to analysis.

I do not quarrel with requiring good language skills of college writing teachers or with the assertion that training at our graduate schools does not adequately prepare teachers of English to meet classroom challenges today. The interesting question for me is just what aggregate of skills and talents *will* qualify an instructor to help beginning students best in becoming writers? Four years ago when I addressed a related question, I raised ten more that focused on what seemed to me then and now as well

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<sup>1</sup> Gertrude S. Fujii, "Those Undertrained Ph.D.'s in English," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 23 February 1981, p. 25.

to be essential skills for instructors who teach writing. I return to this issue of qualifications, however, for several reasons.

First, I believe that the profession, through its national organizations, is turning its attention at last to college teaching and to the best way to prepare those who will have to do the job in the next decades. At open hearings, Modern Language Association members have pressed MLA's Commission on the Future of the Profession, for example, to address in its final report the issue of appropriate graduate preparation. There is reluctance to charge colleges of education with responsibility for prescribing correct programs for college writing instructors, given a general dissatisfaction with past and current programs of teacher preparation and a growing awareness that specialists with advanced degrees in language and literature should assume a more active role than before in training their future colleagues. Only professors of content in the profession can help avoid what Francis Bacon calls in *The Advancement of Learning* "the over-early and peremptory reduction of knowledge into arts and methods."

Second, I note the growth in size and number of graduate programs in teaching writing over the last few years. That, too, encourages me to discuss qualifications for instructors because I suspect that these programs, unfortunately, are mushrooming in much the same way that basic writing programs have mushroomed since 1970—in response to a perceived audience but, ironically, uninfluenced by the kind of consensus college English instructors (through the MLA and other associations) seem now just on the verge of sharing. This is a consensus that only practitioners can develop: a definition of just what successful graduate training for prospective writing teachers entails. With little agreement about what works where and for whom, programs and courses proliferate.

Third, after many years as a teacher in the basic writing classroom and in various positions as a writing program administrator where I have had to evaluate the qualifications of teaching faculty, and after a few years as an instructor of graduate students preparing for careers in writing instruction, I want to update my earlier recommendations by adding some and by elaborating upon others. And last, I want to draw together some of the important suggestions I have read and heard about suitable

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<sup>2</sup>Harvey S. Wiener, "Questions on Basic Skills for the Writing Teacher," *College Composition and Communication*, 28, No. 4 (1977), 321-324.

training for teachers from colleagues who have addressed this issue in a variety of forums.

I now believe that the first and most important qualification for teachers of basic writing is that they be practicing writers who apply whatever formal training or finely tuned instincts they have about the creative process, about linguistics, grammar, and stylistics, about editing, revising, and polishing a piece of work. Only teachers who write—stories, poems, novels, essays, books, speeches, articles, reports—can continue to broaden their vision of the incredible challenge that inheres in the production of words and sentences on a page. Only writers who frequently write in different contexts can develop the range of skills their beginning students require of them.

Richard Marius, head of Harvard's Expository Writing Program, points out quite correctly "that writing teachers should themselves regularly publish and that their publications should not all be about teaching writing."<sup>3</sup> Extending this point, James Raymond argues that teachers who are not good writers and editors will not develop as good teachers. Tracing the sorry history of language training, Raymond believes "that teachers are often insecure as writers and editors, and that the guidance they give their pupils is chancy at best." He suggests that "proper training for English teachers might reasonably include healthy doses of writing and editing courses in addition to courses that view language from the value-free perspective of linguists."<sup>4</sup>

Programs that provide the kind of balance Raymond suggests—I would add intensive training in literary analysis for reasons I shall come to later—are few and far between, so far as I can tell. Departments seeking teachers of basic writing advertise for those with degrees in rhetoric or in linguistics, but I have not seen much to support the idea pretty well accepted in many quarters that such programs of study make major contributions in producing teachers who write, in helping them create strategies that encourage reluctant writers to explore language, or in stimulating the kind of expansive approach to student writing that beginners require. We must await evidence that connects graduate

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<sup>3</sup>Richard Marius, "Faculty Indifference to Writing: A Pessimistic View," *Writing Program Administration*, 4, No. 2 (1980), 9.

<sup>4</sup>James C. Raymond, "Epilogue: Literacy from Five Perspectives," *Literacy as a Human Problem*, forthcoming from the University of Alabama Press.

programs in rhetoric and linguistics with the day-to-day lessons by which basic writing teachers must unravel the writer's craft.

I do not mean to suggest with my doubts, however, that I think the more traditional graduate study in literature currently prepares basic writing teachers to achieve these goals. As it stands now, the "straight English" advanced degree does not achieve them adequately either. However, it is inadvisable to reject out of hand literary training, with its demonstrable strengths, in favor of other, less proven, training. Undoubtedly, all graduate programs that prepare writing teachers must offer courses in writing, in editing, and in language study; and there must also be courses in how to teach writing to beginners offered by experienced and successful writing teachers with impressive publication records. (Strong programs over the country do include some of the training I am suggesting, but in too many institutions it is insufficient, unfocused, and intermittent.) In this sense, graduate students *are* undertrained. It is particularly ironic that at the City University of New York—where the basic writing effort began, really, with the advent of Open Admissions in 1970—there is no systematic instruction for doctoral students in the kinds of writing, editing and teaching skills demanded for the writing classroom.

Recognizing the shortcomings in graduate instruction and the dearth of hard data that would suggest the prototype for a full course of study, I am convinced, along with many colleagues, that skills in literary analysis are exactly the kinds of skills that, placed in the appropriate perspective, have the strongest potential for creating the best teachers of writing. In a paean to Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, Kenneth A. Bruffee establishes the perspective I am talking about. Bruffee says that Shaughnessy "puts much conventional academic research in English to shame" because she applies to the work of beginners what "other scholars in English reserve exclusively for conventional problems in literary criticism."<sup>5</sup> There is in this statement, of course, censure of the kind of one-track activity by which much of our profession moves. But Bruffee's point is, finally, very positive. Shaughnessy's efforts are a model for us. They imply that the teacher's goal is to make a real difference in the lives of other human beings by helping them to know and to use their minds. *Errors and Expectations*, he continues, "shows how much highly intelligent, truly sophisticated, engaged scholars can do with the tools of

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<sup>5</sup>Kenneth A. Bruffee, "A New Intellectual Frontier," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 27 February 1978, p. 40.

their trade to generate new knowledge through serious research into their subject, and into the process of teaching it, at the basic and introductory level."<sup>6</sup>

The point I am trying to make here is that conventional training in literary analysis does equip writing teachers to deal intelligently with student prose—if they learn to apply their skills to it. I agree with Fujii when she praises the advanced degree because I believe, too, that it provides essential perceptions about literature and language and that it offers the kind of knowledge that helps not only to improve skills for students, but also to give them “appreciation of cogently expressed thought, recognition of logic and ethics, and comprehension of the greatness of the human spirit expressed through the written word.”<sup>7</sup> Further, writing a dissertation and completing it is an experience of great value, beyond whatever contribution it might make to personal knowledge of content or to literary scholarship. The long creative effort of the thesis is the work of a writer suffering the craft; the practice with language on paper is precisely the kind of practice with process and product that teachers can learn to recall and to reexamine in developing a course of study for beginning writers. Certainly, it is not the doctoral degree in literature per se (Shaughnessy had none, although her academic training was, in fact, in literary criticism) that creates conditions for excellence in the basic writing classroom. However, the habit of mind nurtured by advanced degree programs, the kinds of insights about writing that such programs in literature cultivate, are what basic writing teachers must bring into the classroom and to a page of a beginner’s efforts. Questions we ask about an essay by Bacon, a poem by Shelley, a story by Faulkner are questions we must ask in order to interpret and to evaluate student writing, too. It is regrettable, as Nancy Sommers points out, that “we have been trained to read and interpret literary texts for meaning, but, unfortunately, we do not hold the same set of assumptions for student texts as we do for literary texts.”<sup>8</sup> Experienced writing teachers who now serve on advanced degree faculties can help correct this dislocation of assumptions. Equipped with skills for examining literary prose closely and intelligently, literature Ph.D.’s must learn to bring those skills to bear on student writing.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Fujii, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup>Nancy Sommers, “Responding to Student Writing,” Section A1, Conference on College Composition and Communication, Dallas, 26 March 1981.

My earlier recommendations for writing teachers were that they develop the basic skills of research and evaluation, learn to identify objectives clearly and to influence budgets, offer instruction in grammar that is appropriate to growth in writing, develop textbooks and classroom strategies for effective teaching, train others (both newcomers to the discipline and those in other subject areas), and see the task of instruction in basic writing as one eminently worth doing.<sup>9</sup> Still I emphasize those skills as crucial. I would add all the personal, human qualities that distinguish any professional who works with people: patience, determination, energy, dedication, sensitivity, sincerity, gentleness, honesty. There are others, certainly. Yet for the basic writing teacher, the skills I have laid out in this paper are the most important qualifications: preparation for the specialized teaching we do must continue to emphasize literary criticism, along with other language study and along with editing skills that teachers can use to help beginners. (I am not suggesting that instructors edit student writing, merely that they be able to guide students to do it.) Equally important, writing teachers must *write*. And they must learn to apply their talents as writers and as critics to the work produced by their students.

The question of how to achieve these goals as I have laid them out is by no means easy to answer. Our first response might be to create new courses; and surely, as I have suggested, we can enrich graduate programs by adding a few courses that would teach critical reading skills to advanced degree candidates and show them how to teach those skills to undergraduates and other courses that would teach non-literary research skills, rhetorical and composing process theory, and the kinds of linguistic and grammatical information useful to basic writing teachers. But given the financial conservatism currently plaguing higher education, I do not think batches of new courses are the answer.

In the first place, we must bring to masters and doctoral programs a sense of the riches in intellectual inquiry awaiting those graduate professors who teach and study writing, no matter what their particular literary interests. Shaughnessy's work already has captured the imagination of some of our best scholars and writers, among them E.D. Hirsch, Adrienne Rich, and Irving Howe, and will inspire many others. Next, we must ask literature faculty to attend more than they have in the past to the

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<sup>9</sup>Wiener, 321-24 *passim*.

centrality of writing—of producing pages of sustained prose—to courses currently offered for graduate students. Surely, many professors already focus in their lectures and class discussions upon the composing process as some great writer worked it through to achieve a magnum opus. We look, for example, at Milton's drafts for *Lycidas*, at Eliot's drafts for *The Wasteland*, at Fitzgerald's drafts for *Tender is the Night*, at the two editions of *Sister Carrie*, and we know that there is much to learn about the creative imagination by following the record of a writer's choices on paper. But I have more in mind when I ask for a central role for writing in the graduate program. We must help English faculty, as Elaine Maimon argues, to "formulate a consistent philosophy for teaching composition"<sup>10</sup> within the literature courses they now teach. Maimon points out there will be problems in developing that philosophy: "A consistent theoretical formulation of this kind requires many English teachers to break old mind-sets and to reflect seriously on unexamined prejudices about teaching composition."<sup>11</sup> As she notes, we must "work with English instructors, frequently senior colleagues, who were nurtured to expect that professional advancement meant no more 8:30 a.m. classes and no more teaching composition."<sup>12</sup>

I am not suggesting here that graduate literature faculty should teach freshman writing (although I would welcome it, certainly); but I am suggesting that they demand of their students in graduate seminars enough writing and enough good student responses to writing so that students immersed in analytic explication are, at the same time, synthesizing ideas in original prose and are reflecting on the process that stimulates sentences and paragraphs. Such an approach would require the production of drafts in a healthy collaborative setting, where students think on paper, write in an atmosphere that encourages risks with language, work with their peers, and revise, edit, and rewrite whatever they produce.

Of course, with this plan graduate instructors will need to read more of what their students write; but with students counseling each other on drafts and of course improving content, instructors will be evaluating

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<sup>10</sup>Elaine P. Maimon, "Writing in the Arts and Sciences: Getting Started and Gaining Momentum," *Writing Program Administration*, 4, No. 3 (1981), 9.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.

papers at more advanced stages of completion than before. Thus, more writing for students need not mean more editing and grading for teachers. Students responsive to collaboration and guided by their teachers can evaluate the work of classmates. The instructor should see himself, ultimately, as one reader alongside others who are less skilled in subject matter, certainly, but who are no less able than the instructor to explicate the prose of their peers. Reading graduate students' papers is work not much different in kind from literary explication.

Studying in a program where more of their courses followed the plan I propose, modern graduate students along with colleagues thirty years their senior could begin to see the fruitful connections between what one studies in graduate school and what we teach in the university. And yet, it will not be easy convincing literature faculty that they can and should direct energies toward helping their apprentices to write. Ironically, just as we are convincing colleagues in disciplines other than English to assume more and more responsibilities for advancing skills in writing, we discover the disorder in our own houses. Maimon reminds us with her reference to Walt Kelly that the enemy we have met is us.

But there are no enemies here. Those of us with backgrounds in literary scholarship who, for whatever reasons, have given much of our time to writing instruction and who have discovered the rewards in such a plan must urge senior colleagues to join us in a collaborative spirit. At one institution, perhaps a series of workshops like those Toby Fulwiler describes at Michigan Tech<sup>13</sup> will spur graduate faculties to reevaluate their courses. At another, perhaps a consultant from outside the university will stimulate a new direction for graduate seminars, like those to be offered by Robert Lucid, Humphrey Tonkin, and Peter Conn in the University of Pennsylvania's graduate English program. At another, a talented department chair or a strong writing program administrator, perhaps, can lead the way to change among colleagues who teach advanced degree candidates.

These suggestions by no means exhaust the possibilities for achieving a program that I think might train a generation of successful teachers of writing. Whatever the method, the goal is the same. Already in place as fertile seeding grounds, American graduate programs in English need to broaden their emphases and, in so doing, to propose courses that connect

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<sup>13</sup>Toby Fulwiler, "Writing Across the Curriculum at Michigan Tech," *Writing Program Administration*, 4, No. 3 (1981), 15-20.



solid research in literature, a commitment to writing and editing, and instruction in writing in the classroom. This combination of offerings will bring us all much closer to the “new intellectual frontier” Kenneth Bruffee sees for opportunities in basic studies.<sup>14</sup> It is a frontier only somewhat more developed than in the past, a frontier still awaiting critical exploration from those well enough trained to carry the work forward.

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<sup>14</sup>Bruffee, p. 40.

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

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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

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\*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.