

Loathing in Literary Studies," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (December 1983): 349-364; "Fear of Fish: A Reply to Walter Davis," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (June 1984): 695-705; "Consequences," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (March 1985): 433-458.

³Is There a Text in This Class, p. 14.

⁴Is There a Text in This Class, p. 336.

⁵Edward M. White, "Poststructural Literary Criticism and the Response to Student Writing," *College Composition and Communication* 35 (May 1984): 193.

⁶Thomas Newkirk, "Direction and Misdirection in Peer Response," *College Composition and Communication* 35 (October 1984): 309.

⁷Elizabeth D. Rankin, "Revitalizing Style: Toward a New Theory and Pedagogy," *Freshman English News* 14 (Spring 1985): 7.

⁸Timothy J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), p. 21.

⁹Reiss, p. 11.

¹⁰Reiss, p. 31.

¹¹Reiss, p. 31.

¹²Reiss, p. 42.

¹³Stephen Mailloux argues that the New Criticism gained academic respectability by adapting itself rhetorically to the scientific ideology of American universities; see "Rhetorical Hermeneutics," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (June 1985): 633-637.

¹⁴James A. Berlin, "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," *College English* 44 (December 1982): 765-777.

¹⁵Jon Harned, "The Intellectual Background of Alexander Bain's 'Modes of Discourse,'" *College Composition and Communication* 36 (February 1985): 42-50.

¹⁶The term derives from Richard E. Young, "Paradigms and Problems: Needed Research in Rhetorical Invention," in *Research in Composing*, ed. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell (Urbana: NCTE, 1978), pp. 29-47. For historical studies of the paradigm, see Albert R. Kitzhaber, "Rhetoric in American Colleges, 1850-1900," Diss. Univ. of Washington, 1953; and James A. Berlin, *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 58-76.

¹⁷Paul C. Rodgers, "Alexander Bain and the Rise of the Organic Paragraph," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 51 (December 1965): 399-408.

¹⁸Janet Emig, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (Urbana: NCTE, 1971), p. 4.

¹⁹"Contemporary Composition," p. 774.

²⁰Quoted in "Contemporary Composition," pp. 774, 775.

²¹Reiss, p. 28.

²²*Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979), p. 8.

²³*Interpretive Social Science*, p. 5.

²⁴Telling criticism of Fish's examples may be found in P. D. Juhl, "Stanley Fish's Interpretive Communities and the Status of Critical Interpretation," *Comparative Criticism* 5 (1983): 47-58; James Phelan, "Data, Danda, and Disagreement," *Diacritics* 13 (Summer 1983): 43-45; and Robert Scholes, *Textual Power* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 149-165. For criticism of Fish's epistemological position, which amounts to an application of Kant's doctrine of the synthetic a priori to the world of cul-

ture, see E. D. Hirsch, "The Politics of Theories of Interpretation," *Critical Inquiry* 9 (September 1982): 235-247, and, in the same issue, Stephen Toulmin, "The Construal of Reality: Criticism in Modern and Postmodern Science," 93-111, which argues that purely objective description and purely subjective interpretation are the opposite ends of a spectrum and that most inquiry in both the natural sciences and the humanities falls somewhere in between.

²⁵Walter A. Davis, "The Fisher King: *Wille zur Macht* in Baltimore," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (June 1984): 667.

²⁶Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

FRESHMEN, "FOCUS," AND WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

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Teaching students to "focus" an essay — to limit and define a controlling main idea (or "thesis") and to marshal reasoning, illustration, and evidence around that main idea — is a central goal in most freshman composition courses. We like to tell ourselves that focusing is one skill that students can carry with them to their writing in other disciplines and in the professions. That assumption, however, is more complicated than it seems, and teaching students how to transfer their focusing skills to writing outside the composition class requires deliberate and thoughtful pedagogical strategies.

The difficulty is illustrated by a typical freshman composition student of mine I'll call Tami — a bright, responsible student who paid attention when we studied the importance of focusing around a limited, specific thesis, and of organizing evidence logically to support the thesis, and when we discussed the uses of writing to discover a focus or thesis. She wrote several nicely focused essays. I told the class that these same skills should be applied to all their writing. The same semester, however, Tami wrote a history paper that appeared as though it had been produced by someone who had never heard of the need to focus around a specific, limited thesis. It was a cut-and-paste pastiche of encyclopedia facts about the assigned topic. Tami was not synthesizing her freshman writing skills with her history class, nor was she using writing to synthesize information in history. When I asked her what her paper's thesis was, she looked at me in shock.

The history professor obviously had a part in what happened — more about that later. Nevertheless, I couldn't help feeling that if Tami was shocked at the very idea that "thesis" was relevant in the history class, I had not done all I could for her. And not I alone. Preliminary analysis of data from a longitudinal study of three college students by Lucille McCarthy indicates an ambiguous and problematic relationship between their freshman writing course and their writing as sophomores in other courses.

Before we can determine how best to help our students acquire and use focusing skills, we need some idea of how "focus" appears in a variety of disciplines. The record of Tami's writing process in history, as well as data colleagues and I have collected from college students writing in biology and business classes, will offer a "bore hole" sample of the shapes "focus" takes, and the skills needed to achieve it, in courses at various levels and in various disciplines across the curriculum.

Tami's assignment in her freshman core history class was delivered orally. The instructor, an inexperienced adjunct, asked students to write a paper on the colonization of a third world country. According to Tami's notes, the instructor suggested students would need information about three aspects — the situation before colonization, the events of colonization, and the results of colonization. Tami's log and her notes and drafts reveal several important features about her concept of focus and her attempts to achieve it in that environment:

1. She spent an inordinate amount of time and thought on the choice of a country.
2. She appears never to consider that she might use or need a thesis for her paper.
3. She seems to have assumed without question that the instructor's three aspects were to be the three sections of the paper.
4. She used the topic and the three sections as a guide to information-gathering and to focusing and organizing her paper. After collecting a book and two encyclopedias about Algeria, she went through them, taking notes first on aspect 1, then 2, then 3. She wrote her paper the same way — putting down some facts that would fall under aspect 1, then 2, then 3. The day before the paper was due, she went through her draft, and, as she states in her log, "Cut out detail that didn't seem connected. Made sure that all included information was directly related to the guidelines for the paper."

She had the concept of checking and revising a draft for focus, but her guideline seems to have been only "Is there anything in any section of the paper that is not related to the teacher-suggested topic for that section?" She relied on a single revision strategy — deletion.

In a large state university upperclass biology class, biologist Virginia Johnson Gazzam and I have collected notes, drafts, interviews, classroom records, and think-aloud tapes produced in the course of students' natural fulfillment of their assignments. Their instructor was skilled and experienced, with extensive training in a writing across the curriculum workshop. There was extensive use of writing as a tool for learning, and careful guidance of the writing and thinking process, as students developed their assignment — to conduct original research and write a scientific report. Also, they were asked to read a section from a composition text that suggested formation of a thesis as one tool for achieving focus. Yet one of the most difficult problems these students reveal in their drafts and in their think-aloud tapes while composing, was the problem of focusing. None of them appeared to use the composition text's discussion of thesis, though one conscientious student actually reads it aloud on her tape.

In writing a report on original scientific research, the focus problem for students assumed two facets. First, they had to know exactly what they were trying to discover, and to shape a method that controlled all relevant variables and that addressed their specific hypothesis or question, while keeping extraneous material out of the experiment and out of the written report.

Second, students had to deal with the conventional scientific report format. Here their think-aloud tapes reveal two problems — first, reconciling the order of the format with the order of their experimental activities and with the order that might naturally suggest itself while beginning to write about the experiment, and, second, deciding how to apportion the information

appropriately among the various sections. For example, while composing the initial draft of the materials and methods section, a student would muse aloud, "maybe this should go in the results section." The train of thought in drafting was interrupted by quandaries about placement of material in the final report format. Despite the difficulties in drafting, some students eventually sorted it all out appropriately; some did not.

The scientific report format may discourage the kind of focus one finds in an essay — arguments marshalled in logical order to support a thesis. Bazerman has pointed out that in the social sciences, professional writing has moved from argumentative essays, where points followed the author's choice of sequence, to a rigid format in which each section is labelled ("Codifying"). Today's format suggests, perhaps especially to inexperienced student writers, that all one need do is chuck into each section whatever material has something to do with the topic of that section — a temptation much like that faced by Tami with her instructor-given aspects, which she took as sections of the paper.

At a selective, mid-size private college, Daniel Singer, of its management/marketing department, and I studied three sections of an upperclass business management class taught by the case method. In their case analyses, students were instructed first to compose a "strategic statement" about the firm, summarizing its present situation, then to examine the aspects of that situation (resources, environment, etc.), then to analyze the firm's central problems and make recommendations. In tandem with this upperclass capstone course, I also examined drafts and revisions of essays written in response to a short case, by introductory economics students, with a skilled senior instructor, at another, smaller and less selective private liberal arts college, in a different area of the country. In both situations, a number of students correctly identified the firm's problems, and made good suggestions for remedies, but were not able to focus their papers around the major problems and recommendations. One important key to success, as we examined the notes and drafts of the upperclass management students, seemed to be the student's ability to break away very early from the case's organization and begin to organize even notes and early drafts around key ideas that would become the central problems and recommendations in the final written analysis. Unsuccessful students were marked by their adherence in notes and drafts to the case's own, deliberately mixed organization. For example, an unsuccessful student retained throughout her drafting the case's division into the steel division and the aluminum division of the firm, making separate, isolated recommendations to each division, while more successful students organized the paper around the central problem — the firm was not sure which business it was in — and interpreted the interrelationship between the steel and aluminum divisions as symptomatic of that larger problem. Their instructor's suggestion that they work out the strategic statement and the discussion of environment and resources first, was partly a guide to a working method, and partly a guide to organizing the paper, but if used too narrowly as a guide to organizing, the suggested order was incomplete, since the best papers were clearly organized from the beginning as arguments to support the writer's final problem analysis and recommendations.

In the introductory economics class, students were given no suggested order of sections. The less successful students merely gave a list of recommendations, with no priority order and little internal coherence. A number of students' drafts contained key insights — for example, the suggestion that the restaurant owner had not specifically enough identified his market — but some students buried this key insight among other recommendations

such as firing some waitresses or changing the menu. Obviously, they could read the case and state the key problem, but in that environment they could not organize a focused case analysis around the key problem.

This sampling is not broad enough to represent every major demand or problem students face in focusing their writing across the curriculum, but it does help a freshman composition instructor to understand what his or her students will be asked to do after the composition class is over:

1. To apply the concept that readers need and want focus, even when the instructor assumes rather than states the need for focus, or when the instructor's emphasis upon topic and upon parts or aspects masks the need for focus in the final paper.

2. To expect that a major goal of the student in the course is to come to understand what constitutes focus in a particular genre, discipline, and classroom, and for a particular audience.

3. To correctly interpret the assignment: is the student being given a focus, or merely a broad topic area? Are parts in the assignment a selection of get-started questions, a guide for the order of thinking or investigation, an inclusive list of material to be covered, or an outline of required sections for the final paper?

4. To be able to depart from the order of written text and/or the instructor's suggested aspects, in order to find a focus and to organize material in support of that focus.

5. When working within a required format, to impose whatever larger focus is needed, transcending individual sections, and to choose and order material within the parts, consistent with the larger focus.

What do these insights mean for the freshman composition class? Joseph Williams, in a recent address, made the point that some aspects of increased maturation as a writer are not inbuilt developmental stages to be mastered once forever, but rather stages in the development of skill in a particular type of writing — stages, then, that must be mastered anew by each person learning that type of writing, no matter how sophisticated in other types of writing. He and others have suggested that we look upon each classroom as a separate "culture" or "speech community," whose singular expectations and constraints shape the writing that takes place among its students. A discipline, likewise, may be seen as a "culture." It would follow, then, that a person who can function comfortably and effectively in one culture will not function effectively in another culture until that person has learned *its* particular expectations and constraints. Thus the composition class does not simply push students up a few rungs in a single human developmental ladder, but also creates its own culture, which students master in order to write successfully in it. But if the composition class is to fulfill a goal of preparing students for writing in other disciplines, it must equip students with the skills and expectations that will help them adapt and learn as quickly as possible, once they step into the new culture represented by a course in a different discipline, with a different instructor and set of constraints and influences.

Our success in teaching student skills that are applicable to other "cultures" depends, then, upon our teaching them not just to focus the essays we assign in composition class, but our equipping them with the expectations and skills that will help them learn to focus their writing appropriately within the "culture" of other disciplines and classrooms. I will suggest several pedagogical strategies I believe could help achieve these ends. Needed in the future are studies that will trace the effects of such strategies upon student attitudes and behaviors.

First, I would suggest that students can profit from graphic illustration that certain attitudes about the writer and about the

nature of writing are common to nearly every writing culture. Tami would have profited from the knowledge that, in most academic classrooms, writers must be makers of meaning, not merely shovelers of information into a row of ready bins. In addition, she needed to know firmly that readers, because they are human, need to perceive a focus in what they read. An instructor can present focus as a human need. Ask students to read a focused piece of writing and an unfocused one, then test their recall. Bring into the freshman classroom a variety of writings, from various fields and situations, and analyze what is the writer's main idea. If your instruction for freshman essays uses thesis formation as a tool, point out that in some types of writing, the main idea cannot readily be expressed as a "thesis," but rather can be understood as a dominating purpose (to teach someone to assemble a bicycle; to present information someone will need to conduct further research). Students must see that, in some form or another, the concept of focus applies to most writing situations.

Second, one can specifically teach the forms of writing students will likely meet immediately after their composition class. Discuss the academic paper in its several variations, telling students that sometimes an instructor will have them write a paper that is little more than a transcription of library information, arranged by categories, copied down for the purpose of learning it, but that *most* academic papers are intended as a preparation for the papers academics write to each other, to present information for a specific purpose, and defend positions. Discuss with students how academic papers function, why they are written, how a discipline builds upon the past work of its scholars, and what is the rhetorical stance of the scholar who interprets a phenomenon and then proposes and defends that interpretation before other scholars (Bazerman, "What").

One can make the lesson about readers and about the academic paper more graphic by bringing into class writers from other fields. A psychologist has had my class on the edge of their seats as she described how she got an idea for a particular paper, researched work already done, discovered someone had already written on her idea, saw a related area still unexplored, shaped a hypothesis, designed an investigation, wrote her report, and got it published.

In addition to knowing that focus, in some form, is necessary for readers and will be crucial to the success of most writing in the disciplines, students should also be led to see that audience analysis, in some form, will be universally useful. Again, in addition to talking broadly about analyzing the education, expectations, and needs of various segments of the public or of business audiences, encourage immediate application by discussing the next audience students will face after composition class — the college instructors who assign them their history and chemistry papers. (Specific advice to students about their instructors as audiences is found in Walvoord, *Writing*, pp. 13-14.) You can bring to your class instructors from other disciplines to explain what they look for when they read student papers. To avoid vague disquisitions, ask each instructor to bring sample student writing and actually to demonstrate how the paper meets or does not meet the instructor's needs and expectations. Students see that instructors are real people, with specific expectations, to whom an academic paper is expected to communicate a real meaning. In my experience, the common refrain that will ring again and again in these talks is that instructors want interpretations, focus, coherence, not just recital of random information. My students are always impressed by the strength of this common expectation.

My final suggestions involve the students' ability to handle assignments and conventional formats. Students can be taught to analyze an instructor's assignment, just as they can be taught close reading and interpretation of any other text. Particularly, one can give them practice in determining whether their instructor is giving them a focus, or merely a broad topic area, within which they must narrow and focus. This is the advice that would have warned Tami not to accept her instructor's three aspects as the parts of the paper, and not to assume that those three aspects would provide her only needed focus. Teach students to ask themselves, "Within the expected number of pages, can I say everything there is to say about the assigned subject? If not, does the assignment make clear how I should limit and define? If not, how shall I focus?" Teach them to ask questions of their instructor, such as "Should we try to cover everything about this topic, or should we find an angle or define a narrower aspect?" In doing so, you help them to overcome the disadvantage of an instructor who may not be elucidating expectations clearly, or who has not carefully thought through the assignment. (Two texts that teach assignment analysis are Walvoord, *Writing*, and Hashimoto, Kroll, and Schafer).

Since so much of students' writing outside the composition class must adhere to conventional or instructor-given formats, the composition class can help students make that significant transition from the essay to the format-driven piece of writing. Give students direct practice in writing within a required format. Formats are all around us; we need merely to adapt one to our uses. For example, an art instructor at my former college asked her students to write student-teaching reports that had the following sections, in this order:

1. Description of the community
2. Description of the school
3. Description of the art department
4. Recommendations for improvement in the art department

As samples of her students' writing show (Walvoord, *Writing*, p. 44), a major problem for students is to create a unifying focus, so that the descriptions of community, school, and art department include not just a random selection of facts, but the information that prepares the reader for the recommendations. I show my students a sample of art student reports, and we discuss how the first 3 sections should be planned and shaped to lead the reader logically to the recommendations. I also show them a well-written real estate assessor's report (Walvoord, *Writing*, pp. 42-44), which I got from the president of the local real estate assessor's organization. Within its traditional format, a real estate assessment, like the art students' reports, also has a "neighborhood description" for the property whose value is being assessed. Students are asked to justify every piece of information in the neighborhood description. They quickly see that only that information is given that helps establish the thesis of the assessment — "This property is worth \$250,000."

More than showing students that material in every section must fit the focus and purpose of the whole, I help them see that required formats, such as are used for real estate assessment and thousands of other situations in college and in the professions, have arisen because they are logical ways to arrange information to support a particular point or focus. In some cases, such formats also embody the assumptions and methodologies of the discipline (see Bazerman's articles), but you can treat only as much of that aspect as your students are ready to understand. Before my students see the real estate assessment, I ask them to plan

how they would support the thesis, "This property is worth \$250,000," writing for an audience of the property owner, potential buyers, and a governmental or legal audience. They usually come up with the suggestion that one would first establish a definition of "value" and how it would be determined. Then one would describe aspects of the property such as its neighborhood, its history, its improvements, its current condition. One would also have to establish the qualifications and defend the procedures of the assessor. I now show my students that they have composed a rough approximation of the conventional sections of a real estate assessment. One can do the same for the conventional scientific report format, or for the diagnostic evaluation or client progress report that, in one form or another, is used in many agencies that deal with clients seeking therapy, advice, or services. I got such a format from my college's speech therapy clinic (Walvoord, *Helping*, pp. 103-106).

Once you have some formats, adapt them for yourself and your freshmen. For example, have them assess the value of anything they own, and make them follow a simple version of the real estate assessment format. Or have them assess the needs of someone they are helping or could help, using a variation of the diagnostic evaluation forms. In doing so, they must tackle the same problems the biology majors in our study tackled — what goes where? Should I draft material in the same order as the paper's final required sections? Need I draft the whole paper at once? If not, which sections should be drafted first? Can I change the format? If so, in what situations? What should be the relation between one section and another? How shall I mark the passage between one section and another? Do I need formal transitions as in an argumentative essay, or is a subheading sufficient? It doesn't matter whether the answers for your adapted format are different from the answers students will work out in science class or speech therapy clinic — what matters is that they get a first pass at some of the strategies involved in writing to a specified format.

Obviously, integrating the kinds of instruction I have suggested with the composition class could be implemented gradually over several semesters, learning as one went along. A necessary component is the study of the types of writing students will be asked to produce in other disciplines and professions. One can approach colleagues and simply ask them to address one's class, or to bring a sample piece of writing from their field and talk to you about it over lunch, or to share a batch of student papers and discuss with you what makes them succeed or fail. Another excellent way of learning about writing is to offer your composition students the option, as one of their composition papers, to work with you on an assignment in one of their other classes. The paper they write is for that other class. To get credit in composition, the student must keep a careful log, detailing how he or she worked on the paper, must bring you all notes and drafts, and must meet with you periodically to show you the progress on their papers. These sessions are enjoyable to me because, while I am helping the student to improve the paper, the student also gets to be the "instructor," introducing me to the constraints and traditions of a discipline new to me. The cooperative effort also gives me a chance to communicate with the professor, to clarify what is expected, and to compare our reactions to the student's work — usually a mutually pleasurable and beneficial exchange.

Once we begin to know what our students will actually be asked to do out there, and what are the common problems they face, we can use these or other methods to prepare them more effectively to use their focusing skills across the curriculum.

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Writing with a Purpose: Inhibiting Effects of Prescriptive Alternatives

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In "You Write with a Purpose; 'You Breathe' and Other Needless Assertions," which appears in the Winter, 1984, issue of *Freshman English News*, Irvin Hashimoto is highly critical of certain maxims currently popular among college writing instructors. I agree that each of these assertions might indeed seem "needless" when evaluated in isolation. I also believe that each might temporarily disorient students who have been taught to assemble prefabricated essays or who have reached the empirically sound conclusion that English teachers often encourage self-expression but evaluate grammar, spelling, and punctuation. I do not feel, however, that any one of these statements (except "Writing should be done on both sides of the brain," which would probably appear quite bizarre in any context) is totally without value when considered in light of the realities of the freshman classroom. I doubt, furthermore, regardless of the use to which these current dictums may actually have been put, that they were initially intended either to support the inclusion or exclusion of specific types of assignments or to justify non-teaching. Rather, their existence seems to be a direct reaction to certain prescriptive assertions. To verify such a contention, one need only consider the paralyzing effects of the mechanistic "writing rules" that are taught in many high schools and even in

some colleges and that represent the most popular alternatives to the assertions Hashimoto condemns:

The first step in writing an essay is to make an outline. That the act of writing consists of a series of steps is acknowledged here. Nevertheless, students are given the disastrous impression that each step is the same for all writers at all times, that the overall process is never recursive, and that all writers work from unalterable formal outlines. Worst of all, by implying that writers arrive at final decisions concerning organization before they have identified content, this directive denies the existence of the analysis and synthesis that usually precede and/or accompany the production of written discourse. As Lindemann emphasizes, students who blindly follow preconceived patterns "prevent themselves from discovering the material's organic unity and finding new implications in the subject" (167).

The outline must contain Roman numerals I, II, and III. Students who take such advice at face value are stifled before they have even had a chance to determine the tentative perimeters of their essays, primarily because they must find some way of slicing their topics into three equal parts, whether or not such divisions are feasible or logical. One need look no farther, then, for the origin of such strikingly odd opening sentences as "My past experiences with composition and literature were good, bad, and in high school" or "In evaluating the course outline to be used in freshman English this semester, I think that it is complete, confusing, and handed out on the first day of class."

For every A in the outline, there must be a B; for every 1, there must be a 2; etc. The problem here is that students are encouraged to generate odd couplings of incongruent ideas, each pair consisting of an important concept followed by an anticlimactic or nonsensical one: "I had two problems when reading novels in high school. First, I sometimes lost track of what was happening because the writer used flashbacks and other devices. I would get what a character had done mixed up with what his father had done, or I would think he was doing something now when he had really done it as a child. Second, I sometimes could not find any of the required novels in the school library." In fact, I have known students actually to omit from their essays interesting, complex, and original points they had clearly articulated during prewriting discussion periods simply because they didn't, as one student put it, have "a second good idea to go with the first one."

An essay must have five paragraphs. In other words, an essay must have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, with the body consisting of the I, II, and III that appear in the outline. But students either follow the five-paragraph scheme so closely that their essays lose all distinguishing characteristics or interpret the rule to mean that their essays must have five indentations and, employing a distorted version of what Stern calls "rhetorical choice" in paragraphing (299), proceed to bisect and consolidate ideas for the sole purpose of creating five groups of sentences shaped like paragraphs. The most interesting fact about this five-paragraph rule, however, (and a very telling one) is that it is not readily accepted by educators outside the field of English. On several recent occasions, for instance, I have found myself, due to the current interest in "writing across the disciplines," sitting among audiences composed of instructors from various departments