perhaps above all else, a keenly rendered illustration of the worldly consequences of composition and interpretation. In one of many quotations and anecdotes from doctors, nurses, administrators, and others in the field, for example, an anonymous school psychologist says: “I am currently working with a child who has been to six psychologists this year, and each report has a completely different diagnosis” (52). And a Correctional Health Services Administrator reports: “I once read a note on a black client which said something like ‘Mr. X was very guarded during the interview. He gave very little information about his mother, and probably doesn’t even know who his father is’” (59). With glosses like these complementing the authors’ analyses, this book gains dimension as a contextualized reminder of how writing and reading are indeed always “interpretive procedures” (64).

It should be noted, however, that teachers of writing are not the only ones who might benefit from Reynolds, Mair, and Fischer’s study. Sections from the book could be used in a regular first-year composition course to explain, for example, source(s) of discourse bias (chapter three) or, more practically, in preparing students for a similar assignment, to demonstrate coherent presentation of survey results (chapter five). And for a writing-in-the-disciplines course—one focusing on health sciences communications, for instance—this short book might make an excellent primary text, not only for its argument, but as a model of collaborative investigation and systematic analysis.

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Of the making of books about the so-called culture wars, it seems there will be no end. The ideas in this book, however, deserve wide attention, both inside and outside the university. Written in a lucid and engaging style, _Beyond the Culture Wars_ presents an argument familiar from Graff’s other recent work. Tracing the history of American education, Graff claims that recent controversies over race, gender, and ethnicity are not, in fact, recent. Debates about curriculum—and predictions of doom accompanying every change therein—have been with us since the beginnings of American higher education. Until now, however, it has
been possible to ignore these issues, but changing demographic, economic, and intellectual developments have forced them to the surface. Equally unsatisfactory as solutions are the liberal pluralist inclusive curriculum (which ignores controversy) and the conservative great books approach (which shuts down controversy); instead, Graff contends, we must teach the conflict itself, letting it shape and give meaning to the curriculum. In fact, one of the sources of the current failure of higher education is the compartmentalization of the university, with its separate colleges, departments, and courses. Everything is so fragmented that students see no connections among their courses. Teaching the conflict, however, would not only reveal the links among the various segments of the students’ university experience but it would also draw students themselves into the debate, making them more interested—and ultimately responsible for their own learning.

This particular version of Graff’s argument is intended for a general readership, but along the way he makes some points that academics might well learn from. He begins by showing the way in which new directions in education have been oversimplified and otherwise misrepresented by their opponents and the media, debunking, for example, Christopher Clausen’s often-repeated “wager” that The Color Purple is being taught in more English classes than all of Shakespeare’s plays combined. Although it is amusing to read the results of Graff’s survey of classes at his own university (Shakespeare 82, Walker 1), he makes a telling point: “If the university has become easy prey for ignorant or malicious representations, it has asked for them. Having treated mere image as beneath its dignity, the academy has left it to its detractors to construct its public image for it” (21).

Graff goes a long way toward constructing a much more attractive (and accurate) image of educational practices in the portions of the book in which he describes his own changed approach to teaching Heart of Darkness after reading Chinua Achebe’s attack on that novella. This account also helps clarify the frequently misunderstood nature of politically informed approaches to literature, as do a number of other passages (especially Chapter 8, “When is Something ‘Political’?”). The appeal of Graff’s book is increased by other sorts of “conversion stories” as well. Among them are his confession of not liking to read as a young man, his admission to being puzzled by implicit academic conventions that were taken for granted by his professors, and his acknowledgement that, like many of his students, he found “life of the mind stuff” unappealing until he felt himself an authentic part of a debate on an issue he cared about.

Indeed, his frankness in dealing with America’s ambivalence (at best) toward intellectual concerns is refreshing. This mistrust is by no means confined to life outside academe, and Graff is unflinching in
pointing out how deeply entrenched it is within the university and those agencies it must deal with. Also refreshing is his insistence on putting students at the center of his concern. Any number of books lamenting the present educational crisis seem to take a grim satisfaction in berating students’ ignorance and rejoicing in the author’s own superiority (an attitude that Graff shows is by no means new, incidentally). Graff is one of the relatively few writers to appear concerned to encourage students to become actively involved in their own learning rather than to recommend bullying students for their own good. To see the difference in emphasis, one need only compare the subtitle of Graff’s book (How Teaching the Conflicts can Revitalize American Education) to that of The Closing of the American Mind by Allan Bloom (How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students). As a demonstration of the efficacy of his approach, Graff devotes a final chapter to discussing various schools that have attempted to put such programs into practice. While this concluding chapter is largely optimistic, Graff is also willing to point out shortcomings and to discuss practical reasons for failure.

As noted previously, Graff’s arguments are not substantially new, and those already familiar with them need not feel compelled to read After the Culture Wars (though it’s hard to imagine they would begrudge the time). Anyone unfamiliar with them, however, will do well to begin here. After the Culture Wars is also highly recommendable to colleagues alarmed by recent developments, who might well start with Chapter 8, already mentioned above. Its down-to-earth, undogmatic, and conciliatory tone will do much to help begin the productive debate Graff calls for.

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Anyone who has read the major composition journals in the past four or five years has encountered essays that incorporate postmodern thought into the mainstream of scholarly inquiry. Often the writers of these essays choose one or two postmodern figures, from which they build a theoretical base. They then relate these insights to current issues in composition, suggesting solutions to problems or projecting new visions of the discipline in light of this new information. Foucault,