Comment on Richard Fulkerson's "Of Pre- and Post-Process: Reviews and Ruminations"

That Richard Fulkerson doubts "the ultimate value and validity of that ubiquitous genre in our field: the topical anthology" is made clear in his 1998 review essay, "Call Me Horatio: Negotiating Between Cognition and Affect in Composition" [CCC 50 (1998), 114]. His major criticism, that anthologies "are created either by editors' inviting other writers whom they believe to have some interest in an issue to contribute a piece, or worse yet, by issuing a general 'call for papers' on the proposed topic in a scholarly journal or, increasingly, via the internet" (114) is reiterated in his review of our collection, Grading in the Post-Process Classroom: From Theory to Practice. [CS 29.2]. Partly because Fulkerson feels we have created a straw person of process pedagogies, partly because he believes it bears the tell-tale "marks" of such anthologies, and partly because he finds "many of the authors seem to lack familiarity with the ongoing scholarly discussions about evaluation, grading, and assessment that have been a staple of our field" (112), he labels our anthology a "bad collection" (110). While "a viewless review is impossible" [Stowe, JAH 78 (1991), 594], Fulkerson's narrow focus on "post-process" in the title reveals his preconceived notions and desire to advance his argument at the expense of accurately representing the book's intent to readers of Composition Studies.

Fulkerson devotes one paragraph of his seven-paragraph review to a single sentence in the "Introduction," the only sentence (other than those in which the title is repeated) that the term "post-process" appears, concluding that we editors are presenting "the ideological critique of process" (110). By ignoring the rest of the twelve-page "Introduction," with its history of grading and discussion of the NCTE Resolution on Grading ("RESOLVED, that the National Council of Teachers of English encourage teachers to refrain as much as possible from using grades to evaluate and respond to student writing, using instead such techniques as narrative evaluations, written comments, dialogue journals, and conferences") [Council Chronicle 2/3/94], he misrepresents the purpose of our anthology. Had Fulkerson, like Jeff Sommers in an earlier review, noted (or at least reported to the readers of CS) that Villanueva in his "Afterword" identifies "writing as a process" as one of the assumptions all the contributors believe (179), other readers might likewise conclude that "the book's title then is not to be read as a repudiation of teaching writing as a process so much as an attempt to
situate the book historically in a *post-process movement* era" [Sommers, *TETYC* 27 (1999), 235].

We'll confess, however, that *Grading in the Post-Process Classroom: From Theory to Practice*, a volume in the Heinemann-Boynton/Cook *CrossCurrents* series, was written in response to a call for submissions. This was a new series announced in the February 1995 issue of *College Composition and Communication*: "Although all scholars in the discipline are invited to submit work, *advanced graduate students* and *beginning assistant professors* are specifically encouraged to contribute." Not unlike guest editors of special topics issues, we followed with a call for abstracts, received thirty-four from "names" in the field and junior scholars and invited David Bleich's opening essay, "What Can Be Done about Grading?" and James Sosnoski's closing essay on reconceiving grades as work in a technocomp classroom. Keeping in mind the purpose of the *CrossCurrents* series and our intention to "offer interventionist strategies to help teachers and students cope with the inevitable problems of grading" (9), we selected the remaining six essays and three shorter, personal pieces to offer a variety of voices situated in different geographic regions and higher education settings. Why so careful a reviewer as we have found Fulkerson to be in the past (he devotes fifteen lines to the genesis of two anthologies in "Call Me" 106) would be either unaware of the purpose of the series or choose not to report it to CS readers continues to puzzle us.

Fulkerson's most pointed remarks are directed at contributors to the collection. "The eleven essayists are united in the largely unexamined (foundational?) presumption that grading, by its nature, is evil," he claims (111). Not one of the eleven essayists labels grading "evil"; in truth, we doubt any of them think it is. Eleanor Agnew declares grades "unreliable ranking instruments" (39), Anne Righton Malone and Barbara Tindall find grading "a complex, multidimensional rhetorical situation rather than a linear, one-dimensional act of interpretation" (138), and Xin Liu Gale in Chapter 5 argues that there may be an actual reduction of learning when grades are withheld until the end of the semester in portfolio classes. Furthermore, Fulkerson claims "many of the authors seem to lack familiarity with the ongoing scholarly discussions" in the field but the staples in the field he suggests are more concerned with assessment than with grading. While many canonical works on assessment are available, there are "surprisingly few" on grading, as notes Stephen Tchudi, editor of *Alternatives to Grading Student Writing* [NCTE 1996; see www.ncte.org/teacherfest/tchudires.shtml]. Edward White's *Teaching and Assessing Writing* [Jossey-Bass 1994], for example, lists only three pages on "grading" in its "Index." Moreover, Fulkerson seems particularly annoyed that James and Kathleen Strickland "cite no sources" (112), but nine "References" are listed following their piece (152-53).

All in all, we know that Fulkerson believes that "short, unified, single volumes by single authors (or co-
authors) . . . ought . . . to become the basic stand-alone publications in our field” (“Call Me” 115). We, however, believe the world of composition scholarship is a large one, where there is room not only for single-authored texts and anthologies of reprinted essays from “big names” but also for topical anthologies from lesser known scholars as well. More importantly, although those of us in the discipline of English may have different perspectives, viewpoints, and disagreements, there should be room for all of us to live and work collegially and graciously together.

Libby Allison, Lizbeth Bryant, and Maureen Hourigan

RICHARD FULKERSON RESPONDS

My negative assessment of Grading in the Post-Process Classroom was bound to provoke a reply. I welcome the editors’ criticisms and the opportunity to address several issues further.

First, a mea culpa. I complained that the Stricklands’ article included no source citations, and the editors correctly point out that I was wrong. The nine sources are right there, on pages 152-53. Such an error is inexcusable, and I apologize.

Editors Allison, Bryant, and Hourigan raise four issues that I want to respond to in approximately the order of importance: 1) my charge that the contributors seemed largely unaware of relevant scholarship, 2) my ignoring the purpose of their book by focusing on the term “post-process,” 3) my bias against the anthology genre, and 4) my ignoring the purpose of the CrossCurrents series.

1) My claim that the contributors seem ill-informed about the scholarly background of research on grading seems to me the crux of the matter. Despite the trendy title, these authors mostly just tell their classroom stories of grading, seemingly unaware that they are oft-told—another instance of what Paul Bryant called composition’s tendency to wake up to a “brand-new world” every morning, like a goose with no memory of the day before [CCC 25.1]. If the articles do not reveal awareness of relevant prior work, then they are unlikely to constitute a step forward in our scholarly do-si-do. The editors invoke Stephen Tchudi, who says there are “surprisingly few” research articles about grading. But Bruce Speck, in Grading Student Writing: An Annotated Bibliography [Greenwood 1998], refers to “the vast literature on grading” (x). His 300-page volume annotates over 1,300 items.

One explanation of such an apparent contradiction is that the clean distinction the editors posit, which separates “grading” from “assessment,” is not so clear after all. Many articles and books with “assessment” in their titles also address grading. I noted, as an illustration, that the work of Ed White was rarely cited, even though he is probably the pre-eminent scholar on the topic. The editors respond that the current second edition of Teaching and Assessing Writing contains only three index entries under “grading”—which is accurate but largely beside the point. The first half of the volume is
“Assessment—A Critical Tool in the Teaching of Writing,” and it includes throughout discussions of grading as one feature of assessment in nearly every classroom. In addition, White has written or edited other volumes and articles that are relevant but never cited: Assigning, Responding, Evaluating [St. Martin’s 1992] for example, includes sample papers illustrating different levels of performance, rubrics for evaluation, and guidelines for responding. Besides White, other significant but unmentioned researchers on grading include Anne Gere as well as Lee Odell and Charles Cooper.

That the issues being discussed in the Allison, Bryant, and Hourigan collection indeed have a long scholarly history is also evidenced by the following books, none of which are cited in the collection: Assessing Writers’ Knowledge and Processes of Composing by Faigley, Cherry, Jolliffe and Skinner (Ablex 1985); Measure for Measure: A Guidebook for Evaluating Students’ Expository Writing by Norman Najimy (NCTE 1981); A Guide for Evaluating Student Composition by Sister M. Judine (NCTE 1965). Not to mention the classics by Diederich and by Greenberg, Wiener, and Donovan cited in my review. The first bibliographical essay on this topic appeared in 1984: “Grading and Evaluation” by Reising and Stewart [Research in Composition and Rhetoric, Ed. Moran and Lunsford, Greenwood, 1984]. That essay, in my judgment, would properly have been the place to start, in the mid-1990’s, if one wanted to become familiar with a rich tradition of publication.

Finally, it’s ironic that the collection fails to mention the December 1993 issue of Teaching English in the Two-Year College, which was devoted to what its editor called “A New Paradigm for Writing Assessment” (Holladay). Although many articles in the Allison, Bryant, Hourigan collection endorse portfolios, none cites the TETYC article on the scholarship of portfolios, co-authored by Bryant herself with Elizabeth Metzger (this omission was pointed out in Jeff Sommers’ review). In fact, only Gale’s article shows awareness of the major volumes about portfolios (Belanoff and Dickson; Black et al.; Yancey).

It isn’t too much to expect scholars to do their homework before going into print.

2) The editors object to my focusing on the term post-process in their title and introduction. In their response, they seem to want to operate under the banner of “process”; hence the quotation from Villanueva. But I included this collection in the review solely because of that term post-process and its prominence in the title. The claim that they were merely attempting to situate the book “historically in a post-process movement era” is disingenuous at best. The title doesn’t refer to an “era” but to a type of classroom, “the post-process classroom,” a phrase also used as the title of the book’s second half.

The editors now disavow the term post-process, while still trading on its cachet. But let me repeat their original rationale: “The collection is titled ‘Post-Process’ because contributors move beyond the process writing
movement's focus on a scientific, cognitivist, and universalistic approach to writing expertise" (9). Clearly describing the "process movement" as "scientific, cognitivist, and universalistic" both rejects "process" and simultaneously converts a set of widely varying viewpoints into a simplistic stereotype—a straw man easily run down by the post-process bandwagon.

3) In an elegant rhetorical move, Allison, Bryant, and Hourigan cite a prior review in which I said our field has too many weak collections and that the unified monograph should be the genre of choice. Touché. It's true that I believe we are inundated with poorly conceived and poorly executed collections. But my Composition Studies review dealt with five collections, several of which I praised. Certainly there is a place for carefully constructed scholarly collections. I have, in fact, contributed to several of them. Beyond that, I simply ask that readers assess my argument and judge for themselves whether bias led to my evaluation.

4) The charge that I ignored the purpose of the CrossCurrents series seems self-defeating. By making it, the editors defend the volume, not on the grounds of its quality, but because the series was to provide a forum open to younger scholars, especially "advanced graduate students and beginning assistant professors." That's like saying, "Give the writers a break. They're novices." (By the way, most of them are not novices at all). But Boynton/Cook's original call for proposals also said the series would publish "thoughtful, . . . and well-reasoned books" (139). And that is no more than what readers of a scholarly volume have a right to expect: well-grounded, well-researched, well-reasoned texts, whether by newcomers or veterans.

Texas A&M—Commerce

COMMENT ON KAREN KOPELSON'S REVIEW OF MUTUALITY IN THE RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

We found it heartening that Karen Kopelson, as stated in her insightful review of our book, would use Mutuality in the teaching seminar at her university "as much for its oversights as for its insights" (138). This is the type of critical reflection that we hoped to stimulate with this book. Indeed, we would be disappointed if the examples from our own teaching and the analyses that we made of them did not invite others to raise issues that we did not examine in the text. In that spirit, we offer two observations regarding Professor Kopelson's comments that we hope will further the discussion of mutuality in the classroom.

First, we agree with Professor Kopelson's observation that our book does not fully take up the issue of how "blindness to teacher difference" can disrupt attempts to foment mutuality in rhetoric and composition classrooms (137). In addition to our caveats about not intending our teaching to be viewed as exemplary, we could have explored in more detail what it means for us to teach and write from the perspective of middle class
white teachers at a predominantly white research one university. Our brief statements calling teachers to consider how their subject positions differ from ours and from those of their students could have been complicated to explore the complex set of issues that may arise as teachers’ varied subjectivities interact with the wide range of student subjectivities possible in a single class session. In fact, we take up this issue explicitly whenever we work with new writing teachers. For example, the last time we co-taught our department’s proseminar for first-time teaching assistants, we introduced this issue simply by standing side-by-side and asking the teaching assistants to consider what unconscious assumptions students might make if they saw David—a tall athletic white male—walk to the front of the room on the first day of class versus if they saw Helen—a short petite white female—do the same. We appreciate Professor Kopelson’s call for more explicit attention to this important issue, and we hope that others will take up her call for substantive descriptions of their experiences engaging students in such identity issues.

Our second response to Professor Kopelson’s observations is that despite the importance of the issue of differing teacher subjectivities, we are, even now, reluctant to speak to subject positions beyond our own experiences. Indeed, such a move would not only run the real risk of essentializing such subject positions, but would also miss the major point of our book: that teachers, whoever they are, need to negotiate mutuality on an ongoing basis in ways that work for them. Recent work in composition studies has begun to illustrate how identity interactions involve multiple aspects of identity and are an on-going process rather than a once-for-all revelation. For example, Susan Talburt’s description of a lesbian teacher’s choice not to be out in her classrooms [in Lesbian and Gay Studies and the Teaching of English, NCTE 2000] calls into the question the oft-presumed value for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) teachers to be out to their students. Talburt argues that this teacher’s decision was based on a recognition that ‘lesbian’ is not a category to represent, voice, or make visible, but a relational process of shifting identifications . . . a verb rather than a noun, identifications rather than an identity, a source of limitation rather than liberation” (59).

Unfortunately, after a substantive discussion of how lesbian identity is an on-going, dynamic process, Talburt’s conclusion seems to treat her case-study teacher’s identity as limited solely to her sexual identity: “To be placed as a lesbian is to be put into place” (72). It is just this kind of essentialist conclusion that we hope to avoid in our work by providing substantive means for teachers to explore their own pedagogical practice as it is reflected in their course architecture, classroom speech genres, and approach to interpretative agency.

In the case of Talburt’s teacher, we would encourage her to explore in more detail how her sexual identity may interact with other aspects of her identity as a teacher and how making
sexual identity explicit may affect the choices she makes to encourage mutuality. We do not mean to suggest here that every LBGT teacher should be out in every class. Indeed, despite the considerable privilege that David’s tall, white, male, now-tenured identity brings to his position as a teacher, he has learned in recent years that choosing to be out as a gay man may inhibit mutuality with those students who see his sexual identity as morally wrong. At the same time, although we might suspect that Helen’s gender and small stature would undermine her authority; this is usually not the case because of her institutional status as a professor and her years of teaching experience. Thus, we agree with Professor Kopelson that teachers’ identity interactions with students cannot be ignored, but, from our perspective, the point of substance is uncovering means for understanding how such differences play out in specific classroom interactions as well as providing vocabulary for articulating how change could be made in ongoing attempts to effect mutuality.

David L. Wallace
Helen Rothschild Ewald