"MUST BE WILLING TO TEACH COMPOSITION": 
THE RHETORIC AND PRACTICES OF THE SMALL COLLEGE JOB SEARCH

In the context of a small college English Department, which relies upon the multiple competencies of all its members, hiring new tenure-line professors can be a defining moment for a Composition Program. Without the active engagement of a composition program and its director, the search process is less likely to produce a colleague with serious interests and expertise in composition. It also risks making many dangerous public statements about our programs—statements that can further reify notions that the teaching of composition is merely an added duty for a generalist with “real” competencies in other areas and which can sustain widespread perceptions that composition requires no specific expertise, training, or research.

Conversely, a carefully planned search can result not only in finding a generalist whose interests and expertise include the teaching of composition; it can also help a composition program to “publicize” (i.e., make public) the goals,
work, and necessary expertise involved in the effective teaching of writing. The audience for either of these public statements about composition—positive or negative—is large. It includes one’s department, one’s college and its key administrators, the candidates, and (through the ads that appear in widely read periodicals like the *Chronicle of Higher Education* as well as MLA’s *Job Information List*) the profession of English studies generally. Thus, the process of writing job ads, screening applications, and interviewing candidates provides compositionists within small college departments with the opportunity to articulate such crucial topics as the relative importance of composition and literature programs (and the hierarchies of knowledge associated with this dual focus), the perceived roles of present department members, and the overall role of the department within the small college community (do we primarily serve our own majors or the general education of the entire college?).

That is not to say that such articulations are likely to be embraced by all players in the search process. But, as James Slevin has argued in another context, perhaps we have for too long allowed for “impoverished notions of composition and what it means to teach it” (6). In fact, in this essay, I will suggest that perhaps we have not only “allowed” this, but have been complicit in creating such notions by continuing to allow the discourse of composition studies to take a secondary role in our searches. I will discuss the crucial importance of using the job search as an occasion for asserting composition’s central role in English studies and in the mission of small colleges more generally—to, as Charles Bazerman has suggested, show that “composition is a serious intellectual endeavor and that it is time for our own field and for the university to take it more seriously” (38). Such assertions will almost certainly be contentious. After all, they question the preeminence of literary studies, which has for many years seen itself as synonymous with English language studies; and they give credence to composition, which those programs have chosen to see as, to quote Sharon Crowley, “the toad in the garden” and “not separate, but certainly unequal” with literary studies. (Where, after all, has composition been in the universe of the so-called *Modern Language Association*?) If we do not insist upon composition’s role in the small college’s mission, we are not likely to improve the visibility, or the viability, of our programs.

**WHY SIZE MATTERS: TEACHING COMPOSITION IN THE SMALL COLLEGE**

The tenure line job search provides an especially crucial opportunity for a small college composition program. While larger schools tend to advertise for either literature or rhetoric composition specialists and rely upon graduate teaching assistants to “shoulder the burden” of First Year Composition (FYC), tenure line faculty members in small colleges are much more likely to regularly
teach composition. Sandra Gilbert’s 1997 *Final Report of the MLA Committee on Professional Employment* laid out the numbers:

**Ph.D. Granting Institutions**
- Grad students taught 63% of FYC
- Part-time faculty taught 19% of FYC
- Full time non-tenure track faculty taught 14% of FYC

**MA Granting Institutions**
- Grad students taught 11% of FYC
- Part-time faculty taught 42% of FYC
- Full time non-tenure track faculty taught 11% of FYC

**BA Granting Institutions**
- Part-time faculty taught 38% of FYC
- Full time non-tenure track faculty taught 12% of FYC

When we extrapolate these numbers into tenure line versus non tenure line composition faculty, the picture becomes even more vivid. On average, at Ph.D. granting institutions, only 4% of FYC is taught by full-time tenure line faculty; at MA granting institutions, 36% of FYC is taught by full-time tenure line faculty; at BA granting institutions, 50% of FYC is taught by full-time tenure line faculty. At two-year and community colleges (though not included in the MLA report), writing instruction is even more central (see Madden 17-18; Bay 28; Carpenter 22).

Since the level of involvement in FYC among tenure line faculty is sharply higher at small, undergraduate-focused institutions, the treatment of composition as a serious and autonomous discipline is, at least theoretically, more viable. However, in order to bring this possibility to fruition, we must look beyond the percentage of courses taught by tenure-line faculty. While course coverage is important, what is at least equally important is the percentage of tenured and tenure-line faculty who act as the advocates for a composition program. Increasing the percentage of tenure-line faculty who not only teach composition, *but who also publicly consider it to be one of their areas of expertise*, can quickly alter what Slevin called the “impoverished notions of composition”—especially in a small department where percentages change rapidly. Such attention to composition activism might seem to go against the grain of the small college cooperative culture, making “the stakes and risks of power grow exceedingly high,” as Thomas Amorose has argued.¹ Still, as Timothy Donovan reminds us, “writing specialists, too, sometimes have to be versatile, outward-looking academicians [since] our professional success may be dependent on programmatic success rather than just upon the quality of our own teaching” (173). Though, as Donovan suggests, creating an environment that

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values composition is necessarily political (“it entails a good deal of interaction with various deans, chairs, and committees”), its goals remain pedagogical. After all, it is the students who will benefit or be deprived if those who deliver on average 50% of our courses—and who have a great influence on how it is delivered in the other 50% as well—are serious about that work and its disciplinary groundings.

Yet, despite advances in our field, one need only look at the MLA Job Information List and The Chronicle of Higher Education’s job listings to see that we have not yet “repaired impoverished notions of composition,” even at perhaps the most crucial moment of program development: the hiring of colleagues. At all stages of the job process—from the writing of a job advertisement, through screening and interviews of candidates, to the final decision on hiring—the small college WPA must be vigilant in protecting the program’s interests.

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU ASK FOR: THE RHETORIC OF COMPOSITION IN JOB ADS

A survey of recent job advertisements reveals that those we hire in small colleges to teach composition—even those who will teach composition more than any other course—are still primarily identified by their traditional English Department nomenclature: historical period of expertise (Victorian, Renaissance, Post-colonial), geographical area of expertise (British, American, Caribbean), and sometimes—though less often—theoretical area of expertise (Deconstructionist, Historicist, Feminist). When a small college WPA adds to this a fourth (and I would argue, a central) category, the search process suddenly takes on a character it may not have had in the past. That fourth category is pedagogy, and more specifically, composition pedagogy. Interestingly, since small colleges thrive on the “teaching focus” or “individual attention” that they can offer, this facet of the job search can highlight the truth of that selling factor, or can expose some blemishes on that public face. In either case, the strong commitment to pedagogy that drives composition studies, both in its research methods and in its classroom practices, fits the public mission of the small college—even though, as Amorose has argued, the “iconic” nature of writing instruction at small colleges can be primarily “symbolic” rather than material (99).

Yet as small college job advertisements make amply clear, this fourth category, composition pedagogy, is often treated more as a given or a duty than as an area of expertise. Literature specialties are visible and prominent: “Tenure-eligible Assistant Professor position in British literature—medieval (emphasis on Chaucer), Shakespeare, and early Renaissance” or “Americanist with broad training in American lit, with research and teaching in the colonial or...
1865-1915 period.” Many even directly separate “duties” or “responsibilities” from “expertise” or “qualifications”—the former set of terms applied to many forms of teaching, the latter focusing upon the expertise in literature or even upper division writing. One ad, for example, was phrased this way: “Duties: Responsible for teaching speech, composition, and literature according to departmental practice and policy. Qualifications: Ph.D. with specialization in 20th century English literature.” Another recent ad was phrased this way:

We are seeking a tenure-track Assistant Professor with a Ph.D. in sixteenth or seventeenth-century British literature. The position requires experience in teaching a British Literature survey course through Milton and computer-assisted first-year writing courses, as well as scholarly expertise in and ability to teach specialized courses in early modern non-dramatic literature. (emphasis added)

The subtle, but significant difference between “experience” (I’ve done it) and “scholarly expertise” (it is an area of ongoing interest) begins the dialogue about this position in quite specific ways. In fact, one ad described the job this way: “The successful candidate can expect the initial load to consist primarily of composition and general education courses” (emphasis added), suggesting that composition is a type of purgatory that one may escape with good behavior. Composition pedagogy—and sometimes teaching generally—is often framed within this rhetoric of burdens, variously described as part of a teaching “load,” as a teaching “duty,” as “departmental practice and policy,” or (for those institutions that prefer a more amicably indentured employee) a “willingness to teach composition.”

Such ads illustrate the ways in which composition is publicly treated as an afterthought, or even an apologia, rather than an area of expertise that will be examined closely in the interview process. Larger institutions can and do treat rhetoric and composition as a distinct field; ironically, though, FYC is not a likely classroom duty, as the above MLA statistics suggest. Ads like the following make the compositionist’s role in FYC at many large institutions clear:

**Assistant or Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Composition**

Assistant or Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Composition with specialization in history of rhetoric and interests in one or more of the following: preparation of teachers of composition, historiography, minority rhetoric and critical race theory, digital rhetorics. Experience and relevant publications are desirable. Teaching will include graduate seminars in areas of specialization, graduate core course in rhetorical history from the classical period through the renaissance,
In the large college structure, being “in composition” means making “contributions”—not necessarily teaching the first-year course itself. And this difference is deeply engrained in the culture of English Ph.D. programs—delivered primarily at large, research-focused institutions—where those outside the fields of Rhetoric/Composition teach composition to support their research in literary studies, and those in the field have as their models those Rhetoric/Composition professors who rarely teach the first-year courses that they theorize. This is not meant as a criticism, nor to suggest that those intellectual contributions are not extremely valuable to the teaching of FYC. But there is a difference. And this difference might explain why, even when they move to the teaching-focused small college, English professors often continue to consider composition peripheral to “real scholarship.” Like the real toad in the imaginary garden—Crowley’s metaphor for composition—it does not fit the professorial models they have come to know.

Perhaps because of this ingrained belief that composition lacks the intellectual rigor of other disciplines, and perhaps because it is not (like upper division literature courses) exclusive to tenure line professors, the small college advertisement tends to assume that the expertise to teach composition is available to all “English teachers” willing to do the job: “All literature faculty teach six courses a year including mandatory teaching in composition.” Phrasings like “responsibilities include composition” or “all faculty are expected to teach composition” abound, and seem to arise as much from a need for full disclosure as to describe one’s work. The phrasings, in effect, say “be aware that you will be asked to do this despite it not being your main concern.” The teaching of composition is also often hidden beneath generic terms like “undergraduate teaching” or “lower division” or “core” courses. One small college searching for an “expert” with “background” in 17th and 18th Century British Literature noted, seemingly under its breath, that “the successful candidate will teach primarily freshman composition.” Conversely, a position advertising for candidates in “twentieth-century British literature and/or postcolonial anglophone studies,” tempered the revelation of its course load (“3/3 and 3/2 in alternate years”) with what can only be read as a parenthetical statement of good news: “(The college has no composition courses).” Such advertisements denigrate the role of composition in a number of ways. They suggest that FYC is somehow separate from the “real” or “desirable” courses: “Candidates should be able to teach a wide range of courses in their field as well as freshman composition” (emphasis added); they separate composition from areas of “specialty”: “Teaching will be split between writing courses (including composition) and literature in the
candidate’s field of specialization, preferably 18th or 20th century British literature” (emphasis added); and they define candidates by their literary specialty while defining their “primary responsibility” as something other: “Restoration and Eighteenth Century literature. Primary teaching responsibility includes freshman composition and sophomore literature surveys.”

There are, of course, positions—even in small colleges—for writing specialists. But these job ads are almost always followed by a laundry list of duties. One ad listed among the duties, “writing center administration and service, WAC coordination, writing intensive courses in the disciplines, textbook selection, curriculum development, program development and/or revision.” And despite the efforts of the Council of Writing Program Administrators to show the intellectual work involved in this field (“Evaluating the Intellectual Work”), program administration is also frequently treated more as willingness than an ability and expertise. So in a seemingly direct response to the Portland Resolution’s demand that “A WPA should not be assigned to direct a program against her or his will or without appropriate training in rhetoric and composition” (Hult et al), one ad for a WPA sought to assure free will (though a somewhat Miltonic version): “Applicants must be willing to direct our Freshman Writing program” (emphasis added). “Must be willing”: a telling, if paradoxical, phrase.

Some small college writing position ads have even distinguished FYC from the more specific areas of expertise:

**Assistant Professor of English (Professional Writing/Journalism)**

The Department of English seeks applications for one assistant professor position (tenure-track) in one or more of the following fields: print journalism, editing for the print media, desktop publishing, public-relations writing, and/or technical writing. Appropriate Ph.D. in English, Journalism or Technical Writing is required for appointment to tenure-track position at rank of assistant professor. Successful candidate should also have a minimum of five years of print journalism experience reporting or editing at a daily newspaper, and commitment to a small journalism program that emphasizes narrative reporting, and writing, and professional internships. Expertise with PhotoShop, PageMaker/Indesign and experience editing in a newspaper or magazine desirable. A commitment to undergraduate education, the teaching of composition, and demonstrated interest in scholarship and publication are required. (emphasis added)

Here too, the ad distinguishes between commitment to the teaching of composition and demonstrated interest in scholarly pursuits, likely in the areas of upper division teaching emphasized in the ad.
In each case, composition is treated as willingness, a duty, a commitment, a vocation, or an acceptable indenture—rarely as an expertise and skill. And such small college ads, when read alongside the more expertise-based literature descriptions, tend to make clear which part of the job is blue-collar, and which white, which is officer training and which is for enlisted soldiers. One ad wanted even more than willingness or commitment: It defined the “ideal candidate” as one who would not only teach composition, but one who will “do so enthusiastically” (emphasis added). From such advertisements, we can come to understand how much of our program’s success we leave to fortune—the fortune that may bring us a literary generalist whose “willingness” to teach composition comes not only with genuine “enthusiasm,” but also with the background, expertise, and impetus to professional growth that would be expected in any other field.

With that said, we might consider the elements of a successful ad. The MLA Job Information List offers some excellent examples of how the process of writing job advertisements can be refined to increase the likelihood of a successful search, and to enhance the public persona of our programs.

First, a successful job ad might acknowledge that composition is a viable field, represented by a vital and active body of scholarship. One college included the following statement in its advertisement for a rhetoric/composition specialist: “Applicants should be committed to making a career of the study and teaching of writing.” Phrasing like this does us all good—not only by better defining the terms of the search, but by acting as public statements that research in, and the practice of, composition are worthy of “career” status.

Second, and as a corollary to the above, a successful ad might overtly value classroom practice as central to the work we do, both as scholars and as teachers. The successful ad, then, should not separate what one knows (usually a literary or theoretical field) from what one does. From gnosis should come praxis; one’s field is what one does. Jobs that involve the regular teaching of composition (most often much more regularly than any other course) should state that as the primary job description, and do so in a way that values such work as an intellectual activity and avoid the “conspiracy against experience” identified by Thomas Newkirk and Linda Brodkey. As Brodkey suggests, “the academy has traditionally demonstrated a limited tolerance for lived experience.” The small college ad might be one place to acknowledge and revalue the relationship between the scholarly and classroom practices by emphasizing the potential for scholarly activity that exists in the undergraduate composition classroom.

After all, the small college has long been a place where this ideal marriage might become real; since research directly related to our classroom practice is more likely to be considered viable professional development within
the small college, and since such a high percentage of time is devoted to the classroom, the scholarship of teaching is both most practical and most useful there. In this way, the successful ad might directly state that the scholarship of teaching, which has always been a strength of composition studies, is also valued by the department and the college. Such public statements about the value of classroom work can make teaching the nexus of a shared concern with professional development in ways that fit the mission of most small colleges, even when they conflict with the more limited (and limiting) definitions of scholarship held by some English Departments. The ad below, for example, suggests that teaching successfully at this small college involves scholarly expertise, whether in literature or in composition:

**Assistant Professor of English.** A growing private, coeducational college with a Civic Arts curriculum that emphasizes experiential learning via its one-course-at-a-time schedule, seeks a PhD with one of the following specialties: 1) Renaissance/Restoration British literature to teach Shakespeare, other drama, and composition courses, or 2) Rhetoric/Composition to teach composition and other core curriculum courses, and to coordinate our composition program.

The message here is that both Renaissance literature and Rhetoric/Composition are reasonable backgrounds for contributors to this college’s teaching mission, and that whatever the background, scholarship has a direct correlation with teaching. The opposite case—that teaching can be a viable ground for scholarship—can (and perhaps should) be made.

An advertisement that presents composition as a field of expertise does more than create a stronger public image. Since the ad articulates a department’s understanding of the role of composition, it also defines the colleagues one is likely to hire, the attitudes of the department they are about to enter, and the intellectual work that will be evaluated at tenure time. As I hope is apparent from the above analyses, many of the ways that our work is portrayed in those ads is less than successful in those areas. But as difficult as it can be to assure that language that speaks well of composition’s role in the department is included in the ad, it can be all the more difficult to encourage language that does so during the interview process, especially when there may be but one voice for composition within the department.

**Asking Rhetorical Questions: Modeling the Intellectual Work of Composition through the Interview Process**

Though there is a large body of literature available that provides guidelines for “successful” job searches in English studies (see, for example, Emmerson; Green; Katz; Laurence; Musser; Showalter; Warner), little has

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been said specific to the role of composition in national job searches. Further, the definition of what “success” means in a job search has perhaps not been extended far enough; from the perspective of compositionists who work in departments that fail to recognize the viability of their discipline’s work, a “successful” interview process needs to be successful in more than one way. Not only should it result in the hiring of colleagues who bring with them expertise in the teaching of writing, but because of composition’s lack of status in many English departments, it should also help the colleagues with whom we already work better understand the field. That is no easy business, of course—especially in cases where one is the sole compositionist or at least solely responsible for the composition program in a department that primarily values literature. In fact, chipping away at such deeply engrained practices, practices that have “always,” we are told, been the standard for evaluating intellectual work, can seem nearly impossible. But only nearly. Sometimes, success must be measured cumulatively and longitudinally, not by the outcomes of a single search.

Thought of in this way, the interview process can provide important opportunities for the enhancement of small college composition programs, even when the search does not end with the hiring of someone we might find an immediate ally for composition (though that is certainly of primary importance in the short term). When the occasion is right, and we interview a candidate who has some knowledge of composition studies, the process can demonstrate our intellectual work much more effectively than can the intradepartmental conversations we have with our colleagues. (And it is not an uncommon occasion to find that candidates have at least a passing knowledge of composition studies—and oftentimes much more—since most graduate schools rely upon teaching assistants to teach composition under the supervision of rhetoric/composition experts.) From those moments of shared discourses, discourses that those who are not directly involved in composition rarely hear, can come the beginnings of authority for the discipline itself.

The danger, of course, is that this unfamiliar discourse can alienate the candidate from other members of the search committee. I have had colleagues who, after a teaching demonstration or a conversation that included discussions of composition theory, described what they heard as lacking true intellectual rigor, largely because it was based in the scholarship of teaching. For this reason, it is wise to find points of connection between the discourses of rhetoric/composition and those discourses valued by our colleagues. Renaissance literature experts may have much to say about Cicero or the Trivium; Americanists on the essay, autobiography, or sermon form; Postmodernists to sophistic teachings, and so on. Even beyond the connections between the shared intellectual traditions of rhetoric and literature, pedagogical discussion can likewise bridge gaps. The department can share its conversations about
writing processes, evaluation of sources, innovative classroom techniques, and perhaps most importantly, learning goals. Discussions like those can cross, rather than highlight, boundaries, especially if we take care to be inclusive and to look for shared ground. Of course, even with such care, the discussion can deteriorate into a complaint session, bemoaning the inability of students to write as well as they once did (“Why can’t our students write? What ARE you composition teachers doing?). Still, even that can be made productive, since compositionists should be quite familiar with, and ready for, that particular set of charges; listening to how a candidate reacts to those complaints can tell us a great deal about their philosophy of teaching composition.

None of this is to say that things always go well; in my experience, they often do not. Varying from a visible lack of interest in the discussions—sighing, reading mail, fidgeting—to attempts to change the subject away from discussions of composition, it is not difficult for our colleagues on search committees to undermine efforts to move composition into a place of respect. Though such shows of displeasure tend to backfire on those who use them (saying more about their own incivility toward differing perspectives than about the department’s work) when they are widespread enough, they can certainly make it difficult to attract those who are serious about composition. Further, we must be mindful of the ethics of attracting candidates into a department with deep divisions over the role of composition. It is a very real concern. But there are few serious composition teachers who are not aware of two things: 1) that the status granted to composition vis à vis literary studies in the profession generally continues to be denigrated and 2) that those conditions are, however slowly, changing to make room for composition as serious work. Only by continued vigilance and the willingness to breach those old norms can composition continue to move toward its due place.

There are, unfortunately, causalities in this process, and as I have found recently, sometimes poignant ones. As we invite new colleagues into this contested ground and attempt to build serious writing programs within small colleges—which I have argued are uniquely suited to bridging the literature/composition divide—we must be aware that both we and those we enlist in this work are at risk. We recently lost a successful teacher with strong credentials in both literary studies and composition, a scholar whose work for the writing program clearly was not given its due reward, and who chose to move to a program that might suit him better. In the job search through which this individual was hired, I employed most of the suggestions I have presented here, did what I could to demonstrate the value of that work and to make the vision for teaching of writing at our small college a reality, as have other dedicated compositionists here. But envisioning a place that values composition does not always, or at least not immediately, create a place without continuing
opposition to that vision. As I said, there are causalities, and frequently ones (like this one) that leave deep scars. The first question to ask, then, is whether the cause is still worth mounting.

As I see it, small college compositionists—despite the dangers—have much to gain by using the search process as an occasion for showcasing the national status of composition as an intellectual discipline. In fact, interviews provide multiple opportunities for modeling the discourses of our discipline for the benefit of our colleagues. Doing so, of course, requires preparation. Small college compositionists must develop a store of available discourses that can model, for candidates and colleagues alike, not only the intellectual topics in rhetoric/composition that connect with parallel topics in literature, but also the national norms for the teaching of composition.

It is, of course, easy for small colleges to become isolated from national norms. Not only is there less time for research, travel, and interaction with other programs, but sometimes the literature on the teaching of composition is not sensitive to the institutional differences that affect the teaching of composition—a topic that was addressed in a session chaired by Sandra Jamieson of Drew University at the 2004 Council of Writing Program Administrators conference, which has been a central concern of Amorose, Paul Hanstedt, Gretchen Moon and other members of CCCC’s Special Interest Group on Teaching Writing at the Small College (including myself), and which this special issue of Composition Studies acknowledges. Still, rather than working in isolation from the position statements of our field—which do not, as Amorose has noted, always directly apply to small college work—we need to find ways to adapt those positions to our own situations, and in the process, write the small college back into the institutional history of composition. Doing so can increase the credibility of small college programs with a number of constituencies: our departments, our administrators, and—in the longer term—composition organizations themselves, who are already beginning to take note of the ongoing work in composition taking place in small colleges.

For example, the standards set for tenure-line faculty under CCCC’s “Professional Standards that Promote Quality Education” are particularly applicable to the small college situation. First, CCCC’s has suggested that “because of the significant intellectual and practical connections between writing and reading, composition and literature, it is desirable that faculty from both areas of specialization teach in the composition program” (“Statement of Principles” 331). Though the uneasy relationship between composition and literature nationally is no secret (and thus raises some questions about this 1989 proclamation), and though merely assigning composition courses to literature experts does not assure that the “significant intellectual and practical connections” will emerge, the report of the MLA Committee on Professional
Employment cited above does indicate that what CCCC’s calls a “desirable” situation is already much more frequently found in the small college department. That is, there are many more faculty members in the ranks of small colleges that teach in both areas. The corollaries to this principle included in the CCCC’s statement are particularly useful: 1) “Ideally, faculty from each area should have the training and experience necessary to teach in both the literature and composition programs”; 2) “Research in rhetoric and composition is a legitimate field of scholarship with standards comparable to other academic fields”; and 3) “Because it is fundamentally necessary to the quality of education at all levels, research in rhetoric and composition should be supported not only at research institutions but also at those institutions primarily dedicated to teaching” (331). Bringing such statements from our national organizations to the attention of our departments and administrators as they form search committees and write job advertisements can ground our arguments in something more than our individual ethos. They also can give us some authority to examine not merely the “willingness” of the candidate to teach composition, but also the level of engagement and competency of the candidate in relation to professional knowledge and development in composition. Will that authority have any real sway in the outcomes of the search? Perhaps. But in any case, insisting that they ought to have some sway—and that NCTE and CCCCs say so too—can be worthwhile in the long run. Of course, the national organizations that we cite can be written off as the wrong national organizations by those in English studies. That is why we need not only other authorities (like MLA, which I cite above), but also other audiences, including college administrators, who in small colleges are often, though not always, more accessible to individual faculty members than at larger institutions.

Since the field of composition is a teaching-focused discipline, demonstrating our field’s potential for connections to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) can be one such authority. Developing this connection can be effective since the conversations surrounding this work have largely been in organizations (like the American Association of Higher Education) that have the ear of administrators, that have strong funding support (and accompanying grants to offer), and that advocate for work that can combat the growing dissatisfaction of the public over the lack of attention paid to teaching by research-driven colleges. AAHE provides a wealth of resources in this area, as does the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, which suits the pedagogical approaches of composition well. SoTL, which traces its recent growth to the 1990 Boyer report, also carries a great deal of caché with many faculty members, and certainly with administrators, because both its work and its public image fit the small college ethos. During the job interview, highlighting the connections between this pedagogical

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research and composition studies, both of which make learning outcomes central, is another method of showing the value of our work. (For example, the WPA Outcomes Statement is a clear example of using what SoTL calls “learning outcomes” to drive curricula.) Further, AAHE may be correct in asserting that “effective teaching is the goal of most college professors.” If so, perhaps we can illustrate how valuable it can be to have colleagues who have training in composition, teachers whose discipline provides them with many methodologies for making the classroom a better learning environment. Giving job candidates the opportunity to talk about how their teaching techniques in composition can be extended to other types of classrooms will allow you to assess the degree to which they have reflected upon their classroom work, and will at the same time allow your colleagues to see how we can, as Ernest Boyer suggested, “move beyond the tired old ‘teaching versus research’ debate and give the familiar and honorable term ‘scholarship’ a broader, more capacious meaning” (qtd. in AAHE).

There are, of course, those scholars who will continue to treat SoTL as fluff (one former colleague called classroom research “peaceable kingdom drivel” in order to denigrate the work of Mary Rose O’Reilly). In such cases, and especially in the frequent case in which there is a sole compositionist among the full-time faculty, these arguments sometimes play best with administrators, who can then bring pressure to bear upon the department to consider the value of composition studies. Sometimes that authority comes from the economic value of the writing program. (Ours, like most, offers by far the largest number of courses in the department in composition.) Sometimes that authority comes from a composition program’s close fit to the pedagogical mission of the small college. In any case, assertions of authority in the small college are sometimes as necessary as they are in larger institutions. Predictably, stepping outside the chain of command on such issues is a risky business. By activating a dialogue on the topic that includes a wider array of decision-makers, the composition program has much to gain, and a not insignificant set of dangers and repercussions — repercussions that I have seen range from strained interpersonal relationships to more serious problems like the ones faced by my colleague as I described above, and which have been discussed by Amorose. Those dangers can be minimized by the ethos that is developed for the program (and, in the small college environment where personal contact is so crucial, for oneself) with the college at large before a search begins. That ethos-development requires that we continue to illustrate to our multi-faceted departments, as well as to college faculty and administration more generally, that the pedagogy-based research of Composition Studies is itself an area of specialization worthy of note. As with any form of activism, timing (kairos) is crucial. But the first decision that needs to be made is whether the ends sought
are worth the price tag associated with them. I have had days on both sides of that equation; one should not underestimate the lengths to which some will go to preserve disciplinary hierarchies.

The “successful” interview, then, combats those hierarchies. It educates our departments, through our own voice as compositionists, and if we are fortunate, through the voice of candidates and other colleagues who may be aware of composition pedagogy. On several occasions, in searches for hybrid positions, I have had the wonderful opportunity to hear over a dozen candidates at a table at MLA discourse about their background and interests surrounding the teaching of writing. Who better to be our advocates than those teacher/scholars from other institutions who have expertise in both literature and composition? (That is, after all, one of the reasons we pay to bring in outside reviewers for our programs—who is going to believe us?) By informing our colleagues about the major issues and practices being discussed in our field, we are more likely to move toward becoming a place where composition is considered a serious business. I have found that, despite many setbacks, vigilance in this area can become a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy—a vision that can become more real over time. Asking questions such as “What is it you believe a student should take from a composition course?”, “What types of activities go on in your writing classroom?”, “What is your theory on commenting on student writing?”, or “What composition theorists and practitioners have most influenced your teaching?” allow for an important dialogue about the writing classroom to begin, and hopefully, to continue in the minds of all who listen. Such “rhetorical questions” and the discussion they breed not only assert the need to take composition seriously, but they educate us all on the issues and literature of our field; we can hear a polyphony of voices on the subject of writing instruction that demonstrate its variety, its scholarship, and its serious treatment. Are these voices always taken seriously? Certainly not. But I still believe that one must keep asking.

We should also keep asking because the questions we pose during the job search are continually refining the job description of our potential colleague. If questions on literary specialty are given prominence, we are setting expectations for both the candidate and the department akin to those job advertisements that make composition a duty rather than an intellectual activity. Conversely, establishing composition as an intellectual field that will require serious inquiry and professional development, and doing so from the outset of the search, increases our department’s chances of a successful outcome. For this reason, we need to pay attention not only to the intellectual work of Composition Studies, but to the day-to-day work of developing a vigorous program. That is, we need to further define during the interview process what we mean by “demonstrated commitment” to composition (which like any other
field, involves engagement with its research). This is especially true in the small college, where course assignments are often 4/4 (and sometimes more). In such an environment, it is not merely disciplinary hierarchy, but time spent on the work of that discipline that is valued. Hence, the job search represents not only a theoretical struggle, but a material one, as departments vie for the portion of our prospective colleagues’ commitment that will be devoted to the work that each values. In searches conducted in larger institutions, many of the decisions about a new colleague’s duties are determined before a line is approved; but in small colleges, which demand not only multiple competencies, but multiple tasks, the initial debates within the department and/or search committee is literally about what portion of this person’s time and mind we will get. Making judgments about such things demands that we, like good Catholics, determine the motivations of our candidates, not just their actions. Do they come to us enthusiastic about composition, or just lukewarm? Are they willing to shoulder the burden, or are they just trying to get by to tenure so that they then can become narratologists or Foucauldians again, unmasking, like Hal in *Henry IV*, as literary experts after all, after their years cavorting with Falstaffian compositionists? Oftentimes, this does not become clear until we see a candidate’s interactions with the full department during the campus interview.

Though most of the issues raised above in relation to the interview process generally apply to the on-campus interview as well, the latter represents a special opportunity to draw attention to the work of a small college writing program—especially if we recognize the multiple audiences to whom we are speaking during this portion of the search. Not only the candidates, but chairs, deans, and our colleagues will be listening as we discuss composition. This rare occasion at the microphone should not be underestimated; it brings with it a chance to highlight the work of our program, the people who do it, and the people who benefit by it. For this reason, a “successful” (in the wider sense I have been using) small college campus interview should involve as many composition stakeholders as possible. Not only tenure-line faculty, but students and adjunct faculty should find their way into the process. A great deal of this can be accomplished during the scheduling process, when occasions can be crafted that can make the work of composition visible.

There are many rhetorical spaces we can create to provide occasions for discussing composition. The most obvious location to highlight attention to pedagogy, of course, is the small college classroom. But in classroom demonstrations, as Musser suggests, “artificiality” can be a problem: “Even if a class of real students is made available to you, you aren’t their teacher and they know it.” Despite its shortcomings, classroom demonstrations can be used “to [the candidate’s] advantage to help the audience gain a sense of your teaching
skills” through “asides or explanatory comments” that indicate a candidates’ familiarity with composition methods (12); they can help department members to gain familiarity as well. Classroom demonstrations can not only provide insight into a candidate’s interaction with students and composition faculty, but also inform candidates that their work will be classroom-centered—something not always made clear in graduate education. As English Showalter has demonstrated, graduate students “immersed in advanced study and research [are] . . . liable to underestimate the emphasis . . . put on undergraduate teaching” (23). Since staking a claim to the work a candidate will be expected to do is defined and re-defined during the interview itself, these visible signs and human constituencies can send a strong message.

Other possibilities for interaction with students and other composition faculty include a meal with students and adjunct composition faculty, which can provide a useful forum for discussing the teaching of writing. On such occasions, we have brought together these groups with the candidate and then absented ourselves so that the students and/or adjunct faculty could have more freedom to have open discussions with the candidates and to provide us with their feedback. The insights of these two groups can be particularly useful for gauging a candidate’s fit in the small college setting, and especially within a composition classroom. Since the teaching of composition is such a student-sensitive undertaking, and since the adjunct faculty have a stake primarily in the candidate’s work as a teacher, this occasion can provide the composition program with a great deal of important information about the candidate’s comfort with undergraduates and with the college ethos. Since, as both CCCC’s and ADE make clear, teaching writing is one of our most important tasks in both literature and composition classrooms, and since composition studies, like small colleges, has consistently foregrounded pedagogy, this moment represents a chance to highlight the coincidence between the institutional and programmatic goals. Teaching composition is, after all, a student-centered activity.

The candidate will have other conversations as well—most notably with one or more upper administrators. Since the small college does usually offer more access to those administrators, both on a formal and informal basis, once again it is crucial to bring discussions about composition into the room on those occasions. I have been fortunate that our upper administrators have, for as long as I have been here, been serious about the teaching of writing. But even if that is not initially the case, helping those administrators understand the work that is done in composition, the importance of that work to the department and to the success of the student, the fact that composition is a discipline that has a rich body of research—and, as with the faculty, finding connections between that area of research and the administrators’ fields of research and interests, can
all help to set the stage for a conversation at the highest level that is more likely to include discussions about composition. Connections can also be drawn, as discussed above, with potential areas of research and grant opportunities in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning through composition—areas that are best suited to the work of small colleges.

“SUCCESS” IN THE JOB SEARCH: SOME CONCLUSIONS AND CAUTIONARY TALES

Many of the arguments I have been making about the small college job search are admittedly focused not only upon the good of the individuals who interview for positions in small college English departments, but also upon the good of the composition program of those departments. However, it is crucial that the ways that we construct this complex rhetorical situation that we call “the job search,” though at least partially political, not be either meant or perceived merely as what Emmerson calls a version of “realpolitik” that sometimes enters academic searches (24). I am keenly aware of the ethical bounds that exist in this situation, and of the many constituencies that I serve as a small college WPA on such occasions—the students, my department, my colleagues in other departments, the college, the field of composition studies, and the candidates themselves, just to name the most obvious. Though I have argued that the job search is a kairotic moment for the progress of small college writing programs, a moment that should be seized by the forelock and which can be judged as “successful” in many ways, I am at the same time mindful of the many consequences that this kind of activism can bring with it. Two competing maxims come to mind: “God is in the details” and “The devil is in the details.” I tend, on these occasions, to look for God in the details, so to speak. But I have also been in composition long enough, have read enough cautionary tales by Sharon Crowley, James Slevin, Linda Brodkey, Kurt Spellmeyer, Chris Anson, and others, have heard enough stories on WPA-L, and have seen the fate of enough composition programs, to know that I am more likely to find the other, at least on occasion.

Still, despite the confrontational (even revolutionary) tone that surrounds discussions about the undervaluing of compositionists and their work, I’ll maintain that there is still hope for a unified effort at the small college. Due to the work of our national organizations, and because composition has become such a crucial part of what English departments do, the power balance is not so badly skewed as it once was. At the small college level, the now common practice of hiring tenurable faculty to teach composition as well as literature has also had its effect. Under these conditions, we might consider how the job search could unify rather than disjoint our programs. The two most obvious answers are writing instruction and The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.
Since the small college thrives on its ability to provide individualized attention, following the unified model of teaching and research suggested by the Boyer Report (and the model most familiar to compositionists) has the potential to drive English department curricular reform. As such, the process of hiring new faculty might not only supply individuals ready to change our educational culture, but give us the opportunity to discuss that culture with continuing faculty. Rather than merely insisting upon the seriousness with which composition expertise and experience be treated, the job search could also provide the chance to articulate what such expertise and experience can do for the department generally. Despite MLA’s new public emphasis on teaching, it has been composition studies that has consistently been in the forefront of making pedagogy central, now boasting an impressive body of literature on the topic. It would be, admittedly, very easy to ask MLA where it has been, or to consider whether the ad hoc status of the “Committee on Teaching” suggests a less than sincere attention to public pressures to do a better job in the classroom. We might resist the temptation to do so, since a unified effort is in fact better; divided departments on the small college level can be particularly disastrous, since so much of our ability to function relies upon a cooperative spirit. But avoiding agonistic arguments does not mean that we do not have productive arguments to make.

Towards that end, perhaps the job search provides our own kairos, our own version of an ad hoc committee on teaching. If we are able to create within our search committees (and later among our entire faculty) a dialogue about what it means to use writing as a process of learning; if we are able to highlight in our interview process the ways in which composition research can inform departmental pedagogy more generally; if we are able to define the pedagogical advantages of a writing-centered curriculum to our administrations during interview proceedings; if we can show the value of our own work by treating seriously the work in composition of our prospective colleague; then the large amount of effort involved in this process can breed more than an appropriately trained and committed colleague. It can, just perhaps, influence the culture that our new colleague will enter.

York, PA

Notes
1 As Amorose suggests, “Of course, the use and abuse of power is a daily occurrence on small as well as large campuses. But when, on a day to day, relational basis, one must face a colleague she has just threatened or to whom she has just promised reward, the stakes and risks of power grow exceedingly high” (100).

2 The advertisements excerpted appeared in the Chronicle of Higher Education and/or the MLA Job Information List between 1999-2004. They are
all for small college positions, unless otherwise noted. The names of colleges and universities offering these ads have been deleted.

3 One notable exception is the University of Louisville, which in 1998-99 began the practice of all full-time English faculty teaching FYC (in exchange for the authorizing of seven new tenure-line positions)—which Debra Journet tellingly describes as a “momentous change” that brings with it challenges to maintaining collegiality, to maintaining the 100% participation of faculty members, and maintaining the importance of literature and language while also making the teaching of composition an area that requires ongoing professional development as well. When Journet reported on the progress of this initiative two years later, she maintained long-term optimism while acknowledging real challenges, including resentment from some of her colleagues and the fact that this change still only allowed them to staff 25% of their courses with professorial faculty (up from the previous 1%).

4 General guidelines for writing job ads for positions in Language and Literature are set up by MLA and appear in the *JIL* as well as in the Appendix to Showalter. For guidelines on job descriptions for WPA positions, see the “Portland Resolution” (Hult et al.).

5 In reality, not only the ads, but also graduate education contribute to misunderstandings about the profession of postsecondary teaching (especially in small colleges) and the ever-increasing importance of teaching in our profession more generally. See, for example, Katz (121), Gregory (7-8), Day (34-36), Langland (29).

6 We must however, with Susan Miller, acknowledge that increasing the intellectual viability of our field must not come at the expense of reproducing the “hegemonic structure by implying that bourgeois social climbing and successful competition for intellectual ‘clout’ are legitimate signs of improvement” (qtd. in Ohman).

7 In fact, I sent an earlier version of this paper to one upper-level administrator who acknowledged my piece with a terse, but encouraging reply: “the wording of the job ad is crucial!”

8 Our attention to a candidate’s involvement in composition should include knowledge of the literature of composition studies, without enacting the traditional “academic bias” against “lived experience” noted by Thomas Newkirk and Linda Brodkey (41). For a discussion of the interrelation between composition research and teaching in composition, see Dalbey (14-15) and Warner (26).

9 See the “ADE Statement of Good Practice,” which not only espouses methods much like those promoted by CCCC’s, but which also specifically states that “Student writing should be part of every English course” and that “Good teachers recognize that notes, drafts, and journals, as well as polished essays, contribute to student learning” (53).
Works Cited


Katz, Seth R. “Graduate Programs and Job Training.” Showalter et al.: 121-129.