Introduction
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GROWING PAINS: THE WRITING MAJOR IN COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC

In the fall of 2005, as the result of various local factors, we called ourselves together to consider reshaping the writing concentrations available for students within the English degree. Our “we” at Eastern Michigan University is happily broad; depending on how we count, those of us invested in writing studies number between eleven and eighteen. (Seven of us are most closely aligned with composition and/or rhetoric; four with technical communication; another four with English education, although three of those have extensive background in composition and rhetoric; and another three in journalism and public relations. Additionally, four creative writers work within our department.) The expertise on which we could draw when considering curriculum issues is concomitantly rich. Our curriculum redesign effort was prompted by a multitude of context-specific and external factors, including our:

• Awareness that, despite emphases in professional writing and technical communication, the disciplinary traditions and research practices of composition and rhetoric remained underemphasized for students;
• Growing understanding that there existed, between first-year composition and master’s level courses in composition and rhetoric, a body of students who those of us with the closest ties to composition and rhetoric wanted to teach and didn’t have access to;
• Collective sense of the myriad backgrounds and specialties we had as a group of faculty that could lead to a dizzying array of thoughtful, exciting possibilities for courses not yet dreamed up;
• Attendance at Kathleen Blake Yancey’s 2004 “Made Not Only in Words” keynote address to the CCCC.

Many others across the country have been thinking and working along similar lines, as is demonstrated by the numerous responses we received to our query about writing majors on the WPA-L that fall, as well as the volume

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of responses that came in when we posted our call for this special issue of *Composition Studies*. Over the next year, the evolving drafts of the pieces included here challenged our own thinking about our major, and we revised and rethought various iterations of a writing major curriculum. We continue to mull over possible curricular changes and their effects in our particular institutional context.

In her keynote address at CCCC in 2004, Kathleen Blake Yancey noted the growth in Composition and Rhetoric graduate programs, the increasingly theoretically grounded first-year composition programs, and the lack of courses in between. The "in-between"—the space for writing majors—is fertile ground for disciplinary expansion and redefinition, and the authors whose work appears in this special issue address various aspects of that territory. This special issue functions both as a record of "where we are" as a discipline right now in our development of writing majors and also offers various cautionary tales, frames from which to consider developing majors, and possibilities for the future.

There is compelling evidence that the number of writing majors at universities across the country has grown. In 1989, for example, Donald Stewart found that only 38% of the departments he surveyed had options for students to specialize in an area other than literature (in Chapman, Harris, and Hult 421). In their own later (and wider) survey in the fall of 1992, Chapman, Harris, and Hult discovered that 70% of the four-year universities reported that they offered writing concentrations of various kinds (422). Most recently, the NCTE Committee on the Major in Rhetoric and Composition has compiled data on 45 majors in writing from across the country (see http://www.ncte.org/cccc/gov/committees/majorrhetcomp). The information on this list, while not complete, offers a useful starting point for considering what a writing major "looks" like on paper, across the country, at various institutions.

This special issue offers another lens into programs, one different from the kinds of representations available through catalog descriptions and lists of courses. Here, the authors have not shied away from the local particularities of majors, programs, and departments; in addition, the authors take up various ethical, disciplinary, and cultural issues to consider as they arise with the development of the writing major. The articles lend insights from both contextualized, local experiences and from national perspectives. Themes of *place*, of steady curricular work over time that often goes unnoticed, of unexpected gifts and unanticipated crises, of timing and advocacy—these run through much of the work here. Since these articles developed independently of each other, the strength of these common themes is especially intriguing.

Anthony Scott’s “The Cart, the Horse, and the Road They are Driving Down: Thinking Ecologically About a New Writing Major” opens this issue by providing particular ways to think carefully about how writing majors function
as a space for text “circulation” and curriculum. He cautions us to learn from our legacy of relationships based on first-year writing as a site for teaching and administration as we develop writing majors.

In “Re-writing the Humanities: The Writing Major’s Effect Upon Undergraduate Studies in English Departments,” Dominic Delli Carpini offers a context-specific look at how a writing major affects other aspects of undergraduate work in sometimes unexpected ways. Based on surveys of students and faculty, Delli Carpini articulates the ways in which undergraduate students in rhetoric courses use their growing understandings of rhetorical studies to enhance their work in other humanities courses.

Providing specific cautions about how writing majors must be responsive to local exigencies, Hill Taylor’s “Black Spaces: Examining the Writing Major at an Urban HBCU” describes the ways in which writing major courses can investigate and interrogate aspects of the field of composition from site-specific sensitivities. His work urges us to consider how particular visions of “the” writing major inevitably privilege particular versions of what that major is and should be.

Timothy Peeples, Paula Rosinski, and Michael Strickland use two complementary frames—that of chronos/kairos, and that of strategy/tactic—to uncover how key moments in their professional writing and rhetoric concentration led to significant changes and advances. In “Chronos, Kairos, Strategies and Tactics: The Case of Constructing Elon University’s Professional Writing and Rhetoric Concentration,” Peeples, Rosinski, and Strickland examine how their program developed through particular occurrences and because of particular conversations and events, some of which were unanticipated.

Lastly, we’re brought again to thinking more broadly about the role of a writing major as an act of disciplinary power through Rebecca Moore Howard’s “Curricular Activism: The Writing Major as Counterdiscourse.” Moore Howard posits that the writing major can change on-campus (and larger cultural) understandings of what writing “is” and “can do” far more than first-year writing programs or WAC initiatives.

Interwoven throughout these articles are brief “Reflections” and “Projections.” In our initial call, we solicited short depictions of what others have learned or done within the curricular space of writing majors, as well as short statements of possibilities for future development. Randall McClure’s “Projecting the Shape of the Writing Major” outlines the various factors that need to be considered as writing majors are developed; Jennifer Clary-Lemon’s “Hot Arctic: Writing Majors as New Sites for New Hires” acknowledges the attractiveness of the writing major to job candidates in composition and rhetoric; Spencer Schaffner’s “Grounding the Writing Major in the Socio-Graphemic Approach” offers a vision of a writing major where students become “spe-
cialists in the study of written language, rhetoric, writing technologies, and image/text semiotics”; Glenn Newman offers a student’s perspective on how a major brings visibility to the profession in “Concocting a Writing Major: A Recipe for Success”; and Kelly Lowe posits a localized account of what can go wrong in “Against the Writing Major.” Additionally, a cluster of three reflections (Thomas Peele’s “What do we Mean by ‘Writing’?”; Linda Shamoon and Celest Martin’s “Which Part of the Elephant is This?: Questioning Creative Non-Fiction in the Writing Major”; and Beth Taylor’s “On Brown University’s New Non-Fiction Writing Program—A ‘Focus’ Within the English Concentration”) all highlight the tensions, limits, and possibilities surrounding the definition of what “writing studies” is and who gets to claim it.

Works Cited


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