I Thought Composition Was About Commas and Quotes, Not Queers: Diversity and Campus Change at a Rural Two-Year College

Danielle Mitchell

“Freaking queers.”
“That’s so gay.”
“What are you, gay?”
“Faggots should be nuked.”

Can you remember the last time you heard such phrases while walking down a hall on campus? While grabbing a refill in the coffee room? While sitting at your desk, student voices greeting you through the open window, making you privy to the conversations as students walk by? Was it recently? Do you hear such things frequently? If not, then your location has afforded you some distance from the heterosexist discourse that many of us customarily experience at work.

Let me be clear, here. I’m not talking about the occasional campus flare up between conservative and liberal student groups that takes over the front pages of the campus newspaper and that litters the Editorials section with diatribes about the destruction of traditional values or tirades against bigoted rhetoric. I’m not talking about the occasional act of hatred between individuals. Such confrontations and acts of hate are significant and worthy of attention, certainly; they enact the social contest over sexuality, reveal the importance of diversity instruction, and reinforce the fact that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) safety cannot often be taken for granted. But I want to focus on a different sort of institutional context—one where chilliness is the norm. Given the often-frigid temperatures at many rural, two-year colleges, the closet is more than a historical metaphor. Public battles amongst the student body such as those waged in student newspapers across the country are rare because confronting the status quo of exclusion would require a sort of vocal, overt support of LGBT difference that much of the population isn’t ready to risk. Situated in this context, many educators such as myself face the specific pedagogical task of using their introductory composition course as both a site of writing instruction and a critical zone of cultural contact. Simultaneously, then, the goal is to facilitate improvement in student writing while also broadening their range of cultural experiences in order to better foster diversity, making room on campus for difference—different subjectivities, different ideas, and different expectations.
Given their geographical and cultural profiles, diversity instruction is not only part of the ethical imperative of rural open admissions colleges such as mine, but also, I would argue, of composition programs in those colleges, programs that focus on critical reading and writing as well as critical thinking. Thus, I'd like to add to the disciplinary discussion of diversity education by sharing a course model designed to facilitate discourse analysis and discussion of gender and sexuality. The course certainly wasn't a curricular silver bullet. Although students learned a lot about critical literacy skills and the social construction of gender, an explosive student confrontation reminded me that the work of a single class is not enough to challenge the dominant heterosexist ethos of a campus. Altering the climate requires systemic and systematic efforts. To this end, then, I'll also share a broader yet integrated model that attempts to address the curricular, administrative, and cultural forces that collectively produce a campus climate. This model makes composition courses more visibly central to the civic discourse taught at rural colleges while it also produces a systemic form of diversity instruction. The cultural pedagogy that results may not work at all institutions, of course. In fact, with its assumptions of collaboration across the curriculum, administrative responsiveness to faculty initiatives, and opportunities for integrated curricular and extra-curricular activities, it seems best suited to small, two-year colleges that tend to enjoy measures of flexibility that larger institutions do not.

Getting Situated: Expectations of Normality on a Rural Campus

Running along the Appalachian Mountains, Fayette, the county in Southwestern Pennsylvania where I teach, has a distinguished history. It was the site of the first battle of the French-Indian War, the stomping ground of US Secretary of State and Marshall Plan initiator George Marshall, and the world's largest provider of coal and coke during the First World War. Some residents now refer to the county as Fayette-nam, however, contrasting its illustrious history with its depressed present. Some readers may consider such nomenclature glib, but consider the fact that the once-prized resource that fueled the national defense industry as well as the local economy is no longer a cash cow. A number of the large Victorian mansions once photographed and toured for their beauty are now abandoned, or at least dilapidated. The once vibrant downtown streets are now the targets of a philanthropist's revitalization efforts because they sport dusty storefront windows, graffiti, and vacant buildings. And the solidly middle-class income that the region provided its miners has been replaced with a median yearly income of $27,451—thirty-five percent below the national average.
Fayette County, once home to the Carnegies, the Mellons, and the Fricks, now punctuated by abandoned mines and coke ovens, is the second poorest county in Pennsylvania. It has one of the highest teen-pregnancy rates in the state; 53 percent of its children live below the poverty level; 24 percent of its population has less than a high school education; and 96 percent of its residents are white. Economically depressed, fiscally liberal but socially conservative, this is a region that tends to favor small government and big churches. Some local bumper stickers make reference to “poverty-necks,” but many outsiders (as my students have referred to them) dismiss the region, culture, and people as redneck, hillbilly.

Of the campus's nearly 1,000 students, most were born and raised in the county, and most are the first in their families to attend college. Nearly 46 percent are categorized as non-traditional (over the age of 24), more than 90 percent are on financial aid, and many are also on public assistance. Very few students openly identify as lesbian or gay. In fact, even the number of semi-out students and faculty (those who will identify their status only within confidential settings, such as on diversity committees) can be counted on one hand. It’s not uncommon for derogatory retorts of choice in this context to be “That’s so gay,” or “Only faggots think like that,” as suggested above. Moreover, posters publicizing the campus appearance by a gay member of MTV’s The Real World have been defaced, torn down, or otherwise destroyed. Brochures about LGBT safety have been removed from a public space and replaced by a New Testament. A student was recently advised by a faculty member to remain in the closet while living in the region. And another student was informed that a gay man could not be the leader of the Minority Student organization, even if that meant the group would remain dormant given its lack of members, because gays aren’t legitimate minorities and the group was never intended to include them.

I would be remiss to suggest that there are no positive forces or progressive students on campus that work to challenge such hostile conditions. Given its affiliation with a large Research I institution, the campus is guided by an ambitious diversity initiative that asserts the need “to foster a humane University community in which everyone feels welcome, by eliminating disrespect and harassment and by working toward the goal of civility and acceptance of everyone” (“Framework”). The plan goes on to identify “respect for others” as one of “our most important educational goals.” To translate the theoretical into the practical, the university also added a diversity component to its general education guidelines, thereby requiring students to enroll in one course that addresses international cultures and another that addresses diverse cultures within the US. The desire to create respectful campuses and to foster appreciation for diverse people and ideas is evident in other institutional acts as well, such as the
establishment of commissions that focus on diversity, the implementation of domestic partner benefits, and the administrative support for studies that assess climate. And, at the larger four-year campus with which a number of two-year campuses such as mine are affiliated, students, faculty, and staff willing to drive that distance can participate in an active community that includes an LGBT Center, film series, lecture series, mentoring program, and student groups for undergraduates and graduates as well as a broad range of other social and political activities.

There is a measure of support for LGBT diversity at the local level as well. A core group of students seek out diversity courses, for instance, taking them even when not required. Listening generously and speaking carefully, they wrestle with issues of difference, work toward creating greater access for diverse perspectives, and welcome minority students into their friendship network. A few of the bolder students even entertained, albeit briefly, establishing a gay-straight alliance in order to create a stable support network, a visible presence of allies, and a student group that could lobby campus leaders. Several faculty members include LGBT issues in positive ways, funnel funds toward diversity-related activities, and bring open-minded speakers to campus. And a group primarily composed of faculty and staff formed a Diversity Task Force that has worked for nearly a decade to warm the campus climate. Among other things, they arrange for guest speakers and develop multicultural presentations, emotionally support individual members of the community, and act as liaisons to the central campus and its service coordinators. Yet the ethos of hostility on campus remains palpable.

As rainbow stickers and pride regalia are often hidden from public view, personal pictures may be left in desk drawers rather than placed on desktops, LGBT resource centers are few and far between (often requiring a lengthy drive to a city), and coming out truly is a radical—sometimes dangerous—act, the painful realities of exclusion based on sexual orientation are all too familiar on campus—and on many campuses like it across the country. The rural locations, demographics, and financial resources of our two-year colleges simply do not allow lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender visibility, let alone tolerance, to be taken for granted. Expectations of normality and the fully acceptable dictate heterosexual subjectivities and heteronormative politics.

Given an institutional context such as that outlined above, the politics of location clearly complicate the institutional goal to foster diversity as well as the two-year college’s mission to provide open access to all citizens, especially those deemed outsiders based on their sexual orientation. In the remainder of this article, however, I’ll discuss my efforts to intervene in this complicated problematic by deploying a diversity-focused first-year writing course, and then by using that course to envision a broader, more integrated...
program that both deploys composition as a site of diversity instruction and diversifies sites of cultural instruction. To this end, I'll discuss my rationale for creating the course, the scholarly precedents that enable this work, and the broader cultural work that has come to the fore as a result of this work. Ultimately, because the cultural curriculum I outline extends pedagogy beyond composition, it may enable instructors at two-year colleges to achieve change more quickly, change that extends beyond the walls of their classrooms to touch the wider campus community. And as I'll argue, some faculty members in composition are in ideal locations to facilitate such a curriculum, even when chilly climates may feel less than ideal.

**Disciplinary Locations: Composition, Discourse, and the Inclusion of LGBT Diversity**

The political nature of the classroom has become a professional commonplace. The issue most often explored is not whether politics belong in the classroom, but rather, what politics shape particular classrooms and curricula. While there are the politics associated with location, such as those outlined above, a range of political factors are associated with what content is included and excluded from the curriculum as well. My rhetorically based composition course raised questions on both fronts.

While my peers in English wholeheartedly endorsed my work, they also told me to be prepared for student resistance. Most peers in other disciplines asked me if I knew what I was getting into given the conservative nature of the student body, but they offered their support. Of the few colleagues who discussed with me their doubts about the legitimacy of my diversity focus, often asserting that writing courses are about punctuation, spelling, grammar, and sentence structure, most were assuaged once I explained the departmentally established (and University Senate approved) course goals, which include training students to become "critical citizens" inside and outside the university, people who engage actively and influentially with the communities they belong to because they have an awareness of how communities are created and influenced through language and other symbols. The course proposes to create a safe and yet provocative environment where students can develop sophistication as a producer and consumer of discourse. [And it] asks not simply for self-expression, but for [student] participation in public discourse on matters of public interest—such as might be expected of educated adults in the world outside of school. ("Freshman Writing")

The expected course goals revolve around reading, writing, thinking, and public discourse. Including pertinent and timely social issues prevalent in the news is expected. Moreover, including such goals seems little more than an
ethical response to real material conditions that demand students make real political choices based on their abilities to analyze claims, evidence, authorial credibility, and the long-term consequences of public discourse.

As I asserted then and believe now, college training in writing is more than learning punctuation and grammar; it is about more than knowing when and how to use commas or quotation marks. Rhetorical training is about learning to think and read critically, to analyze thoroughly, and to write clearly. It would be irresponsible not to provide students opportunities to practice on issues that are pertinent to their lives, votes, nation, campus. Thus, given the course goals, the university's expectations that students be trained for civic participation, and the fact that the introductory composition course usually is the only course in reading and writing that all students must take, these courses are institutionally located to conduct the theoretical and practical work of studying the discursive construction of difference. Moreover, these courses are critically important to this work. They certainly are not the only sites for this work—nor should they be. But as the only course in critical reading and analysis that many two-year students will take, and the only course in writing of our two required courses that is not specialized (such as writing for business or writing for technical professions), the introductory composition course becomes even more important to both the university's mission and its diversity initiatives.

The work required to legitimize my course may not be required in this particular scholarly arena, as those within the discipline are likely well versed in the progression of composition pedagogy since the linguistic turn. Understood as both the study and production of discourse, while paying attention to the relationship between discourse and power, disciplinary inclusion of issues such as race, class, sex, and gender is no longer surprising. In fact, given the work of scholars such as Shirley Wilson Logan, Stephen Parks, Patricia Bizzell, James Berlin, Sharon Crowley, Lynn Bloom, Joy Ritchie, and Susan Jarratt, among others, these have become central lines of inquiry. The dominant paradigm is far more attentive to issues of difference, social privilege, and material ramifications of discourse than it once was. However, the scholarly emergence of sexuality as a disciplinary line of inquiry may be less well known.

Harriet Malinowtiz dates the first CCCC panel on sexuality and composition studies to 1987, noting a special interest group (SIG) followed in 1993. The panel she references occurs two years before the 1989 discussion led by Paul Puccio that is cited by Allison Berg, Jean Kowaleski, Caroline LeGuin, Ellen Weinauer, and Eric Wolfe as the first to bust homosexuality out of Composition's closet. During the year between those two panels, though, Ellen Louise Hart's "Literacy and the Lesbian/Gay Learner" appeared in a small collection by an independent publisher. As do Sarah Sloane and Alison Regan in their later publications, Hart
argues that the dominant paradigm of expressivism put LGBT students at risk. By privileging personal narratives and authentic voice, she explains, expressivism asks LGBT learners to either out themselves to their peers (and teachers) or to censor their lives, to censor their authenticity. This may not seem like a concern since sexuality may not be a topic teachers ask students to address. However, if students are to use writing to express their fears, desires, families, weekend plans, or visions of the world, then it becomes increasingly difficult to refer to their loved ones and their friends and their activities without replacing pronouns, at the very least. So students must weigh issues of “authenticity against safety, self-revelation against distortion or silence” (Sloane 32).

Scholars since Hart have also interrogated the power dynamics that pedagogies produce as well as the potential dangers, both intellectual and physical, that can be associated with acts of inclusion and exclusion. As early as 1989, for instance, David Bleich argued that it’s not necessarily the inclusion of sexuality as a line of discursive analysis that challenges dominant logic or leads to thoughtful inquiry. In fact, in “Homophobia and Sexism as Popular Values,” he argues that inclusion can actually enable the reproduction of heterosexist ideology as much as it can challenge exclusion. Sixty percent of his students considered homosexuality “gross and disgusting” when polled, for example (23). Some even considered the extermination of gays a legitimate social plan. Challenging such discourse can be difficult, especially in a classroom, and especially by a student—especially a student who may fear being linked to gay subjectivity. Additionally, because studies claim that adolescent and college-aged men are the most likely both to commit crimes against LGBT persons, and to consider the violence justifiable, even called for, the classroom can become a hotbed for not just heated debate, but also potential violence. Thus, how inclusion is deployed is just as important as it being deployed.

Hart and Sarah-Hope Parmeter reiterate the importance of methodology in “Writing in the Margins,” published in 1992, as do Sloane and David Rothgery. The latter two publications are notable for another reason, though. In addition to linking composition studies and LGBT issues, their publications appear in mainstream sites, an edited collection about the profession and CCC, respectively. Richard Miller followed their lead in 1994 with his mainstream publication in College English; he argued that fears of alienating students or creating risk via discussions of sexuality ought not be used to sustain exclusion, nor should pressures to limit a writing course to technical issues of correctness. He believes the contentious nature of public discourse ought not be sanitized for the classroom. Rather, homophobic discourse ought to be challenged, not only on the level of grammar and punctuation, but also on philosophical, ethical grounds as well. As he clearly asserts, composition is a course in which the reception

Diversity and Campus Change 29
and production of discourse is central. Making clear the assumptions and ramifications of discourse, then, is integral to the course, just as integral as issues of correctness.

With the now fairly consistent presence of LGBT issues in disciplinary venues, and the fact that discussions have shifted from the legitimacy of inclusion itself to queering the classroom, professionalizing queers, and queer identity as an academic commodity, we're clearly a long way from the early days when disciplinary exclusion was the commonsensical norm. However, we're still a long way from having pedagogies appropriate to all academic contexts, let alone effective pedagogies.

In part, then, I share with you an experience I deem less than successful in order to talk about the cultural curriculum that emerged from the course. It's not that my students didn't learn to create stronger thesis sentences or tighter arguments. In fact, many students became stronger writers as well as stronger readers of discourse who could theorize about the construction of subjectivity via linguistic and social practices, as I'll discuss in the next section. But the course also underscored the magnitude of the problem—the limited potential of a course to alter the cultural climate. As a result, as I will discuss at the conclusion of this article, a far broader form of systemic intervention seems necessary, a cultural pedagogy that reaches beyond the writing course and makes discourse analysis central to campus life.

Anxiety 101: An Introductory Composition Course

The composition course I developed was similar to many of those deployed across the country and outlined in the discipline's scholarship; I wanted to focus on the discursive construction of culture, for instance, providing a sense of how people are written at the same time they write the world, and to assist students as they improve their writing. As I was training students to write carefully organized and clear prose, then, I also wanted to train them to be careful and conscious readers who traced concepts, phrases, social practices, and expectations in order to pay attention to their historical emergence, moments of deployment, ideological assumptions, and material ramifications. As I told them the first day, and as illustrated by the course's overall goals, introductory composition is as much about reading as writing, as much about reading the world as the word, and as much about cultural production of ideas as the textual production of essays. Thus, students would study the principles of rhetorical analysis and audience awareness, analyze the ideological features of genres ranging from the popular to the professional, and produce documents ranging from summaries to analyses and narratives to research papers. Given these parameters and my desire to highlight the relationships between language, social practices, cultural values, and power, my course was not
radically different than those offered by other instructors at the campus. I was, however, the only teacher of introductory composition including an extended unit on both gender and sexuality. Moreover, I was, according to reports from students as well as other faculty, the only teacher whose sexuality was a topic of student debate.

To achieve the course objectives of inclusion, I knew I had to establish a strategy that produced a measure of safety on multiple fronts. Obviously, I didn’t want to incite violence against anyone perceived to be LGBT. Nor did I want to wage an outright assault against the ideological safety many of the students enjoyed. The sort of inclusion I envisioned would certainly be disruptive to this safety, as it was based, at least in part, on a form of heterosexual privilege that included an intolerance of things LGBT. But to be successful, as Amy Winans models in “Local Pedagogies and Race,” I needed to create as safe a context as possible for the interrogation of the safety that privilege accords. Thus, I needed a way to analyze discourse—both the overt discourse of hate employed in the region and on the campus as well as the less obvious forms of heterosexist discourse that students were unwittingly likely to experience and/or reproduce. As Winans so accurately explains, for instance, a number of students at rural colleges are striving to embody a middle-class ethos, one that relies on appearing polite, sophisticated, thoughtful—not racist, sexist, classist, or even homophobic. So any course that attempts to reverse the dominant sentiment of hostile contexts must devise a strategy for addressing such discourse and its related constructs of ethos. My strategy was to create progressive units that would culminate in one dedicated to the interrogation of gender and sexuality as social constructs. The progression would be based on the fact that analysis— versus summary—is a critical component of higher education (one that our campus has agreed needs to be central to the curriculum), and that there are multiple types of analysis, two of which have been deemed integral to the first-year course in composition. Thus, I created a schedule that included both rhetorical and ideological analysis and presented the course as one designed to teach a form of socio-academic interrogation that could trace the connections between ideas, assumptions, subject positions, and material realities, and to help students become stronger readers and writers.

The course began with a series of activities designed to differentiate summary from analysis—a distinction with which many of our first-year students struggle, but one critical to engaging the work of the course. Essentially, if students don’t understand the fundamental difference between what happens in a text and doing something with the text, it’s difficult to analyze texts as historically constructed artifacts that simultaneously inform and are informed by social values. So students worked in small groups, studied particular texts, and completed activities that made more
concrete the genre, expectations, and organizational options associated with summaries. Then, using the same texts, students shifted to the rhetorical analysis unit.

Exploring the strategies of textual production that writers deploy to achieve their goals, students used the basic terms of rhetorical analysis (ethos, pathos, logos) to determine how texts persuade readers to engage their materials as well as how they develop arguments. One group focused on Sesame Street, for instance. They explained how the show works to secure viewers by appealing to two very different audiences: parents and their children. Other groups focused on home improvement programs, such as This Old House and Design on a Dime. They linked program content to the gender and anticipated values of target audiences, and interrogated how the show’s established credibility. Students were pushed via this group work to clarify the logic of their analyses, explain their use of evidence, and substantiate their claims. Doing so led them to articulate the distinctions between rhetorical appeals, to recognize the need to explain (not just present) evidence, and to explore the importance of context (whether it be understood geographically, demographically, psychographically, or socio-historically) to an audience’s reception of a text.

While I have often argued that students are typically adept at a type of rhetorical analysis—altering their speech for particular audiences, such as professors versus best friends—transferring such skills to the analysis of the discourse produced by others isn’t always as easy for them. One student asserted in a freewrite, for instance, “I’ve never really had to do anything like this, anything other than summarize something. Doing my own thinking is hard. Analysis is hard.” Similarly, other students suggested that rhetorical analysis both required and enabled them to engage texts and arguments in a different way; they were beginning to see them as products of authorial choices, as things to be analyzed, rigorously engaged through a process of inquiry. And they were beginning to demystify the academic experience. They could see, for example, how teachers developed their lecture materials and course expectations: “They don’t make things up. They analyze them and then make claims based on that analysis. That’s what I’m supposed to do to get a good grade.” Perhaps more importantly, they were transferring the skills of analysis to assignments in other courses. As one student exclaimed, “My Philosophy teacher said my response to the reading was on track and that I wrote a good essay. That’s never happened before!” And as another student wrote, “I get tired of defending my ideas all the time, giving evidence for what I think. My paper grades are going up in my business class [though], so maybe it works.”

The first two segments of the course, then, worked well to fulfill some of the service expectations of the required class in composition. Students learned to summarize information, to facilitate open-ended
discussion in groups, to punctuate more effectively, and to analyze texts rhetorically. As a result, they were better prepared to think through issues of textual production and reception and to complete the activities in some of their other courses. The next phase of the course got more complicated, however, as its goal was to formally introduce ideological analysis, thereby providing the framework for the unit on gender and sexuality. Although some discussions of gender had taken place during the rhetorical analysis activities, students tended to take the category of gender and the associated expectations of the category for granted rather than identifying them as sites of interrogation—constructs revealed in but also produced by texts.

To ease the transition from rhetorical to ideological analysis, I asked students to continue working with texts they already knew well, the advertisements and other texts that they had focused on most during the rhetorical analysis unit. As I explained it, the goal was simply to analyze the text differently by focusing on its engagement with cultural values rather than its efficacy or the strategies it deployed to persuade. The transition was still challenging, of course. Ideological analysis asked students to use a logic with which many were unfamiliar and to think through the ramifications of a text’s discourse. And whereas rhetorical analysis was easier to perform, because textual strategies became easy to identify, teasing out the social work of a text’s representations and logic was more difficult.

Given their struggles to see how texts tapped into larger systems of belief, the first week of the unit focused on group work and application activities. Ads for things ranging from the Super Bowl to soda to liquor to home security systems were the initial texts-in-common and main sites of analysis. As a group, we discussed the ads rhetorically and then I led them through the process of analyzing them ideologically. By depicting a woman home with children while the man is away on a business trip, for example, we discussed how one ad selling home-security systems deployed a particular image of family—an image that excludes many others. It also depicted the “family” as safe until men are absent, women as vulnerable without the protection of men, and “dark” figures as threats. We teased out each of these ideas to explore the ways that a text, regardless of the creator’s intent, embodies a series of assumptions and visions of the world. We also discussed the potential ramifications of such assumptions and visions. By way of example, in the case of the security system, students interrogated the meaning of the dark figure in terms of race relations, specifically the production of racialized fears based on the association of family life with whiteness and danger with dark figures that they interpreted to symbolize black males. Students also questioned the ad’s representation of the stranger as the threat to women in a culture where violence by intimates may actually be a more legitimate fear.
Students seemed to get the point theoretically, but struggled with actually linking texts to larger discursive and material structures. To extend their experience with ideological analysis, and to illustrate that social texts worthy of study extend beyond advertisements and written documents, we shifted attention to forms of knowledge or literacies, such as sports, cheerleading, musical training, and online gaming in order to interrogate their relationships to issues such as race, sex, class, and, minimally, gender. The initial challenge was likely a common one: to illustrate how the assignment revolved around analysis, not just narratives about their activities or schooling. The goal was to do something with their histories. Rather than telling stories about their experiences, they were to analyze them, asking questions about the social production and regulation of subjectivity evident in those experiences.

A majority of students in this phase of the course linked literacies to issues of race and class, acknowledging how those categories are produced by dominant social practices. But a small group of students was beginning to consider gender as malleable, a socially produced construct. Extending the work she did with diet ads, for instance, one young woman talked about the production of femininity via the culture of dirt-bike riding in her previous school. Her early writing described her regret and anger at being left out. A week of group work and a day of individual conferences later, however, she argued in a final draft that the culture of riding produced masculine subjects fit for a world of adventure, competition, and action. Alternatively, via the avenues of participation available to them in that particular context, feminine subjects were relegated to posing for sexy posters hung in bike shops and to cheering on or taking care of rather than competing against the men—a production of subjectivities that produced women to be sexual objects, caregivers, and service-sector employees. While the logic used to defend her conclusion was sometimes sketchy, the analysis was ambitious in its attempts to link activities or literacies to the (re)production of a gendered and classed social system.

It's important to note that even the strongest writers in the class struggled to produce clear writing as they were learning the new method of analysis. Their mastery of punctuation seemed to falter, while their usually sound sentence structures got a bit clunky. Yet with nearly half of the class dedicated to hands-on workshops, students were able to revise their work, flesh out the logic of their arguments, discuss the purposes of conclusions, consider potential strategies for organizing introductions, and collaboratively develop transitional phrases that could logically move readers from the contents of one paragraph to the next. As a result, their prose got stronger, exhibiting clearer explanations, better-organized paragraphs, more effective punctuation, and tighter sentence structures.
Even though the shifts from summary to rhetorical analysis to ideological analysis were often frustrating for students because they were so frequently standing on unfamiliar intellectual turf, each segment of the course provided students multiple opportunities to study and write about the relationships among texts—whether written documents, visual media, literacies or social practices—and social values and subjectivities. As a result, they discussed how issues of race, sex, class, gender, and even geography could be linked to activities they were good at, things they had been excluded from, things they were expected to learn (or unlearn), and ways they were expected to participate in the world. This range of discussion points and experience provided a strong base for the final series of assignments, which were dedicated to the more extensive analyses associated with the research process. The final unit of the course, however, would focus much more specifically on issues of gender and sexuality as well as the social production and regulation of categories of difference.

When designing the unit, I took a lesson from David Bleich’s “Homophobia and Sexism as Popular Values,” making sure it aligned well with the others, both in terms of its theoretical framework and its inclusion of social issues. So while sites of analysis may have differed over the semester, ranging from advertisements to forms of literacy, each main unit moved from summary to analysis, and each built on the one before in order to move students from rhetorical to ideological analysis, a shift that I operationally defined as moving from how a text is constructed to achieve particular goals within specific contexts to what socio-ideological effects are produced by that text. Day-to-day activities were also consistent across units: small and large group discussions, peer-response workshops, teacher conferences, short in-class writing, and paper assignments that were taken through a process from brainstorming to editing. But there were several additional goals guiding my development of the final unit. While teaching the research-based paper as a genre, I wanted to focus discussions more specifically on gender and sexuality as socially produced constructs. Doing so would link the class to the regional debates over gay rights and the heterosexist campus discourse I had experienced as well as to issues associated with sexism. Moreover, I hoped the unit would unsettle the dominant logics foundational to such discourses.

The syllabus included a range of reading assignments from Cheryl Glenn's *Making Sense: A New Rhetorical Reader*. They ran the gamut from fairly traditional materials such as Jamaica Kincaid's “Girl,” Judy Brady's “I Want a Wife,” and Dave Barry’s “Guys vs. Men” to popular texts such as *Will & Grace* and texts that would create more discomfort, such as Barrie Jean Borich’s “What Kind of King,” in which the writer describes shopping for clothes with her butch partner in the men’s department at J.C. Penney.
As we began with the more traditional texts, students handled the transition to the unit well. Responding to Kincaid's "Girl," for example, students built on their previous discussions of gender and began talking about it as a fluid concept based on historical and material conditions, a construct that changes over time and varies across cultures. They also expertly identified mechanisms used to construct and discipline masculinity when asked to re-write the text such that it could be called "Boy." One student even traced a normative pattern in his family; as his grandfather had beaten his father for growing his hair long, his father had beaten him for getting an earring because both were interpreted as signs that the young men were "becoming faggots." Many of his peers nodded in understanding as the student described the familial pattern. But when the "becoming faggots" line was uttered, there was a bit of head shaking and some light laughter, prompted according to one student by the notion that you can simply "become" gay by choosing hair styles or accessories. I was shaking my head slightly as well, but not because of the idea that someone may choose to alter their performance of sexuality at any given time in their life, but that the class seemed to be accepting violence as a just form of discipline. To wit, unlike the discussions they had about domestic abuse, when students categorically denied the legitimacy of violence, an overwhelming portion of the class affirmed that physical assaults are legitimate attempts to promote and enforce proper (meaning heterosexual) behaviors.

In retrospect, the discussion at that point could have turned in any number of directions, such as the conflation of gender and personal expression with sexual preference or the purposes underlying the vigilant policing of masculinity. I asserted first what I thought was the most obvious and necessary thing to be said: violence is not a legitimate form of persuasion. I also admitted that I did not want to stifle conversation, but that it was hard for me as a teacher to negotiate a classroom discussion that took for granted the legitimacy of such violence. I could talk about the use of violence if it were a true discussion, based on interrogation and dialogue, but I could not out of hand perpetuate its legitimacy, as that would suggest all students, faculty, and staff on campus as well as members of the general community who happened to be or were perceived to be LGBT ought to be considered potential targets of assault. And as my syllabus asserted in its policies section, while differences of opinion were to be expected, we were also expected to learn to deal with them productively because the physical safety of class participants had to be a given. My comments stifled all conversation about the issue, of course. So I tabled any further discussion about the functions of violence for later sessions and moved on.

Specifically, I asked students to consider how the dirt-bike riding and earring examples related to each other. We moved beyond the obvious relatively quickly, as multiple students broke the ice by chirping, in
unison, that both examples related to gender. Their facial expressions as well as their simultaneous responses incited laughter, eased the tension of the previous discussion, and enabled us to collaborate again. Students ultimately linked the examples as active forms of social discipline that work to sustain gender constructs and the sorts of social relationships that they support. Training females to be sensitive and pretty and to care for others, for instance, sustains particular familial roles as well as hiring practices, pay structures, and social expectations. As one student asserted, “women are supposed to take care of everyone around them, including their husband, but then act like they need that man to take care of them.” And as a nursing student stated, “if gender policing primarily pumped men into heavy-hitting medical research jobs and women into nursing, no wonder you couldn’t get a prosthetic to fit a woman until recently; the male body was treated as the norm, as if its dimensions and characteristics are universal to all people.” Moreover, training males to be rugged individuals who strictly abide by masculine codes of performativity in their most traditional sense upholds the stereotypical behavioral distinctions between men and women, as well as a supposed distinction between men and gay men, and therefore functions to sustain a range of social practices based on those distinctions (such as paying less for women’s labor or bashing males for not fulfilling expectations of masculinity).

It didn’t take long before an us-versus-them tension began to build given the desire of many of the female students to interrogate what they called the unfair effects of gender codes. I guided the discussion away from questions like “Why do you guys try to be in charge of everything?” (they weren’t very effective) to ask the entire class for examples of how women enforce gender codes on other women. Complicating the deployment of gender in that way eased the tension a bit; the men in class no longer felt like targets. But it also revealed how women as well as men are implicated in the maintenance of gender and its related stereotypes, expectations, and unfair ramifications. As a result, I hoped students would consider how dealing with social issues isn’t usually as easy as identifying two sides to be pitted against each other. Issues must be analyzed systemically and people must be willing to explore their own participation in the reproduction of inequitable conditions.

With the notion of complicity—even when unintended—in mind, I asked them to consider several questions for the next class discussion, questions that would bring us back to gender, but also to sexuality and its enforcement in what I hoped would be productive ways: [1] If the image of the negative (that is the gay) is something against which we are consistently measured, by others as well as ourselves when considering how we want to present ourselves to the world, does the construction of identity itself require the existence of a marginalized, denigrated subject? [2] Even when

Diversity and Campus Change 37
we are being taught to perform gender so that we will not appear or act gay, doesn't the centrality of gayness somehow become so internalized that it is, in fact, a part of us? [3] If your neighbor were to argue that LGBT subjectivities were a threat to a person like you, how would he or she explain that stance?

The next class session focused mainly on the relationship between definition and identity, considering the first two questions, reserving the third for a freewrite activity that was linked to a discussion about providing support for assertions. Initially, the most vocal students secured their heterosexuality by suggesting that gayness had nothing to do with them, perhaps with the exception of not wanting people to think that they were gay. I responded theoretically, asking about definition as a concept and a process. The upshot was that to have an identity involves people defining themselves as well as being defined by others. And to be defined requires being understood in relation to something else. Any identity therefore necessarily includes the opposite. Furthermore, an identity position, once established, isn't fixed. Maintaining an identity, such as heterosexual or feminine, and acting in accordance with the expectations of that category, means (however subconsciously much of it happens) repeatedly defining oneself against and rejecting the performances of other possible subjectivities. Thus, any identity is a dynamic category that is produced according to a process of perpetual performativity, as Judith Butler argues.

Even though most students had a much easier time talking about gender than sexuality, the majority ended up agreeing by the end of the class discussion that gayness, the cultural negative against which the proper was defined and measured, was an important factor in their lives; it was used to establish the parameters of acceptable emotions, clothing, hobbies, hair, attitudes, and friends, for instance. By considering the image of gay identity a commonplace that works to shape culture and their own identities, many students were able to invest in the unit. The theoretical identification they produced didn't require them to take a stand on the legitimacy of LGBT people, to study gay people as specimens, or to politically (or religiously) debate LGBT rights. Rather, it constructed a cultural commonplace and asked students to identify the assumptions, expectations, social functions, and myriad forms of discipline associated with that commonplace.

This sort of indirect approach at the beginning of the unit may seem problematic. Rather than directly launching into the marriage debates and interrogating religious values or political inequities and reading articles documenting LGBT oppression, I tried to create an environment where all students would feel invested in and less marginalized by the material. I wanted to avoid the sort of confrontation that would fundamentally alter our ability to have productive group discussions. I wanted to assert physical safety as an expectation and a right at the same time that I destabilized
the students' ideological safety, which relied on LGBT exclusion and marginalization. As did Winans in her work on race at a rural campus, then, I had to find a way to deal with outright hostile discourse as well as a layer of polite yet troubling discourse produced by students who didn't want to appear homophobic. I chose to focus on some definitional work as a result, defining gender, sex, sexuality, identity formation, and definition itself. Doing so enabled the class to create a link among all subject positions, at least on a theoretical level, and to establish a sense of collaborative engagement. And from my perspective, those were the most productive sessions of the unit because we developed a tone of identification rather than separation—but they were only the first two days of the unit.

The tense, but often productive, discussions we established early in the unit took a turn as we progressed through the material, however; they gave way to student snickering, smirking, and kicking each other under the tables and then to more aggressive reactions. In response to a freewrite activity about what social conditions are threatened by LGBT inclusion and what conditions are protected by the enforcement of heterosexuality, one student explained that I was "working on behalf of sin." In lieu of an informal in-class writing activity at another point, I was slipped a New Testament. And when I told a student that he might want to reconsider a thesis that asserted the obviously false claim that no straight person would watch Will & Grace, he got so irate that he yelled about how I was "making [him] talk about gays," slammed his fist into a desk, gathered his books, and approached me with a swiftness that made me wonder if I was about to become his tackling dummy. He continued to yell as he got in my face: "I don't like gays; they're not normal! Anyone who wants crap on his dick is not a real man." The rage evident in these comments was also evident in his paper draft, which made claims about gays not being "real" men, homosexuality being perverse, and diversity being an illegitimate area of college education.

I didn't go into the course naïve enough to think that all students would be comfortable discussing diversity, or that they would appreciate diverse perspectives, populations, or texts. I expected a number of students to resist the work, either by not participating or by being antagonistic. Some of the materials would be difficult to teach even on larger and far more liberal campuses, after all. But if part of the discipline's work, and a major objective of the course unit, is to conduct the sort of analysis that leads students to understand language and social practices in new ways, there's bound to be tension, discomfort, uncertainty. Let's face it: taking away the safety of simplicity, and revealing how discourse commonly perceived as liberal can be complicit with exclusionary practices, creates cognitive dissonance and asks students to position themselves on new intellectual ground. This movement will often be accompanied by a loss of composure.
because seeing the world in new ways can be painful. Understood in this regard, classrooms based on analyzing discourse ought to be uncomfortable places punctuated by difficult silences, confrontations, and occasional emotional bursts. The ethos of the classroom community based on the notion of everyone getting along in a tranquil apolitical setting just doesn't seem to fit diversity work.

Because the politics of the contact zone create tension, I was expecting it. In fact, to an extent, I wanted it—but I also wanted to control it, limit it, determine what it would be like. So I had certainly considered options for dealing with heterosexist discourse in the classroom. When I was confronted with the student's rage, then, I knew I could focus on commas and quotes, paying attention to issues of correctness in the student's paper draft rather than actually challenging his tirade—something that Richard Miller and David Rothgery both might urge me not to do, and that very much felt like coping out. I knew I could yell back. I knew I could appear to remain relatively calm. I knew I could come out. I knew I could do any number of things. And, even though I was surprised by how quickly my own feelings of physical and psychological safety eroded, I figured I could handle the immediate situation. A majority of the students had already left, as it was a workshop day and they were doing small-group work down the hall, in the cafeteria, and in the student lounge. And if all else failed, there were two doors to the classroom, an administrative office one floor down, and a campus security office nearby.

But what did I actually do? I stood my ground and tried to turn his outburst into a learning moment. Rather than escalating into a shouting match, asking him to calm down, or backing away, I tried to defuse the moment's intensity and then analyze the discourse (not the student, but the discursive structures that had been presented) in order to model the process of inquiry that students had been asked to engage all semester. While looking him in the eye, and waving off another male student who had moved from the back of the room toward the front in what I thought was going to be an effort to intervene on my behalf, I told him that I understood that he was upset: he had struggled to earn the grades he wanted on the previous assignments; his current paper required extensive revision to earn a passing grade; he had difficult assignments in all of his other courses to worry about as well; and his daughter had been sick, requiring more of his time than usual. I admitted, too, that I would likely be feeling overwhelmed were I in his shoes. But he had just charged at a member of the campus community—and a professor to boot—in a threatening manner and needed to calm down. "If you can't maintain control and be respectful of everyone in this room, then walk away now and come to my office hours to talk about this incident and your revision strategy. Or, you can participate in the remainder of the class session. Either way, the rest of this session will
focus on what just happened.” He walked away. He never did come back, for reasons I later found out were entirely personal. And when he finally did resurface, months later, he called to apologize.

After he walked out, however, the remaining students didn’t seem to know quite what to do. They looked at the ground, out the window, at each other, never landing on one spot for very long and rarely making eye contact with me. I asked them to look at me, told them everything was okay, and said it was a perfect time for us to talk—to talk about what happened and what it means, to analyze the discourse that had been deployed. So I asked about the rhetoric of threats, specifically its purpose. “In this case,” said one student, “to get a higher grade, to make you lose face in front of us, maybe to get us to confront you too, and to scare you and these sorts of conversations away from campus.” Another student said, “I’m not sure. But threats are used to assert a division, to say what’s normal. And I only know what people around here think is normal, and what they want you to think is normal. And they want you to think it’s okay to be sexist and to hate gays.” On his way out, the young man who I had waved away earlier said over his shoulder, “Him rushing you like that, trying to make you scared, was an attempt to redefine what your class, and college, are allowed to be.”

I may never be satisfied with how I handled the situation. I still think about ways I could have rebounded differently, engaged the class and that student in other ways. But over the course of the next week or so, many students moved from asserting violence is a reasonable way to patrol the borders of gender and sexuality to feeling sorry for people who experience violence or the threat of it. Rather than feeling sorry for people who are attacked, and allowing that emotion to define a liberal stance of inclusion, I suggested that ideological analysis move us beyond emotion to a systemic interrogation of the myriad ways that sexuality is patrolled and regulated so we can determine what is actually being protected and at what cost. And according to their evaluations of the course, some good came from the outburst and my efforts to engage it productively. Students noted, for example, that most conversations end where ours began, and that they weren’t “let off the hook” but had to “keep thinking about hard issues” and how others are affected by their words, beliefs, and votes—by the discourse they participate in.

Because students felt challenged, wrote complex papers interrogating the means by which sexuality and gender are patrolled, and even questioned social regulations, I felt the class went well. They improved as readers and writers. They learned to struggle more productively with difficult issues and to talk about that struggle. They learned to more carefully identify claims, analyze evidence, and respond analytically to texts. They also learned to better craft and substantiate their own claims.
Even given the successes along the way, though, the class was frequently riddled with anxiety. There were days when I dreaded walking into the room. Many sleepless nights before class, I tried to figure out how to respond to a student comment from the previous session, how to address the reading assignment, or what to do about the guys in the back row who wore smirks wider than the brims of their baseball caps. There were stacks of hate-filled papers; even though many weren't intended to be so, they were. The discourse in these papers was then brought back into the classroom, made integral to the revision process. When a student asserted that she thought gays should be left alone to do what they wanted to do, as long as they were behind closed doors, for instance, we interrogated the assumptions and logic of that stance. When a student said isolation is the only legal response to LGBT behaviors, we discussed it—as well as similar logics based on a “let them alone to kill themselves off” attitude, such as those sometimes deployed to discuss homelessness or inner-city violence. When a student articulated that gay men are pedophiles, we addressed that logic as well. It's important to note, though, we also interrogated positive assertions, such as civic marriages ought be legalized for all couples.

Given the rigor of analysis, it's not surprising that students felt the anxiety as much as I did. They admitted that there were days when they didn't want to come to class, either, knowing it was going to be tense and intense, even exhausting as social narratives, personal values, and cultural logics were assessed, analyzed, and as one student asserted, “thought to death.” So even as successful as the class was in some ways, it was equally taxing. And in terms of altering a campus climate, it was only one class, only one group of 20 students. It was, literally, only the beginning. Although impressed with their writing and their burgeoning analytical skills, I was emotionally drained and unsure I could teach classes like that every semester. I had to face it: I couldn't be the queer crusader any more than the then-one professor of color could teach the campus to be anti-racist.

Although only one student publicly lost composure in an explosive manner, many students—both in the class and on the larger campus—were likely to identify with the feelings and reactions that spurred his outburst. And the emotional energy required to wage diversity classes in rural areas is remarkable. Therefore, it stands to reason that challenging heterosexist ideology and angry reactions to diversity requires a community rather than an individualist solution. But it's ironic, really; as it sunk in that the work to be done was immense, and that my composition course can only go so far to alter the hostile climate, it was also becoming clearer how the composition program itself could be integral to, if not a leader of, the campus efforts to create change.

42 Composition Studies
As a program responsible for providing comprehensive education in critical literacy, and as the only first-year course on my campus that engages each and every first-year student, composition is poised to participate in literacy programs that challenge students in and outside of writing classes. In the remainder of this paper, then, I’d like to describe a cultural literacy program that emerged on campus. Many people who became involved in the program did so because they were dedicated to staying in hostile contexts and realized the need for local pedagogies, practical strategies, and holistic approaches that can produce greater levels of access and support for the inclusion of LGBT faculty, staff, students, and experiences. I will not argue that the cultural pedagogy I advocate or its holistic campus strategy is the way to positively affect all colleges. I will not even suggest that compositionists are the best people to do this work. I will suggest, though, that such a systemic approach can be deployed to pre-queer a campus such as mine. I will also suggest that given our contact hours with all students and the size of our programs as well as the role of those programs, we are well positioned to do this work. And the cultural model works to establish the groundwork necessary for productive discussions of diversity that we may wish to generate in composition courses. Moreover, by spreading the pedagogical responsibility across the curriculum, it may more effectively counter the hegemony of heterosexism in regions where “diversity educators” interested in posing questions about subjectivity, power, and the material effects of language are interpreted as ideologues.

The Campus as Classroom—A Cultural Pedagogy Broadly Construed

Disrupting the status quo is easy if it’s understood as producing a loss of composure—a rupture, however minor, in the tranquility experienced by students, faculty, or campuses that have happily sustained exclusive values and effectively patrolled the institution, disciplining others such that they leave, go straight pedagogically, or simply shut up. But systemically altering the heterosexist culture of a campus is not easy. At the very least, it requires a holistic approach that integrates all facets of campus life in order to better address the many factors that coalesce to create exclusion in the first place. A writing course such as I’ve described is only one aspect of such a program.

Perhaps the first question that must be addressed, before even talking about a comprehensive literacy program that integrates issues of diversity, though, may be why composition? Why add to the already time-consuming workloads and the already difficult work of teaching writing? What positions
that disciplinary area and its teachers to participate in the coordination of campus-wide programs such as the one I advocate?

When it comes to diversity, teachers are often masters of theory who need pragmatic strategies to create change, strategies that can create social pressures, relationships, and activities that engender diversity. And I believe compositionists ought to play an integral role in the work for several reasons. Because we engage all new students, for instance, we’re in a position to talk to the administration about intellectual and social trends in the student population. Moreover, we are central to all first-year experiences, not only in terms of retention, but also in terms of establishing an intellectual trajectory for students. Creating a dynamic first-year experience that extends far beyond the walls of a single classroom is critical to campus and student success. And as literacy educators dedicated to strengthening the methods by which people read and write, we’re in a position to create cross-campus partnerships that facilitate that goal. Moreover, as typically one of the largest programs on campus, composition is pivotal to the university mission, and can function as an important site of organization and dissemination. Composition can thusly leverage its institutional size, purpose, and program to generate a local pedagogy and a comprehensive first-year experience in reading and writing that is attentive to issues of diversity and critical thought.

To broadly conceive pedagogy as everything that happens on campus provides innumerable points of potential intervention in the process of social production. Targeting three primary areas of concentration—the administration, the curriculum, and the larger campus culture—can reinforce the initial loss of ideological composure experienced by students, such as the one who yelled at me during class. Moreover, it can play an important role in producing the repeated exposure to diversity education often required to transition from gut responses and reactionary politics to sustained analysis and cultural inclusion.

Because the tone set by the administration profoundly affects colleges and their communities, especially on small campuses in small towns where students frequently interact with campus leaders and where administrators participate on local boards and governing committees, persuading campus officers to make a concerted effort to lead the community toward an appreciation—and celebration—of diversity is critical to altering hostile contexts. In short, the actions of administrators model behavioral expectations for students as well as the local citizenry. Thus, as leaders, they need to both enable and participate in inclusion so that when the actions of the campus and its leaders are “read” by students and members of the community, they read a text that models diversity appreciation. It would be unreasonable to expect that all administrators are friendly to diversity, of course, especially to LGBT issues. However, if diversity initiatives already
exist, then so do the means to hold leaders accountable to those initiatives, whether through annual evaluations, strategic planning, hotlines to report behavior, or other avenues of institutional review. Even loosely organized climate surveys (and online surveys can be created and implemented at very little expense) can make a large impact, generating concern at central campuses and on governance boards.

When administrators appreciate diversity, other strategies to bolster the climate include encouraging them to hire LGBT faculty even if that person may not be retained long term. Although administrators see the financial stake in retention, they also tend to see the stake in campus growth, growth earned by hiring strong faculty (not just faculty that will stay indefinitely) who can make a mark on programs and the intellectual culture of a region. Certainly, however, regions that are fairly hostile to those new hires will require procedures for individual and professional support. Merely settling for the visibility created by out faculty or pointing to policies of academic freedom when confronted with student complaints is not enough. The interests and clout of all friendly administrators can be leveraged to demonstrate the legitimacy of diversity education and representation on campus and in the community. Supporting faculty when student complaints can be linked to backlash, inviting LGBT faculty into the networks of campus leadership, and asking LGBT citizens to serve on campus advisory and review boards are important strategies for setting the tone on a campus, for instance.

While composition instructors cannot make these things happen, we can be advocates of diversity initiatives that hold administrators accountable to quantifiable support. We can lobby friendly audiences in positions of power and consistently keep our issues on the table. And through faculty senate committees we can create policies that ensure diversity advocates are on all hiring and review committees. Moreover, via rhetorical appeals based on campus mission statements, we can articulate the need for comprehensive education and regular strategic planning and follow-through that makes diversity a theoretical and material priority. At an even more practical level, professors can create a cadre of safety for each other as they often strive to do for students—one or more groups of advanced faculty can actively mentor and support new faculty, use their tenure as a shield to advocate for progressive campus change, and challenge peers who use the classroom to denounce diversity or the legitimacy of critical academic pursuits.

In addition to such administrative and professional support, challenging the normalcy of LGBT exclusion requires dedication at the curricular level as well. On campuses with diversity requirements for all students, it's often easy to pretend that alternative experiences, histories, and cultures are adequately addressed. But this curricular model can actually marginalize diversity education by suggesting it belongs in one or two isolated courses.

Diversity and Campus Change 45
rather than in all courses. Rather than relying on a course here and there, an integrated cross-campus model can reinforce the importance of and expectations for diversity, place the responsibility for diversity training on all instructors rather than one or two, coordinate coursework with a cultural series of speakers, movies, and other events, and protect individual faculty members from accusations of politicizing the classroom based on their personal agendas. It's in this area that composition may have the most promise and influence.

In short, composition instructors are often the only teachers on small campuses who have extensive training in pedagogy. We're often taught how to teach, not just what content ought to be taught. We often study teaching. And teaching is as much, sometimes more, a concern than research. As a result, we're sometimes poised to enhance instruction in ways that other members of our communities aren't. Many of us, in fact, do similar work already via programs in writing across the curriculum; we help other faculty to create assignments and course units for their content areas. As teachers of reading and writing with experience teaching about issues of difference, we can tap into these existing relationships with faculty to generate broader use of writing-to-learn activities, increase student experience with issues of difference, produce knowledge of the respective discipline, and reinforce student abilities to analyze discourse. A teacher of Math, for example, may value diversity but be unsure about how to make it productive and relevant to her course when she already struggles to cover all the material. She could alter her statistics assignment by asking students to go beyond calculating results. A short writing assignment asking them to consider the disparate results that they find, such as those associated with race or class and diabetes or AIDS diagnoses, would illustrate the extent to which mathematical results—a type of language—require analysis while also encouraging students to explore the relationship between race, class, region, and a particular disease. An alternative assignment could ask students to study and tabulate statistics related to employment and salary equity. Students would thusly learn to calculate results while also being exposed to larger disciplinary and institutional practices. Courses ranging from History to Sociology to English to Mining Technologies could incorporate local histories that speak more directly to the politics and demographics of the region and our students, such as issues of gender, sexuality, and class in the contexts of coal mining and unionization.

Treating instruction in diversity as a matter of discourse, as a matter of language, power, and material circumstances, enables composition faculty simultaneously to teach the content, to teach about the discipline, and to encourage critical thinking about issues of diversity. Moreover, it enables faculty in composition to leverage their training in pedagogy
and critical analysis to create a campus community defined by—not infrequently punctuated by—courses inclusive of diversity that train critical readers and writers.

Creating a cultural pedagogy that reaches into all corners of campus life, however, does not privilege the classroom proper; it also makes use of non-classroom spaces as overtly pedagogical spaces—spaces that can teach, spaces to be read, spaces to be written. Office doors, bulletin boards, bookcases, and walls are purposeful sites for creating visibility, establishing a tone of acceptance, and sharing information. They offer powerful opportunities to create a linguistic impact on the campus. An impact, in turn, that illustrates the power of language to affect culture. Blanketing the campus with diversity affirming materials is only part of this pedagogy, though, just as coursework is only part of the picture. It is also important to create the frameworks for understanding and discussing issues of social difference as we would in a classroom setting. To facilitate this work in my context meant joining forces with the Diversity Task Force and strategizing ways to proliferate extra-curricular diversity education across campus.

We began our work by carefully coordinating a speaker series to educate attendees, humanize difference, create an ethos of compassion, and enrich materials being presented in courses. Speakers addressed issues of sexuality, alcoholism, and domestic violence. Then we worked to generate support among the faculty for a Cultural Center. Once we had a population of supporters, we lobbied the administration for their support, presenting a formal proposal that drew on the university and campus mission statements as well as their statements on diversity to explain how a Center would support students, educate members of the campus and local community, and coordinate faculty and staff training opportunities. Given the multiple cultural centers located on the single, large campus that acts as our hub, demonstrating successful models wasn’t difficult. The issue quickly became a matter of what would be housed there, who would do the work on our campus, who would pay for it, and how would we get people to visit.

To address these concerns we knew we must be respectful of local culture while also representing diversity and advocating greater inclusion. As a result, the Center presents histories deemed acceptable by the local community, such as histories of labor in the coal and coke heritage, alongside histories of women, Indians, African Americans, Hispanics, and LGBT cultures. The Center supplements these materials with critical theories of race, sex, class, gender, and sexuality as well as texts about anger management, hate crime, and domestic violence, and links these pedagogical efforts to corporate hiring priorities and the university’s mandate for diversity in order to reinforce how an authority higher than the campus’s Diversity Group deems the material critical to personal, intellectual, economic, and community development. The Center’s theme
each semester is also linked to at least one course being offered on campus in order to supplement the formal curriculum. And Health Awareness Activities often dovetail with our activities, incorporating presentations and testing that align with our themes. Members of the community are invited to attend cultural programs at least once per semester, such as presentations by Chinese Dragon Dance teams, groups that perform traditional African drumming, or gay citizens who were once members of the military. Most of the funds for the Cultural Center materials come from donations at the speaker events and cultural activities that we sponsor as well as student activity fees; we also use a modest chunk of the modest budget allocated to the Diversity Task Force to facilitate the university’s diversity mission.

Although few educators question that the classroom is an important social space full of promise, conflict, and potential, many of us also realize that one teacher, one classroom, one pedagogical attempt to rupture inequitable conditions is not likely to unravel the logic of heterosexism that pervades many of our communities. Certainly, discussions of particular syllabi models and writing assignments are important to the work I advocate. But for some of us, other practical work needs to get done, too; otherwise, we risk being lone voices, sole figures rather easily taken down. Developing a holistic approach of cultural pedagogy can put the onus of diversity education on the entire campus. And published scholarship attesting to this can provide us ammunition as we argue for policy changes, course developments, and professional mentoring programs.

Even with comprehensive literacy programs and cultural pedagogies, we will still have difficult confrontations with students—and perhaps colleagues. With all the changes that have taken place on my campus, there are still times when I feel I can’t be out enough, hidden enough, butch enough, femme enough, confrontational enough, or motherly enough to affect more change. There are moments when I think I can’t yell enough, cry enough, laugh enough, or be strong enough to make a difference because the culture of fear remains profound. But by teaching students to engage language critically, by creating courses across the curriculum that encourage open discussions of difference, and by creating a campus environment respectful of diversity, the work does get easier. After all, if one of the primary forces in the production of culture is language, it is through critical analysis of language, its assumptions, and its material realities that we can alter that culture. And even though many people on small campuses may lament what they lose by teaching in such a context, it is the small-campus environment that provides us magnificent opportunities to alter a climate, to develop a curriculum, and to create social change.
Notes

1. The diversity designation can be given to a class when 25 percent of its materials represent diversity, either in content or authorship. Much debate surrounded the low percentage of materials required to earn the designation, but that line of inquiry is not one that I wish to pursue in this paper.

2. The fact that conference presentations rather than printed articles seem to dominate this era isn’t surprising given the historical context. During the 1970s, for instance, much composition scholarship was focused on legitimating the discipline itself, and cognitive research was a major trend. Moreover, it was not until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association reversed their position that had hitherto linked LGBT subjectivity to illness. And according to John D’Emilio, it also wasn’t until 1973 that the Gay Academic Union was formed in New York, a broad-based organization interested in addressing the needs and concerns of LGBT scholars.

3. See discussions in Gary David Comstock’s Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men, or Gregory Herek and Kevin Berrill’s Hate Crimes.

4. A thorough review of the history is beyond the scope of this piece. Jonathan Alexander and Michelle Gibson offer a more detailed history in their 2004 JAC essay.

5. Students considered, for instance, how certain knowledges (such as the ability to golf well, to analyze stock portfolios, to follow instructions but not to solve abstract problems) seem not only more accessible to members of particular demographics, but also integral to the social production of those groups.

6. Campuses affiliated with large universities may have more leverage to persuade the administration that access and tolerance are inadequate, and that acceptance and overt support are necessary because even if they are geographically distant from the “main” campus site, the faculty and students often have recourse to the policies and protections established by that campus.

7. It’s important to note that an economy of scale guided the development of the Center. In other words, while a large Research I campus might have several centers, each dedicated to a particular cultural group or category of diversity, smaller campuses may have to start with one center that provides a range of materials. Moreover, that center may have to be developed on a shoe-string budget, borrowing materials from the library or from the personal collections held by faculty, and culling together funds from university diversity initiatives, already established university organizations that offer small grants for programming, local community non-profit organizations, and slivers of student-activity fees that can be used to secure speakers and to purchase textual materials.
Works Cited


Rothgery, David. “‘So What Do We Do Now?’ Necessary Directionality as the Writing Teacher’s Response to Racist, Sexist, Homophobic Papers.” College Composition and Communication 44 (1993): 241-47.


50 Composition Studies
Copyright of Composition Studies is the property of Composition Studies and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.