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Writing Against the Curriculum presents a collection of essays about anti-disciplinary practice within writing programs structured around WID philosophies. In their introduction, the editors contend that this popular restructuring—normally a single first-year “Introduction to Writing” course, followed by a two-year sequence of “Writing in the Disciplines” courses taught in academic departments—essentially reduces first-year composition to a pre-disciplinary course of minor significance and status. But this status also creates a space to infuse FYC with anti-disciplinary praxis. The editors argue that these courses “make excellent spaces to question disciplinarity through the study of rhetoric, the attention to invention and intervention, the emphasis on critical thinking, and [...] curricular flexibility [...]... before students experience disciplinary enforcement most intensely in the advanced classes” (3). In a curricular structure where writing is a gateway for the disciplinary assembly-line, this collection demonstrates the ways in which pedagogies can slow and subvert this process. Audiences of critical pedagogues, writing program administrators, and WAC/WID practitioners who seek a critical approach will find this collection of particular value.

The driving question of the book asks: how can theory and pedagogy work to examine, analyze, and subvert the mechanisms of disciplinarity? A primary answer is to deliberately integrate Composition Studies and Cultural Studies for anti-disciplinary projects, and nearly all eleven chapters in this short collection demonstrate this integration. The book is divided into three sections. The first, “What Is Writing For?”, is a meditation on the pedagogical praxis of anti-disciplinarity; the second, “Shifting Schemas,” is a critique of curricular and institutional structures, and a demonstration of anti-disciplinary practice in full courses and writing programs; the third, “Writing Across the (Anti) Disciplines,” details forms of intervention in disciplinary classrooms, and shows how anti-disciplinary pedagogy opens up new spaces for student agency. One of the strengths of the book as a whole is how it playfully (re)assembles the concept of discipline, both in the Foucaultian sense of restriction, surveillance, and punishment, and in its denotations of methodology, body of knowledge, and a community with shared values. The introduction does a thorough threading of popular prefixes for disciplinary—pre-, inter-, trans-, multi-, anti-, cross-, and post—and it clearly situates “writing pedagogy as a critical practice against discipline, and towards post-disciplinary,” defined here as a pedagogy that functions as if discrete disciplines no longer matter (5). This frames the book as a col-
lection of pedagogies against the dominant methods, knowledge practices, and values of WID structured writing programs. It asserts critical inquiry as a tactical practice to resist these forces.

Part 1 consists of three chapters about anti-disciplinary writing practices. The opening chapter by Ryan Claycomb and Rachel Riedner, “Toward an Anti-Disciplinary Nexus: Cultural Studies, Rhetoric Studies, and Composition,” argues that a civic-minded Rhetorical Studies, an activist-oriented Cultural Studies, and a praxis-laden Composition Studies share a common interest in action and empowerment. This, they argue, can form the basis of anti-disciplinary pedagogy (25). A good example of this at the end of part 1 is Pegeen Reichert Powell’s essay “Interventions at the Intersections: An Analysis of Public Writing and Student Writing.” She analyzes two examples of student-produced public writing and concludes that the divisions between public and academic or disciplinary and anti-disciplinary are unstable, and in practice risk being distinctions without a difference (69). Her examples of student-produced public writing actively challenge academic taxonomies and sanctified modes of knowledge production, arriving at spaces of productive ambiguity where disciplinarity is no longer the point. Powell’s example is typical of this section as a whole. Within the structure of a program that unapologetically seeks to produce workers in service of a totalizing market economy, the student writing valued in this collection is political, self-reflexive, public, and laced with critical awareness (13).

Although the book is framed as primarily concerned with the first-year composition course, by part 2 it becomes clear the book is also about praxis in writing program administration, the library, and WID courses. The particular strength of the essays in part 2 is how mindfully they dwell on the boundaries of pragmatism and critical theory. In his discussion of a WID course, Alan Ramón Clinton demonstrates how writing is so manifold in its possibilities, that in addition to writing to learn a discipline, “writing itself is against discipline” (75). His pedagogy frames writing as a technology of invention which can be used as a means of gaining knowledge, as well as thinking against disciplinary boundaries. Similarly, Catherine Gouge’s piece on building and administering Web-Intensive Writing Programs acknowledges the troubling implications of online writing classes, but uses their location to cultivate a critical administrative approach for anti-disciplinary interventions. Specifically, this means resisting demands from upper-level administration for the matriculation of high numbers of traditional students by designing these courses solely for adult populations and building critical reflection into the curriculum. Gouge’s pithy summary exemplifies just this kind of boundary work between pragmatism and critical praxis inside and outside the program:

Inside of the program, I have designed courses which offer students a professional certificate that is authorized by a state university in exchange for becoming more critical and aware students and citizens; outside of the
program, I use my role on university college committees as an opportunity to challenge the disciplinary boundaries which seek to reproduce uncritical laborers and consumers. (121)

In his essay in section 2, “The Brake of Reflection: Slowing Social Process in the Critical WID Classroom,” David Kellogg acknowledges the overwhelmingly pragmatic ambitions toward vocation that most of our students have and also makes use of reflexive practice. Kellogg uses reflection and reflexivity to slow the process of disciplinarity and create the space for explicit awareness and critique. Kellogg argues that one way to give support to critical reflection in the WID classroom is to “keep WID programs in an English or rhetoric program where such perspectives have a chance to be acknowledged” (107).

The third and last section of the book consists of three chapters which enact anti-disciplinary pedagogy from within the cultural studies-infused composition and literature classrooms. Unfortunately, the last section leaves the connections to anti-disciplinarity vague. This is particularly strange, given that the last two chapters were written by the editors. I was left wondering why the connection between the anti-disciplinary theory in their introduction and the practice in these pedagogical chapters was not made explicit, as they were in the rest of the book. While Eric Lorentzen’s essay on teaching Dickens is an exception, anti-disciplinarity nearly disappears in the last section in favor of descriptions of Cultural Studies pedagogies. While the last two essays are dynamic approaches to Black Studies and Performance Studies in the composition classroom, the lack of specific connection to anti-disciplinary practice leaves the end of the book somewhat disjointed. I can only reason that part of this disconnect is due to the fact that these chapters were originally written a number of years ago as journal articles.

Given the recent calls to strengthen the disciplinary status of composition by teaching the content of our discipline, Writing Against the Curriculum provides a counter-statement and asks, what benefits can we derive from a continued, but perhaps more deliberate, non-disciplinary status? While this question may accept a low status for composition in the academic hierarchy, it also offers tactical practices to subvert the centrifugal forces of disciplinary power structures. Its aim is to let composition live outside of a disciplined space, to allow for the vagaries of writing instruction, as long as they provide space for students to cultivate their creative and critical capacities. The collection is the first of its kind and it probably won’t be the last. With the rising popularity of WID structured writing programs, Writing Against the Curriculum provides a timely and needed response for how Composition Studies and Cultural Studies can resist these trends, implement theory across pedagogical and programmatic contexts, and build anti-disciplinary praxis into an increasingly disciplined academy.

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