

# A Model of Efficiency: Pre-College Credit and the State Apparatus

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## ABSTRACT

*This article describes one program's adventures with pre-college credit initiatives and their wider implications for writing programs. We show that mandated state policy, determined largely by political and economic factors rather than by educational ones, regulates and constrains writing curriculum. Despite the many challenges to autonomy and program integrity posed by state interference, we argue that writing teachers and administrators can engage in coalition-building with various stakeholders—local businesses, faculty across disciplines, and students—to speak back to state encroachment on writing education.*

During a recent tour of her city's nationally recognized college-prep high school, Laura listened as the school principal informed the tour group that the school offers more Advanced Placement (AP) courses than any other high school in the state. The principal added that the AP curriculum positions students to bypass courses like English composition. "And we know nobody wants to take THAT course!" he added. Heads nodded, though one person near Laura spoke under her breath, "I used to teach composition," a barely articulated defense of THAT course.

Our local high school may boast the largest number of AP offerings in the area, but in most other ways it is no anomaly. The availability of AP and other college-credit opportunities such as dual enrollment courses for high school students is widespread and shows no signs of waning. In fact, dual enrollment programs of one kind or another have become so pervasive that in 2013, the CWPA released the "CWPA Position Statement on Pre-College Credit for Writing," offering guidelines for forming judgments about localized dual enrollment initiatives and other ways of earning pre-college credit so that stakeholders (students, parents, schools, state initiatives, and so forth) can understand the diverse variables at play in each of these programs. In the midst of the proliferating ways students can earn

college credit, we take stock of the consequences for teachers, students, programs, and the field of composition studies. What follows is one program's adventures with pre-college credit initiatives and an argument for how they speak to wider implications of credit programs originating outside composition classes, the likes of which include AP, International Baccalaureate, and concurrent enrollment credit, as noted in the CWPA statement (1).

In Spring 2008, through a circuitous email message, we learned of the Ohio Board of Regents' (OBR) proposal for changing how state institutions of higher education award AP credit. The proposed changes would lower the cut-off for AP scores necessary to earn college credit in nearly every subject area. For English, this meant that students who earned a score of 3 (whereas 4 had been the previous standard) on either the Language and Composition or the Literature and Composition exam would be exempt from taking our first-quarter composition course. Our assistant dean sent a draft of the proposal to cross-college advisors, charged with helping first-year students enroll in classes and invited them to post feedback on a discussion board that had been created on our university's course management system. The message was not sent to anyone in the writing program directly but was forwarded to Joyce, then interim director of composition, by an advisor in the English department.

We should have realized from the beginning that the policy change was a foregone conclusion, not a proposed change. In retrospect, the signs were clear: limited circulation of information to staff not positioned to object to or question the merits of the proposal; private discussion board to which only a small handful of people were invited to contribute; request for feedback rather than an invitation to discuss the policy collectively; exclusion of writing faculty. Yet, upon reading about the proposed change, we thought—naively as it turned out—that by networking with writing faculty and administrators at affected Ohio institutions in order to develop a cross-institutional objection to the change, we could intervene in the policy change or become part of the discussion. Neither came to pass.

The chair of the OBR committee justified the group's recommendation to grant credit for a 3 by reporting that a "strong majority (over 75%)" of board members had approved the policy and that the OBR decided to move forward with the proposal. To be fair, in a private email to Laura, a member of the OBR committee who was serving as writing director on his campus, admitted that he and his colleagues were unhappy about the change in policy, providing a glimpse of the conflicted subject positions that administrators often uneasily occupy. It's our view that the subcommittee chair's role was largely over-determined; the call for the changed policy was enacted from the top down by the OBR in an effort to maximize efficiency across

state institutions. This move aligned with then-Governor Strickland's goal to create a University System of Ohio, such as the ones in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and California. A related goal was to increase student enrollment in Ohio state colleges and universities by making it possible for more students to earn college credit while in high school.

The OBR's sudden AP policy change left us with the distinct sense that our program, along with other Ohio composition programs, had been hijacked by the state for purposes that had little to do with student learning. This change effectively and unabashedly interpellates students as customers and education as commodity. Driven by economic factors, the policy's intended outcome was to make higher education in Ohio more attractive by emphasizing efficiency of enrollment and potential economic value for prospective students. Its effect is to foreground managerial concerns by creating an organizational structure that prioritizes the flow of bodies into the university. As a result, definitions of and standards for writing competency and conversations about how that gets determined and by whom are forced into the background. As directors of a large composition program, we experienced the OBR's decision and the way it was arrived at as a direct challenge to faculty ownership of programs and policies underwriting them. We recognized the state's treatment of universities hinged on a construction of "students as currency," as Jesse Swan puts it, and, just as bad, "knowledge and courses as property or objects suitable for trafficking" (114). Our goal in this article is to explore how mandated state policy, determined largely by political and economic factors rather than by educational ones, regulates and constrains writing curriculum, effectively trafficking credit to build state-based brand loyalty via an uninterrupted pipeline connecting high school students to postsecondary institutions across the state—in our case, Ohio high school students and Ohio postsecondary institutions.

We begin by contextualizing pre-college credit programs within Ohio, all of which blur the transition between high school and college. We explore what's at stake in pre-college credit programs for students, professors, and the discipline of writing when managerial priorities trump educational ones. Finally, we reflect on our own complicity in pre-college credit programs, noting that, as WPAs, we experience our dedication to our department's existing writing program—complete with transfer agreements, standardized placement and curricula, and a stratified work-force—as a challenge to our ability to respond effectively to the state's mandate. In other words, despite our best intentions, we work within and perpetuate a flawed system that continually calls on WPAs to react to policies that often compromise imaginative ways to organize learning and teaching in our large public institution. At the same time, as we suggest in the final section, coalition-

building with various stakeholders—local businesses, faculty across disciplines, and students—presents opportunities for writing programs to exercise agency and speak back to state encroachment on writing education.

#### PRE-COLLEGE CREDIT PROGRAMS IN OHIO

The OBR's decision to lower the credit threshold for AP awards across the state must be understood against the backdrop of Ohio's repeated efforts to mount and sustain successful pre-college credit programs. The appearance and disappearance of various programs in Ohio seems to reflect the general trajectory of postsecondary education as it shifts from an educational mission-driven model to a consumer-driven one. This shift might be read as the latest evidence that, as Gary Rhoades and Sheila Slaughter claim, university faculty are "managed professionals" vulnerable at any time to restructuring from without (43). Bousquet identifies managerialism as the "core subjectivity of the discipline of rhetoric and composition," which he links to "the university's accelerated move toward corporate partnership, executive control, and acceptance of profitability and accumulation as values in decision making" ("Composition" 23). Because of the large scale of many writing programs and the contingent labor force that overwhelmingly staffs writing courses across the country, first-year required writing courses are often configured as opportunistic sites for launching initiatives ranging from common book programs to learning community efforts to summer programs for first-generation college students. FYC is often viewed as a one-space-fits-all, due in no small measure to the still ambivalent identity of a general education writing course that continues to be viewed as content-less and skills-driven. This ambivalence also makes FYC susceptible to changes in administrative policies within institutions as well as outside them, including state-based initiatives that shift FYC to high schools or exempt college-bound students from first-year college writing instruction altogether through AP credit awards.

Efforts to increase access to higher education are often framed—legitimately, we believe—in the context of economic stability for citizens and regions. As such, programs range from those reaching under-represented and low-income families to those targeting at-risk youth to those designed for aspiring musicians, artists, and engineers. Still others provide students with an early start by offering courses in the summer prior to fall enrollment, which may include developmental coursework. Such programs, generally free or subsidized by states and/or colleges and universities (Lowe), recently received national support from the Department of Education.

As former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced in October 2015, students from low-income backgrounds now may gain early access to Federal Pell Grants to take dual enrollment courses. Duncan, the architect of the program, described the \$20 million dollar experiment, initially limited to 2016–2017, as an effort to decrease “barrier[s] to access for some students, particularly those from low-income families” (“Fact Sheet”). Because “66% of institutions report that some parents and students contributed toward tuition” for concurrent enrollment programs, low-income students participate at a lower rate (Lowe). NCTE TYCA Chair Eva Payne worries that low-income students may be further disadvantaged later down the road: “If a portion of their lifetime Pell Grant award is siphoned off while the student is still in high school, already poor students will be faced with taking on greater student loan debt.” She also notes that the good intentions of the Pell Grant program are not backed by “specific plans to support this more vulnerable student population,” revealing the absence of long-term planning necessary to sustain the participation of the very low-income students the program is meant to serve.

The lack of sustainability planning for pre-college credit programs strikes a chord with us because Ohio’s efforts to sustain such programs have waxed and waned for nearly thirty years. In fact, the programs have been so numerous and have gone by so many names that the flagship university in Ohio has developed a glossary of eleven program names to help users navigate the ever-changing college-credit landscape (see [ugeducation.osu.edu/collegedcreditplus-glossary.shtml](http://ugeducation.osu.edu/collegedcreditplus-glossary.shtml)). In 1989, Ohio initiated Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), which allowed 11th and 12th graders to enroll in college courses, earning credit in both high school and college (KnowledgeWorks 2). In 1997, the program expanded to include 9th and 10th graders (as of 2007, Ohio is one of six states in the US to offer dual enrollment options to 9th and 10th graders). By 2006, reinvesting in PSEO was a significant initiative of Governor Strickland’s campaign platform and constituted \$5.7 million of his state budget once in office (8). According to a 2007 report, *The Promise of Dual Enrollment: Assessing Ohio’s Early College Access Policy*, between 1998 and 2004, “more than 55,000 students earned credit that could be applied to college degrees” and more than half “take more than six credit hours a semester” (KnowledgeWorks 3). Student participation documented during that period was overwhelmingly homogeneous: “[n]early 9 out of 10 PSEO participants are white and two out of three are female” (4).

In 2008, Governor Strickland introduced yet another dual enrollment program, Seniors to Sophomores (STS), which allows qualifying high school students to spend their senior year on a participating Ohio college or

university campus where they can enroll in a full load of courses. In turn, these students become eligible to enter an Ohio institution as sophomores, eliminating their first year of college. The STS program responded to the fact that Ohio citizens attend college at a rate below the national average, that baccalaureate attainment is 39th lowest in the nation, and that the National Report Card gives Ohio an F for affordability (“Access Pathway”).

In April 2008, Governor Strickland and Chancellor Fingerhut announced forty-two recipients of Early Adopter grants for high schools participating in STS, funding that reimbursed high schools for the per-pupil state funding they lost when students spent their senior year at college. Despite this, STS was short-lived and had limited results due in large part to lack of state or university support. Two years after its inception, *The Columbus Dispatch* reported reasons for the program’s lackluster attraction to students:

Some of the 49 school districts that tried the new program learned that it wasn’t feasible for students to spend their entire school day on campus. Rural students often were too far from campus to attend college, principals didn’t want to lose per-pupil funding for those students, and the students didn’t like the idea of missing out on the senior year experience at their high schools. (“College Program”)

The article goes on to note that after the first year of grant funding, participation dropped dramatically; one school went from 34 students in the pilot year to 19 the second, another from 35 to zero.

Like other fast-track initiatives, STS was ultimately repackaged, along with other pre-college credit initiatives across Ohio, and bundled under what is now called College Credit Plus (CCP). Using college readiness benchmarks established by individual colleges and universities, this program admits students from grades 7 through 12 to take university courses for college credit. Courses are taught at high schools, colleges, and online. Entry requirements for students at our university include high school transcripts, ACT or SAT scores, and scores from a university math placement test. Rather than using grade and/or test score thresholds for entry requirements, student records are assessed holistically and are reviewed against a newly developed state benchmark, “Uniform Standards for Remediation-Free Status.” These standards apply to math, science, reading, and writing and are meant to insure that all students are “deemed remediation free in a subject” before enrolling in a college credit-bearing course (1). A 2016 update of remediation standards developed in 2012, the new standards, as the title suggests, must have been motivated by students entering dual enrollment programs ill-equipped to deal with college-level work. However,

we have been unable to trace the history of these standards. Through their participation in CCP, students can earn up to 30 college credit hours per academic year, not to exceed 120 college credit hours total while enrolled in the program (“College Credit Plus”). Given that “completion of a three or more credit-hour college course converts to 1.0 Carnegie unit earned at the high school,” a CCP student could complete the first two years of college and satisfy her high school graduation requirement at the same time, decreasing the time to a college diploma by two years (“College Credit Plus”). While there are risks for the student—for example, failing a college course impacts high school GPA and graduation requirements—this option is attractive because college courses taken under CCP are free, paid for by the state. The economic advantages are obvious, even if fast tracking a college education is not, in our view, advantageous for students.

While we are deeply disturbed by the growth of pre-college credit arrangements, we are also skeptical of certain aspects of CCP’s longevity, namely credentialing high school faculty to teach college courses to their high school students. Nonetheless, it’s true that the writing program has frequently been positioned in a defensive pose because of our university’s lack of long-term sustainability planning and general rush to follow the money promised by swelling enrollments and to capitalize on whatever idea trickles down from the state or national levels. Most recently, for instance, faculty in history, Spanish, French, math, and English composition were asked to produce a proposal for developing 18-hour certificate programs credentialing high school teachers without master’s degrees in the discipline or subfield to teach college courses in high schools for the CCP program. Those already holding master’s degrees can apply for credentialing without completing the certificate program. In our case, high school faculty with master’s degrees or those completing the certificate would be credentialed as University of Cincinnati Volunteer Adjuncts eligible to teach our first-year college composition course in their high schools. The irony of participating in a program that outsources the work of our labor force is not lost on us. We were given two weeks in summer 2015 to develop a certificate program that had to go through university and state approval. We had to do it without developing new courses and without requesting additional funds for staffing, even as we were told to expect an influx of area high school teachers seeking this credential. We wrote the certificate proposal and that summer one high school teacher applied to the program, was admitted, and enrolled in a course that counts toward the certificate requirement. Since developing the certificate, we’ve learned that our involvement in CCP dual credit enrollment entails other commitments for which we had not planned and for which funding is not guaranteed after the first year: being available

for regular consultations, conducting at least one full-class period observation at the participant's high school, helping design the dual credit course along with its syllabi and assignments, and assisting with assessment of high school student writing. Ironically, however, university faculty would not be eligible to teach our courses in high schools, the courses we would train high school faculty to teach, because under Ohio licensing agreements, we would not have the appropriate licensure. As distressing as this scenario is, we are not convinced the certification and subsequent teaching and mentoring will endure because the state and university have not yet made long-term funding commitments to it. Unlike dual credit credentialing and certification, however, we know that AP credit is institutionalized and here to stay.

### AP FOR THE WIN?

The AP program is admittedly a fertile site for fast-tracking economic incentives because of its widespread appeal and institutionalized presence, both of which are noted in the College Board's 2014–2015 *AP Program Guide*: "Most two- and four-year colleges and universities worldwide recognize AP in the admissions process and accept successful exam scores for credit, placement, or both" (3). Laura's high school tour made clear that high schools have gotten the message about the widespread acceptance of AP scores by postsecondary institutions.

In theory, students can earn anywhere from three to upwards of thirty-six (and, in some cases, more) college credits as a result of AP exams. At our university, this would amount to in-state tuition savings ranging from approximately \$1,377 for a 3-credit course to \$11,000 for a full year of college credit; out-of-state tuition savings of \$3,300 for a 3-credit course and up to \$26,334 for a year. It's no wonder, then, that parents and students are willing to spend the current rate of \$91 per AP exam in the hopes of earning college credit ("AP Exam"). No surprise either that the AP credit policy is viewed as a viable way to entice potential students, or "dependent consumers" as Swan terms them, to attend Ohio institutions.

Although we were not empowered to say so at the time—our voices were effectively excluded while state officials made policy affecting our curriculum, staffing, and enrollment—we read the OBR's action as symptomatic of the managerial and very often anti-intellectual impulse guiding contemporary higher education. Managerial motives, which guide the class of technobureaucrats, shaped the OBR's commitment to develop organizational structures that privilege efficiency and control consumer cost. Whereas the OBR foregrounded the material conditions making this



managerial move appear necessary and possible—i.e., the increasing cost of higher education, Ohio’s high attrition rate between high school and college, and the ailing economy—the board simultaneously and not surprisingly failed to address issues of great urgency to most writing specialists: how this change would affect student learning, general education goals, and reasonable criteria for writing competency beyond the first-year course. To frame the issue in economic language, the OBR over-invested in college credit for profit and under-invested in learning. As a result, it was not necessary to include writing specialists like us in the decision-making process, for clearly our response would predictably center on student learning, program goals, and evidence illustrating readiness for an intermediate writing course by students who earn a score of 3 on an AP exam. The way the AP policy change was instituted in Ohio signals an alarming statist creep that removes power and control from programs and trained faculty in order to empower and privilege state economic interests.

AP credit and its function as a placement tool directly affects our composition program at the University of Cincinnati, an urban Research I institution, which serves over 6,000 undergraduate students per year in general education writing courses. Prior to the state-mandated AP exemption of 3, our program had accepted a score of 4 as credit for our first-quarter composition course, English 101, a portfolio-based course focused on analysis and argument. The higher score was justified in part because students were required to produce a rhetorical analysis in 101, a difficult task for students even after several weeks of instruction. More generally, though, the complexity of thought that students were expected to exhibit in 101 warranted, to the then-director of composition and to upper administrators who were persuaded by his argument, a higher exemption cut-off. The higher score was also consistent with that of other universities and colleges across the state. In this light, the argument to establish an AP exemption of 3 to align standards among all state public higher education institutions seemed specious to us for all sorts of reasons, including the flattening of differences between schools across the state. But as we discovered, we not only had no choice but to accept the lower standard, we were also blindsided by the office of enrollment management, which instituted the change one full year ahead of the two-year implementation time frame in an effort to capture qualified students sooner.

We emerged from this experience questioning how a 3 or 4 should be interpreted by colleges.<sup>1</sup> To give some context for the scores and what they are supposed to denote, the College Board offers the following rating index (“AP Scores”):

5 = extremely well qualified [for college credit]

4 = well qualified

3 = qualified

2 = possibly qualified

1 = no recommendation

AP Exam scores of 5 are equivalent to grades of A+ and A in the corresponding college course. AP Exam scores of 4 are equivalent to grades of A-, B+, and B in college. AP Exam scores of 3 are equivalent to grades of B-, C+, and C in college (22).

There are many issues to wrangle with here, not the least of which is the College Board's confidence in determining what counts as equivalent to A, B, C, D, and F grades at varying institutions and in suggesting that a timed exam result can be considered equivalent to a course.

Our interest, however, is in the description of what it takes to earn a 3, most notably, mediocre performance and minimal effort, as articulated in the 2008 *AP Program Guide* (no longer accessible): "Generally, to obtain a grade of 3 or higher on an AP Exam, students need to answer a little more than 50 percent of the multiple-choice questions correctly and do acceptable work on the free-response section" (40). It's disquieting, to say the least, that such lackluster performance—completing correctly just over half of the multiple-choice questions that are largely irrelevant to writing teachers in the first place and producing acceptable (whatever that means) work on the writing portion—forms the basis for exempting students from a first-year composition course. The minimum requirements illustrate the low regard for the first year of college writing instruction. More significantly, the practice of exempting students from writing classes undermines conceptions of writing widely embraced by composition teachers: writing as a tool for active participation in democratic culture, writing as a way of composing selves as well as communities and cultures. Despite our efforts to design a curriculum that asks students to understand communication as a rhetorical practice that calls for careful understanding of self and other, individual and community, and our attention to research as an inquiry-based exercise in how to keep questions open and how to work responsibly with the words of others, AP scoring interpellates our composition course as equivalent to a minimally acceptable free response to three acontextual-prompts for an unspecified audience. The notion that writing is something other than a measurable skill does not figure into the institutional credit apparatus.

The rhetorical power of writing is made to seem absurd in this context where economic realities trump learning, thinking, and growing. This point

is made particularly clear because the change to exempt students from FYC based on a score of 3 rather than 4 was not predicated on research indicating that student learning is better served, or for that matter, on any research whatsoever. In this sense, there was no pretense about the motivation for the change; indeed, there is no *need* for pretense, particularly when we consider the pervasive managerial model that increasingly organizes and constrains intellectual work in the academy (i.e., Bousquet et al.; Johnson et al.; Readings; Rhoades). This model is now the default rather than the exception and so presumably requires no justification. It is this default status that impresses upon us just how little our rhetoric about writing signifies outside our discipline. Because most of what we do at UC, like the discipline at large, operates on the assumption that writing matters to citizenship and to critical agency, we are often ill-equipped to counter with much credibility economic arguments that ostentatiously flout this assumption.

In the OBR's proposal for changing AP credit awards, the committee outlines the philosophy informing the changes, including the following statement from an internal document: "There should be a balance between maintaining standards and advantaging students in awarding AP credits." How will this balance be achieved? Who are the stakeholders who get to determine what constitutes balance or standards? The desire for balance cited by the OBR takes for granted the idea that a way of advantaging students is to award them college credit for high school learning. More specifically, we are to believe that providing students fewer opportunities for writing advantages them. Decreasing writing opportunities for our students is particularly distressing to us because our university has converted from quarters to semesters. In the new configuration, students are required to take one first-year writing course (they formerly took two), followed by one mid-career writing course ideally taken during a student's sophomore year. The OBR's decision to use a score of 3 for exemption has meant that some students skip writing courses altogether during their first-year of college. Yet to become confident, competent writers, we believe students need practice, reflection, and instruction. Current research on writing transfer suggests that when students get out of the practice of writing, their skills diminish—an unsurprising consequence for which we have many points of comparison in everyday life (see Beaufort). Even if students do emerge from high school as accomplished writers, there's good reason to believe that these writers can become better writers as they gain more practice, write for different audiences, and increase their awareness of discourse conventions across the disciplines and in public writing contexts (see Whitley and Paulsen).

Despite its stature and effect on student enrollment, few college faculty stop to ask if “America’s colleges and universities [should] grant college credit through tests given by agencies outside education?” (Mahala and Vivion 51). How many college English professors know what is currently being tested by the SAT, ACT, GRE, or AP exams? How many realize that there are two AP exams for English—Language and Composition and Literature and Composition?<sup>2</sup> For the most part, educational tests and the credits or placements they beget are handled by admissions offices, without the knowledge (and, let’s face it, interest) of college teachers. Many college teachers would be surprised to learn just how ubiquitous the College Board’s presence is in the culture of schooling. In the AP Program Summary Report for 2014, for instance, we learn that the total number of exams taken during that year was 4,176,200 by 2,342,528 students, a 6 percent increase from 2013 (“Program”). Of those, 505,244 exams in English Language and Composition and 397,477 in English Literature and Composition were administered, for a grand total of 902,721 exams in English. “The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual AP Report to the Nation” boasts that in the ten years between 2003 and 2013, the number of AP exams taken increased by 1,824,503 (7). AP constitutes a significant portion of the College Board’s stamp on education and its revenue:

[T]he expansion of AP has nearly doubled the number of students who have been given access to the opportunity of AP, more than quadrupled the number of low-income graduates who have been given this opportunity and the expansion has resulted in a larger increase in successful AP experiences than not . . . (6)

This statement contradicts the findings of a study conducted by William Lichten that the increase in the numbers of AP exams taken show clearly that the “average test performance level has dropped” and does not match college standards (1).

But, alas, as David Blakesly points out in “Directed Self-Placement in the University,” AP writing policies are not primarily about writing or learning. There is a clear ideological function involved in placement practices, entangled as they are with the enactment of state power, financial incentives, and the politics of college enrollment. Blakesley contends that “we continue to underestimate how such forces of power regulate and forestall change, as well as how they compromise the forms of rhetoric we rely on to support change or rationalize our successes” (11). Blakesley’s point hits close to home. As we strategized how to contest the state’s decision, we became increasingly aware of our limited rhetorical power. We rely on rhetoric that communicates to insiders but fails to imagine a world in

which writing is merely a measurable skill and a 3-credit course to check off, despite the fact that this view often wins the day. This realization is key because if we fail to contend with the larger political forces that encroach on our work, then we cannot begin to ask important questions about the interests served by our programs and our positions in them, wittingly or unwittingly, and the potential conflict between these interests and student learning. In their 1993 article, "The Role of AP and the Composition Program," Mahala and Vivion ominously warn that

the economic and political forces we describe in this paper are likely to continue to shape the development of AP programs and policy more than departmental debate unless WPAs and other well-positioned educators do more to inform colleagues about AP. (44)

They say that reliance on AP will likely continue and expand for the following reasons, which 22 years later remain astonishingly relevant: "Mandates for standardized assessment, escalating college costs, and growing student anxiety about incurring debt in an economy where college degrees don't necessarily translate into jobs" (45).

#### REFLECTION AND LOOKING FORWARD

What, then, are writing specialists to do with our hopes for a citizenry empowered and activated by writing's potential? How can we reconcile a social vision of writing and composing with state imperatives to increase tuition dollars and to create streamlined education systems that seek ease and stability rather than complication and disruption, characteristics that we align with the complexity of literacy practices? As well-intentioned WPAs, how do we come to see and alter our own roles in this conflict? What kind of economy are we perpetuating within writing programs themselves and to what end?

Our positions as WPAs and composition faculty embody points of tension. State-mandated changes not only put us in a reactive stance, continually off-balance as we respond to crisis, but the changes also have the potential to threaten our faculty's livelihood. Decreased need for sections of composition results in cutbacks in faculty, many of whom are hired on a contingency basis. Our status within departments and institutions results from the view of composition as a skills-based course, taught most often by non-specialists without protection of tenure or, in some cases, contracts that extend beyond a term.

Issues of status and legitimacy are old news, but they continue to affect our ability to act as agents on behalf of our faculty and writing programs and cloud any argument we might make on behalf of students. We

acknowledge, then, that our argument is a conflicted one: by calling into question the economic exigencies that appear to drive curriculum, we are also arguing our own relevance against a larger bureaucratic structure that dismisses our professionalism while at the same time reminding us of our tacit consent in maintaining the status quo.

Our narrative highlights how writing programs are structured and envisioned in ways that make them vulnerable to managerial creep and to state encroachment. Composition's required status is one factor that ties it to state-mandated credit agreements. While we are not ready to cast our lot with the abolitionists, for we value FYC as a productive starting point for so many of our students, we offer this as an example of how working within reproduces and perhaps even invites predictable problems and fails to envision other ways of doing our work. The writing studies movement may be a promising model for reimagining our work and who does it. By advocating for a curriculum that positions students as writing researchers and teachers as having some knowledge of writing scholarship, Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle challenge the way composition is imagined and taught at most institutions. Given our recent and ongoing experiences, however, we're confident that state officials would discount this challenge as long as the overriding goal of educational reform remains creating efficiency and minimizing differences across Ohio institutions.

Ultimately, we feel ambivalent and a bit adrift making suggestions and crafting strategies for intervention. Perhaps in the eight years that have elapsed since we first began this project, we have become habituated to the new normal, a landscape characterized by fiscal austerity and educational decision-making in the hands of technobureaucrats (Governor Scott Walker's assault on the University of Wisconsin system comes to mind here). Yet we do see some signs of hope, particularly in the form of partnerships with potential stake-holders. To that end, we close by commenting on coalition-building across colleges, with local businesses, with high school teachers, and with students. We believe that coalition politics has a great deal of potential for creating change, particularly when anchored in economic issues of a community or profession.

Our university's College of Allied Health Sciences (CAHS) Writing Fellows Program developed as a result of concerns from area health care employers regarding employees' poor writing skills. Recognizing that they did not offer writing instruction or support to students in their programs, CAHS faculty responded to this concern by contacting faculty in English composition and asking us to teach them how to teach writing in their courses. Together with CAHS, composition administrators designed a series of workshops to help faculty in health sciences devise writing assign-

ments, activities, and rubrics in an effort to infuse writing across the CAHS curriculum. The workshops, now in their fourth year, have affected over thirty faculty who have agreed to mentor colleagues seeking to improve writing, learning, and writing instruction in their courses. This experience suggests that proactive WPAs can leverage contacts across the curriculum to stand in support of writing instruction in the first-year, second-year, and beyond when confronted by pressures to outsource FYC to high schools or wherever else. We see more faculty and colleges involved in writing instruction as a good thing. Expanding the base of stakeholders who support sustained, thoughtful writing instruction represents a substantial alliance and, in this case, links writing to employment success, a pairing that speaks to state board members more clearly than does writing instruction as a powerful basis for rhetorical flexibility, critical citizenry, or institutional change—descriptors that might better align with how compositionists view the work of writing programs.

On that note, writing faculty might also consider local businesses allies in our efforts to sustain and expand writing initiatives. We can partner with employers to find out what they really value in writing practices and use that information to assess the extent to which our courses prepare students for a variety of rhetorical tasks. When working with social work faculty in CAHS, for example, we learned that employers value reflective writing abilities and critical thinking (an admittedly elusive catch-all). Although social work students were expected to do reflective writing in their major coursework, they received little to no instruction in how to apply that knowledge to the site of client care. We used this information as the basis for teacher-training workshops with CAHS faculty, which created opportunities for rich dialogue across departments within CAHS on writing skills and preparation. These dialogues led to the creation of writing rubrics, scaffolded assignments, and purposeful assignment designs.

Working with CAHS heightened our sense that, among other things, if writing programs follow the managerial model, we lose important connections between literacy and social mobility, connections that affect our students' economic futures and compel businesses to spend over 3 billion dollars annually to address writing deficiencies (National Commission on Writing 4). It's no small irony that states' efforts to streamline access to higher education by limiting or eliminating writing instruction in college is predicated on economics at the front end while ignoring economic disadvantages at the back end: employers seek workers with good writing skills. If one of the primary goals of higher education is to prepare students for employment, then graduating students who have the rhetorical knowledge and writing skills to adapt to a variety of situations should begin in the

first year and be reinforced throughout their college careers. More writing instruction, not less, would be in the best interest of students, disciplines, and states. Thus, linking writing instruction to an issue that legislators can appreciate—job readiness—is increasingly important, even if not primarily what drives those of us who teach writing and administer programs (see Brandt for a thorough study of the role of writing in our current economy).

Given the proliferation of dual enrollment policies rolling out across the country, another option for writing faculty is to influence as much as possible what is taught in dual enrollment high school composition courses, how, and by whom. While the conditions were not ideal when we created the 18-credit hour Graduate Certificate for Teachers of English program for CCP, the program put us in a position to shape expectations regarding preparation and requirements for teaching college composition courses. For instance, our program requires study of theories of composing, digital composing, teaching college writing, research methods in writing studies, and a style or grammar course, all of which help us foreground writing instruction in current theoretical and practical contexts. In other words, rather than a quick how-to, we aimed to immerse the teachers in theoretical, methodological, and rhetorical debates about how best to teach writing, respond to the needs of diverse students, and envision classrooms as sites for research and meaning-making.

Another possibility when faced with pressures to accommodate state-designed credentialing initiatives is to refuse to participate: our affiliate two-year colleges have taken this position. Qualified high school students participate in courses taught on the campuses under the post-secondary enrollment option, but the colleges have chosen not to partner with high school teachers seeking certification to teach college composition in high schools. While we cannot opt out of state-mandated AP exemptions, we can argue that we lack the resources to mentor high school faculty and other tasks associated with CCP, as our two-year counterparts have done. In the long run, like STS, without guaranteed funding in place beyond the first year, the CCP plan may end up being unsustainable. But it is likely that efforts to exempt more students from first-year writing or eliminate it altogether will press on, wasting faculty time and exhausting our energies in arguing the benefits of writing instruction embedded within the FYC curriculum. While arguments at national or state levels prove often impenetrable by faculty, we might try a different approach. We could flip the script and harness the energies of those most affected by these policies: our students.

By eliciting feedback from students about their writing needs, we can partner with them to design curricula while balancing the integrity of our



writing programs. An instructive model for this idea is available in Colleen Whitley and Deirdre Paulsen's "What do the Students Think?" in which they report on findings from a research study focused on students' comparisons between their AP and FYC courses. Working with a group of honors students enrolled at Brigham Young University who are required to take FYC regardless of AP score, the researchers found that "students in our survey repeatedly said that while their high school AP courses has prepared them to enter [the honors FYC], the AP courses were not replacements for it" (91). Among the more revealing findings were that students had minimal experience conducting research for a paper prior to their FYC courses. In fact, the researchers quote a handful of respondents who reported that they had never done a research paper in their high school classes.

Even more than partnering with students to design curricula, we might consider coalition-building with students to argue for the value of FYC. If asked, would students advocate for writing courses as valuable to their education? FYC courses are for students: what would happen if we get them involved in public conversations about the value of our courses, especially juniors and seniors who have accrued experience in major courses that might help them gauge how they apply what they've learned. This could be a risky move, as students might very well affirm the local principal's view that no one wants to take these courses. We might find, though, that students offer arguments for FYC, or for a refashioned idea of FYC, that help teachers and administrators make the case for relevance and viability in terms that legislators might actually hear. When the consumer says they want or value something, the managers might just listen. This cynical take notwithstanding, involving students in a public process of assessing the relevance of FYC could illuminate problems and deficiencies as well as productive functions of current courses and programs. As a result, we might have to give up some of our most cherished beliefs and values and further build on our strengths.

In the many state policies aimed at efficiency and access, state boards assume that students (and their parents) want college on the quick in order to save money. Is the shortened college experience important to students? What's lost in the lost years? Should there be room in college, in writing classrooms, for what Carrie S. Leverenz identifies as design thinking, which requires time, collaboration, failure, and improvisation? For Leverenz, academic writing is a "creative act of making, one in which writers make not only texts, but themselves and their worlds" (3). Is such a description relevant and/or persuasive to students? Both state officials and compositionists could develop a better sense of the needs of students we serve by partnering with them on issues that press on their futures. By joining with students

in mapping out the ways that writing works or can work for them, we can aim to make THAT course one they opt into. Who knows, perhaps state governments will follow suit.

## NOTES

1. Writing specialists have offered conflicting views on AP scoring practices, especially in relation to the quotas established in advance of scoring to determine the proportion of 5s, 4s, 3s, 2s, and 1s. For a critique of this practice, see Vopat. For an alternative view that seeks to contextualize scoring techniques, see Jolliffe and Phelan. See also Lichten in Hansen et al. for statistical data demonstrating the steep decline in standards for granting a 3 on the exam. For critiques of the test and its role as a predictor of college success, see Foster; Mahala and Vivion.

2. Exam descriptions are as follows:

### **AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION EXAM: 3 HOURS 15 MINUTES**

The AP English Language and Composition Exam employs multiple-choice questions to test students [sic] skills in rhetorical analysis of prose passages. Students are also required to write three essays that demonstrate their skill in rhetorical analysis, argumentation, and synthesis of information from multiple sources to support the students [sic] own argument. Although the skills tested on the exam remain essentially the same from year to year, there may be some variation in format of the free-response (essay) questions.

#### Format of Assessment

**Section I:** Multiple Choice: 52-55 Questions | 60 Minutes | 45% of Exam Score

- Includes excerpts from several non-fiction texts
- Each excerpt is accompanied by several multiple-choice questions

**Section II:** Free Response: 3 Free-Response Questions | 2 Hours 15 Minutes | 55% of Exam Score

- 15 minutes for reading source materials for the synthesis prompt (in the free-response section)
- 120 minutes to write essay responses to the 3 free-response questions (“AP English Language”)

### **AP ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION EXAM: 3 HOURS**

The AP English Literature and Composition Exam employs multiple-choice questions and free-response prompts to test students’ skills in literary analysis of passages from prose and poetry texts.

#### Format of Assessment

**Section I:** Multiple Choice | 60 Minutes | 55 Questions | 45% of Exam Score

- Includes excerpts from several published works of drama, poetry, or prose fiction

- Each excerpt is accompanied by several multiple-choice questions or prompts

**Section II:** Free Response | 120 Minutes | 3 Free-Response Questions | 55% of Exam Score

- Students have 120 minutes to write essay responses to three free-response prompts from the following categories:
  - A literary analysis of a given poem
  - A literary analysis of a given passage of prose fiction
  - An analysis that examines a specific concept, issue, or element in a work of literary merit selected by the student (“AP English Literature”)

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