



Carter, C. (Ed.). (2001). Composition, cultural studies, and academic labor: A roundtable with Cary Nelson. *Workplace*, 7, 102-121.

COMPOSITION, CULTURAL STUDIES, AND ACADEMIC LABOR

A Roundtable with Cary Nelson

Chris Carter (Moderator)

Participants: Alan France, Robin Truth Goodman, Patricia Harkin, William Hendricks, Leo Parascondola, Eileen Schell, James Sosnoski, William Vaughn

As English programs across the country regularly rely on contingent instructors to staff their Composition classes, and as Composition directors train their doctoral students to manage rather than resist the exploitation of such instructors, the need for organized opposition to current structures of literacy work grows increasingly urgent. Teachers committed to the democratization of culture might turn critical lenses toward their own institutions and, in reading the material conditions of part-time Composition instruction, recognize the need to theorize and pursue workplace justice for instructors and students alike. They might also recognize, however, the investment of administrators and established faculty in the maintenance of an inexpensive underclass. Such an underclass, while protecting faculty from teaching introductory courses, garners large profits for the university administration by covering numerous composition sections at low cost. Departmental and executive bureaucrats have mutual interests in conserving contingent labor, and those interests help to generate intensified surveillance of the radical pedagogies and critical literacies that threaten to undermine the stability of existing labor conditions.

Composition discourse openly authorizes the policing of left literacy work, as calls for intensified managerial training and exhortations to contest the “authoritarianism of critical pedagogy” gain a widening audience.

Embracing a managerial subjectivity, the discipline's aversion to materialist critique stems from and strengthens its desire to rationalize the corporate university.

In the following transcription of a web-based colloquy from March 2001, labor activists, Composition scholars, cultural critics, and thinkers who occupy various combinations of these subject positions collectively consider the (dis)connections between literacy instruction and workplace justice. Bringing a variety of perspectives to bear on the state of literacy work, colloquy participants consider in rich detail the potential benefits offered by cultural theory, interdisciplinary solidarity, unionization, and curricular transformation.

Before their discussion the participants read two examples of contemporary composition discourse purporting to debunk the materialist posture represented by cultural studies scholarship: Kurt Spellmeyer's “Out of the Fashion Industry: From Cultural Studies to the Anthropology of Knowledge” and Richard

Miller's "Let's Do the Numbers: Comp Droids and the Prophets of Doom." The authors of both articles have demonstrated a long-term commitment to student agency and the disciplinary respectability of Composition, yet Spellmeyer's construction of cultural theory as elitist abstraction and Miller's "curricular innovations" in labor management mark an alarming abandonment of radical institutional critique.

Patricia Harkin (*Contending with Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*) argues in the opening strand of our electronic discussion forum that the proliferation of management discourse, and the growing opposition to Cultural Studies, depend on and reinforce the desire for a "professional managerial class." The rhetorical structure of Miller's and Spellmeyer's work evidences the constructed class boundary, as the authors address a community of management while ignoring the audience of part-timers who currently perform the managed instruction. Contingent labor activist Eileen Schell (*Moving a Mountain: Transforming the Role of Contingent Labor in Composition and Higher Education*) suggests that management rhetorics often hold no critical component, replacing social consciousness with the drive for efficiency. She further contends that the sort of disdain Spellmeyer expresses for theory in writing classrooms reflects many compositionists' desires to protect their intellectual territory from invasion and appropriation by cultural critics. Spellmeyer, claiming that cultural studies "disempowers" students with theoretical abstraction, works to maintain Composition's disciplinary autonomy by arguing for the suppression of ideological critique in writing classrooms.

Yet, as both Cary Nelson (*Manifesto of a Tenured Radical*) and James Sosnoski (*Token Professionals and Master Critics*) point out, the drive toward disciplinary autonomy may be one force that prevents Composition and various departments throughout the university, from collectively addressing labor issues that contaminate the entire institution of higher learning.

William Hendricks points out that many cultural-studies scholars, by contrast, not only theorize the transformation of academic labor, they catalyze change by participating in local unions. Rather than speaking for laborers whose exploitation they have not suffered, they speak for themselves as teacher-scholars whose job security and academic freedoms are threatened by the university's increasing corporatism. In protesting the excesses of such corporatism, academics like Hendricks, Schell, Nelson, and William Vaughn interweave sophisticated social theory with street-level activism. Vaughn ("Need a Break from Your Dissertation? Organize a Union!" in Randy Martin's *Chalk Lines*) contends that while both cultural studies and Composition scholarship often exhibit the social awareness necessary for effective activism, the longevity of the academic labor movement depends less on appealing to people's sense of disciplinary identity than to their sense of responsibility as college educators.

We might begin to denaturalize flexible labor practices by making public the conditions in which many part-timers work—conditions that some workers in fields outside academia will recognize as startlingly similar to their own. By appealing to other workers who understand the importance of fair pay, respectable working conditions, and the assurance of continued work, contingent teachers and their full-time advocates can amplify the demand for change.

"Public shame," explains Schell, "can be a good thing." The public disclosure of contingent writing teachers' employment circumstances will likely give cause for shame, and in so doing may prompt the community outrage necessary to rattle complacent institutional bureaucracies.

Communal support for literacy workers first requires the acknowledgment that writing instruction is legitimate and valuable labor. Alan France observes that writing instruction is often constructed as the abject toil that "authentic" English professors carefully avoid. Nor does materialist scholarship, as Robin Truth Goodman ("The Righting of Writing" in this volume) observes, automatically lead to labor consciousness in the academy. Certain strains of cultural theory, she implies, do more to support diverse

forms of consumerism than to rally against the powers that profit from such diversity. Cultural theory performs its most radical work, however, when fueling collective resistance to racial, sexual, and class injustice. Goodman suggests that the writing classroom might serve as a site for drafting and implementing the specifics of effective public resistance. Literacy instruction might then serve as much-needed labor against labor exploitation. In conjunction with the sort of cultural studies scholarship that promotes interdisciplinary solidarity and the critical engagement with the totality wrought by capital, composition classes might inform the imaginative refiguring of, rather than smooth assimilation into, the world of work.

“The attitudes toward composition have to evolve,” asserts Vaughn, “if the labor circumstances are to improve.” Radical articulations of cultural studies can help speed such evolution by deepening our awareness of the complicity of writing (and much of higher education) with corporate power. In order for literacy instructors and their students to generate alternatives to current workplace conditions both within and outside the university, Composition must be reconceived as genuinely critical practice.

1. Conservative Harmonies

Chris Carter: Within current Rhetoric and Composition discourse, voices urging “resistance” to Cultural Studies theory and those promoting increased managerial training for doctoral students steadily gain volume and intensity. Those voices augment and sustain each other, producing conservative harmonies of reduced critical thinking and intensified corporatization. What ideological factors have contributed to the political articulation of these voices? What cultural roles do they ascribe to writing instruction and to the university in general? How have such voices conspired to suppress more radical notions of Composition work?

Eileen Schell: To respond to the point about managerial training in graduate education, I'm struck by the fact that Richard Miller's argument for managerial training in "Let's Do the Numbers: Comp Droids and the Prophets of Doom" isn't really a new argument in composition scholarship. One of the main points he makes is this: Those receiving PhDs in Rhetoric and Composition "should have at least the opportunity to take a host of courses designed to prepare them for the jobs PhDs in comp actually receive" (104). He calls for training in Writing program administration as part of graduate course prep. This argument was made over a decade ago by compositionists like Trudelle Thomas in "The Graduate Student as Apprentice WPA: Experiencing the Future" (WPA: Writing Program Administration 1991) and Michael Pemberton in "Tales Too Terrible To Tell: Unstated Truths and Under-preparation in Graduate Composition Programs" (in *Writing Ourselves into the Story* 1993). I feel underwhelmed by his observation about courses in this area of graduate education. I think the question is what do these courses actually look like; are they steeped in "managerial" rhetorics or do they have critical and political elements? Do these courses prepare composition faculty/writing program administrators to work as advocates for addressing the problematic working conditions of part-time and non-tenure-track faculty? Do these courses help potential faculty members develop a critical perspective and a set of rhetorical and practical strategies that enable them to address and alleviate rather than simply perpetuate existing labor inequities? I need examples of what these courses are meant to do and how they are theorized and buttressed by scholarship that is both critical and conversant of recent trends in higher education.

Bill Vaughn: I became a writing administrator and union organizer at about the same time, and have always more or less seen both roles as opportunities for enacting what I think of as professional responsibility, or embracing the fullest dimensions of our work within and across both disciplines and institutions. Here I mean to distinguish that approach from what I think of as the customary training model for graduate students, which is to organize one's career around individual achievement and self-enhancement. So first, I would qualify Chris's opening remarks by saying that I believe managerial labor/training always bears within it at least the prospect for being radicalized even beyond what cheap

labor teaching affords. At the very least, you get to peel away a little more of the illusion, because you're necessarily positioned closer to decisions about hiring, staffing, curriculum, etc. That kind of access can prove invaluable when making arguments to your own immediate peers, and to those working elsewhere on campus, who may have no idea how English/Composition operates, and/or why the concerns of that domain ought to matter to them. In addition, managerial jobs necessarily position one in organizing modes. It may be that the majority of those who train this way as grad students do not use such training to practice organizing, but the opportunity is nonetheless there. I firmly believe that most of the things we do as academics translate to activism, and while it's no doubt utopian to think in such terms, I like to believe that the more we can learn about managerial work as we train for the profession, the better we'll be able to shape the field.

Does the above reflect "conservative harmonies" and "ideological factors"? No doubt, but it's also a function of laziness and convenience—for which latter term, I suppose, one ideological synonym these days is "flexibility." I'm more concerned about the way my profession acquiesces to this regime than to anything more insidious. For me, the greatest danger is not what's imposed on us, but what we give away. "Managing" is itself a loaded term, and the revulsion the concept incites is one reason such work, like composition before it, is being displaced onto the profession's less advantaged (e.g. me, now, as a first year person; me, before, as an adjunct and grad student). I still believe it's as much an opportunity as it is a burden, and I think the biggest problem is the readiness with which protected faculty flee from such responsibility.

Which is to say, in answer to another of Chris's questions, that the cultural roles assigned to writing and the university in general amount to, in my narrative, those things many faculty would rather not do: teach Composition and administrate.

Finally, regarding E. Schell's point above, I should confess that I neither trained as a Composition specialist, nor took any classes in writing program administration. (For that matter, I never went through the Organizing Institute either.) So my guess would be that institutionalized administrative training would be fraught with all the dangers to which Chris alludes. At the same time, the profession somehow needs to impart managerial experience more widely during graduate school, because as much as I believe scholars all have the potential to be activists—about their own profession, anyway—the reality is most are still married to a model of professional development that is fundamentally atomistic. Nobody likes to manage because nobody knows how to manage because managing isn't part of the curriculum. Just because we can't do it, though, doesn't mean it goes undone. That's the point at which corporatization enters the picture, and what I'm emphasizing is, academics need to know how to manage to resist those trends, and they shouldn't balk at such training for fear that learning how to manage means learning to be complicit. The greater complicity is to imagine managing is someone else's responsibility.

Schell: Bill, I like what you say about trying to find ways to bring together organizing strategies and administrative work, although this can be an uneasy fit as you note. You do an excellent job of teasing out the tensions around the term "managerial." I've actually taught a graduate course on Writing Program administration where we focused on contingent labor issues and developing a critical/interventionist stance in writing program administrative work.

As for the resistance to Cultural Studies theory and teaching, I'm interested in following up on Chris's point about conservative harmonies. Over the last decade (now I feel old), I first saw the resistance to cultural studies in comp appear in Maxine Hairston's article "Diversity and Ideology in the Writing Classroom," which appeared in *College Composition and Communication* in the early 1990s. In that piece, Hairston launches a critique of how "politics" has been brought into the writing classroom by a number of theorists in composition: James Berlin and John Trimbur among others. Although many disagreed with Hairston's piece and labeled her "reactionary," the strain of criticism she launched seems to

have persisted. This strain of criticism serves to create and police academic "turf." In Hairston's piece, she seems particularly frustrated by the idea that students' voices and experiences get "nudged" out or "censored" by those who teach using ideological perspectives and texts from critical theory, Cultural Studies, feminist theory, etc. In other words, she asserts that composition is about "student writing," not about "politics." Hairston seems to be fighting a turf war, protecting Composition teaching and practice from political theories that appear to "subsume" what composition is really about: student work (in her estimation).

In other words, we have a disciplinary turf battle on our hands—one that was actually enacted at Hairston's institution, the University of Texas-Austin over English 306.

Like Hairston (and I'm not equating them here, just pointing out a potential connection), Spellmeyer seems to articulate a turf-protecting argument when he says: "In many respects, the work on pedagogy done here in the U.S., after three decades of developmental college teaching and inquiry, already surpasses whatever we might learn from the experience of the Open University and Birmingham Centre" (430). This is followed up by Spellmeyer's comment that he has learned more from Heath than Fiske or Hebdige. It seems to me that some of the debate here is about "turf," about what gets read, cited, and acknowledged and what gets institutional/theoretical clout in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. I think the critique of Cultural Studies and the critique of particular strains of political pedagogies is related to a perpetual anxiety in composition studies about what pedagogical traditions and knowledges we produce in the field versus the knowledges we import/borrow from other fields: a sort of playing out of "local knowledge" versus "imported knowledge."

I see this anxiety over knowledge-making in all five of the departments where I've taught writing. I've heard many instructors/faculty express an anxiety that a particular theory or approach will "replace" a focus on student texts. The anxiety that I think is being expressed here, although it's only one of many, is the resistance to the idea that composition is a content-less discipline that needs to be filled with something: literature, theory, you name it. I think this is an historical problem and an ingrained response that many composition faculty use to defend against what they perceive to be the ideological and disciplinary encroachment of particular theories. I know I haven't addressed the ideological issues that Chris raises, but what I'm trying to offer here is an historical read on an underlying disciplinary anxiety that gets played out in these debates. As a feminist scholar, I don't agree with the critiques, but I do see how they have been, in some cases, historically produced by a set of material conditions in writing programs/English Depts.

Robin Goodman: Professor Schell: Could you elaborate on how you see "the idea that composition is a content-less discipline" as an "historical problem"?

William Hendricks: Let me offer two different responses to Chris's query: "How have [anti-Cultural Studies voices plus pro-managerial training voices] conspired to suppress more radical notions of Composition work?"

First response, taking a "naive" perspective on agency. Well, if these voices really have conspired to suppress more radical notions of Composition work, then they've probably been wasting their time. In US academic culture, I doubt that "more radical notions" of just about anything are suppressible. All is assimilable to the ongoing professional discourse(s), and, it could be argued, it's in the interests of the capitalist class that "radical notions" always circulate, so long as they are safely confined within academic conversations. Sort of a safety valve and monitoring board combined. The question for academic labor is not how to keep radical notions alive (they won't die) but how to act on them. (For me, this means above all militant forms of labor organizing and labor actions.)

Second response, taking an "ideological" perspective on agency (appropriate for a discussion involving Cultural Studies, a tool for getting under the smooth surfaces of our perceptions). Yeah, in a way these voices do conspire to suppress, successfully, more radical notions of Composition work. And, as to the "how" this happens, these voices conspire to suppress radical notions insofar as they are part of our national cultural imaginary in which, to paraphrase our new Secretary of the Treasury, class warfare is over, something we've moved beyond as any clear-thinking adult would see. Conflicts between labor and capital? Nope, not in this country. And I think that this ideology is at work at times in Kurt Spellmeyer's "Culture and Agency," his response to Alan France's and Donald Lazere's responses to Spellmeyer's "Out of the Fashion Industry." Spellmeyer is dismissive of those who would "blame the usual suspect, corporate capitalism" for "Nazis and skinheads" ("Culture and Agency" 295). I am currently a whole lot less worried about US Nazis and skinheads than I am about US corporate capitalism. I agree with Spellmeyer that we live in a time when many (though I'd say most) feel aggrieved and disrespected, but I think that the professional culture of expertise has a relatively minor role in producing these psychic affronts. Our national (well, really international) con game in which almost everyone is cheated almost every day of their life seems to me a more likely suspect. "Among those who 'really matter,'" Spellmeyer says (and he seems to be referring here to to [his version of] British Cultural Studies adherents), "almost no one has proposed that ordinary people have the intelligence and wisdom necessary for self-rule." Well, what do we know? We know that one group of persons in the US who daily proposes, believes, and acts upon the idea that ordinary people have the intelligence and wisdom for self-determination is organized labor.

Organized labor does not imagine that we are, to borrow a phrase from Spellmeyer, the "disinterested champions of the oppressed" (293). No, we are oppressed, but we are very much "interested." We're not social workers, we're struggling for us. When Eileen Schell in her first post asks whether particular courses designed to prepare doctoral students to work as WPAs "help potential faculty members develop a critical perspective and a set of rhetorical strategies that enable them to address and alleviate rather than simply perpetuate existing labor inequities," she implies that such courses could serve these goals. And, in her second post, she demonstrates that such courses sometimes do advance these goals. When Bill Vaughn points out that WPA jobs can be a vehicle for labor organizing, I believe him. I think that we make a tactical error if we deny or foreclose these possibilities in advance.

Cary Nelson: I'd like to add a couple of historical notes to this dialogue. First, the tension between the economic and political meaning of writing studies has been with us for a long time. My own experience suggests it first came to a head in the 1970s as a radicalized cohort of young faculty and graduate student teachers confronted the writing classroom in its earliest instrumentalized form—business and technical writing. For many, teaching such courses in English departments meant trying to inflect service to capitalism with a critical and ethical edge. It wasn't easy, nor was there a visible Cultural Studies model for the work. The issue is now much more widespread, especially as writing studies moves into many other disciplines where preparing students for the industrial workplace is a priority. In such contexts, "Cultural Studies" encompasses a willingness to ask foundational questions about who and what the writing classroom serves, about the ends and methods of corporate discourse. Of course the eager servants of the global economy do not welcome such questions.

The exploitation of contingent workers has been part of English for a long time as well. One of its origins is with English as a Second Language Programs, often enough part of English departments in the 1970s. These programs were often staffed with underpaid part-time teachers from their inception. They helped rationalize a model that is now destroying the profession as a whole.

Robin Truth Goodman: While I agree that most attacks on Cultural Studies are also attacks on critical readings and on radical ideas, I do not therefore think that celebrations of Cultural Studies stand as defenses of radical ideas. Many teachers of writing use Cultural Studies as a way to teach students to love their hairstyles and other items available at the mall, or to "tolerate" the hairstyles of others.

Additionally, Cultural Studies is often a convenient and even seemingly acceptable way to downsize, as most Ph.D.s trained in the humanities can currently hold down the fort in more than one department and so cut-down on the number of hires. In itself, Cultural Studies is not a way out of conservatism or a challenge to racism, instrumental knowledge, or corporatism. Giroux has, of course, already argued this point. I think it's worth thinking about how composition classes can promise something besides hand-designing consumer agency, in other words, how Composition Studies can in themselves become activist by using writing to challenge oppressions, not just to write about them, describe them, "tolerate" them, or even to ask questions about them. What would the composition classroom look like if writing were not seen as a way to assimilate into corporate labor but rather as a way to rally against power? Would it "wither away" (what would it take for colleges no longer to have to contend with growing rates of illiteracy)? Cultural studies is not always doing its job if it is supposed to be foundational in catalyzing that switch.

Another point is that, Miller aside, most college-level teachers of writing do not have Ph.D.s in composition studies, nor have they studied in Composition Studies programs. In fact, many if not most college-level teachers of writing do not have Ph.D.s at all. So Miller's contention that teachers of writing should not be required to get Ph.D.s is less a utopian pipe-dream than a dystopian reality that is not working, at least not equitably.

Nelson: Among the things Composition Studies most needs to gain critical purchase on the academy and the culture are (1) a shift to Composition classes with viable, semester-long, serious intellectual subjects and (2) enough job security for its teachers to guarantee academic freedom in the classroom.

Composition teachers cannot train their students to be critical participants in a democracy unless they are themselves protected from political and administrative reprisals. They cannot be driven to abandon intellectual challenges to protect their jobs; they cannot be forced to trade high grades for positive student evaluations. All this is the daily life of most Composition faculty, along with subminimum salaries, insulting working conditions, and a denial of basic benefits. Corporate America wants a Composition faculty workforce in fear for its jobs and thus less likely to encourage intellectual and political dissent among its students. The only solution to this problem is collective action—unionization and collective bargaining.

Patricia Harkin: Chris, I'd like to take up your question about the "ideological forces" that bring together those who oppose Cultural Studies theory with those who encourage managerial "training" (and I use that Foucaultian term quite deliberately here) for WPAs. It's an important question, and you have framed it very shrewdly as an articulation issue. One (only one) way of thinking about articulation is as an attempt to connect different framings without falling into the trap of totalization, e.g., to "fix" a problem of racial injustice may create (or leave unsolved) one of gender discrimination. To paraphrase Stuart Hall, "articulation" is a way of looking at (and bringing together) the disparate ways in which persons make meaning of situations they encounter. I understand articulation as both a saying and a connecting. And Fredric Jameson, in his review of Grossberg, Nelson, and Trenchler, asserted that articulation is the most important problem that CS faces today.

But the POLITICAL CONNECTIONS between 1) persons who "make meaning" of the current state of affairs in such a way as to call for managerial training (e.g. Miller) and 2) those who see things in such a way as to oppose CS (e.g., Hairston—or the Cheneys, the Blooms, and so forth) do NOT NECESSARILY imply that they are SAYING the same thing. (This I think is part of Eileen's point.) And so you very perceptively ask, "what are the ideological forces that bring these strange bedfellows together"? It's a good articulation question—because "capitalism" is too big an answer but "they just have different agendas" is too (irresponsibly) narrow.

I'd suggest that a desire to establish and belong to a "professional managerial class" is one such "force." To belong to a professional managerial class is (as Cary might say) NOT to be a worker. Older thinkers like Allan Bloom and Harold Bloom want to "manage" the culture's construction of value—symbolic capital, cultural capital, etc.—by creating certain kinds of subjects. (I'm leaving Hairston out because I her use of the term "ideology" is, well, uninformed.) At the same time, the CS establishment, in many but not all cases, also seeks to form/create subjects—but critical ones this time. In both cases, though, it seems to me that folks want to create a force of workers (contingent labor) who will train more workers (students) to be just like them.

Cary says that the "only" solution is unionization and bargaining among contingent faculty that would break the chain. I agree, of course, that unionization is desirable. But I do worry that within the managed university, unionization will simply bring an end to "freshman comp" as we know it. That is, if a corporate university is faced with the problem of paying its contingent labor a fair wage/salary and benefits, wouldn't it simply decide to eliminate the writing requirement and make the problem go away that way? Nelson: I agree that Comp could be endangered if higher education were to compensate its teachers fairly, but the truth is that the salaries of composition teachers could be doubled—and in some institutions tripled—and those schools would still make a significant profit on their comp courses. No business is going to give up a profit-making enterprise. These doubled or tripled salaries would not in my view be fair compensation in many cases, but they would not be so brutal as they are at present. There are still colleges, for example, paying \$900 to a teacher of a 15-16 week comp course. Half pay \$2,000 or less. Plus a union contract is probably the only way to mandate full time/part time ratios.

In this context Cultural Studies is no more than a code word for the intellectual warrant to provide a full political and social context to classroom instruction.

Schell: Robin Truth Goodman asked: "Professor Schell: Could you elaborate on how you see 'the idea that composition is a content-less discipline' as an 'historical problem'?"

What I said in my post above is that Hairston and others tend to protect against what they perceive to be an attitude that composition courses are "content-less" and that they need to be filled up with a disciplinary content-based subject matter, i.e. a study of short fiction, for instance. This is an historical problem because in issues of *English Journal* and other publications from the first part of the century there is a lot of anxiety about what the content should be for "freshman comp" courses. This anxiety is played out frequently in contemporary English/writing departments over what gets taught. There is also a lot of anxiety about problematic working conditions. Bob Connors has a wonderful article in the 1990 issue of *Rhetoric Review* called "Overwork and Underpay in the Composition Classroom," which reads the labor "crisis" discourse from reports and articles in English publications from around 1900-present.

Goodman's query about historical situations and content-less courses leads me to think through Cary's post that prescribes the following for comp: "Among the things Composition Studies most needs to gain critical purchase on the academy and the culture are (1) a shift to Composition classes with viable, semester-long, serious intellectual subjects and (2) enough job security for its teachers to guarantee academic freedom in the classroom." I agree with Cary wholeheartedly on #2, but I'm wondering about #1. What constitutes a "serious intellectual subject" in first year-comp in your view, Cary? Are you speaking of Composition courses where the students undertake study of an issue or subject from multiple disciplinary perspectives? Are you proposing Writing across the Curriculum courses, which have a wonderful history that is documented in David Russell's book?

The typical question to ask of this comment about "serious intellectual subject matter" is what roles does rhetorical theory and composition research play in the formulation of a writing class? What is the

relationship between "serious intellectual subjects" and practices and principles of rhetoric and composing process theories? Some writing curricula (including the one here at Syracuse University) are grounded in theoretical principles and practices of rhetoric and composing theory and are not particularly focused on a particular area of intellectual subject matter (in terms of large numbers of readings focused on particular theme or issue). Does that mean our courses are lacking in serious intellectual subject matter? Some have said so, but what I'm wondering, overall, is how does disciplinary knowledge of Composition and Rhetoric have the potential to shape a successful writing course? Often, it is pointed out that people who teach Composition are not necessarily trained to do so and are not scholars in the field. Still others say that this training doesn't necessarily create more effective teachers. When I hear this, I wonder what proof there is for this, exactly. How do we know that training in this area doesn't produce better instruction? Where are the studies? Where's the qualitative evidence? These claims seem to be buttressed by anecdotal evidence, which does carry weight, but I'm not persuaded by the anecdotes. I also wonder about the benefits of historical knowledge, for instance, knowing that an assignment you've given is grounded in particular traditions of inquiry and in a particular genre of student writing (not thinking you're inventing the wheel). I know I sound like I'm tooting the horn for formal training in Rhetoric and Composition studies (not surprising since I direct a PhD program in Composition and Cultural Rhetoric). Yet what I'm wondering here is: is the "serious intellectual subject" matter inclusive of disciplinary knowledge in Rhetoric and Composition studies?

2. Smooth Surfaces

Carter: Counter to Spellmeyer's claim that Cultural Studies disempowers ordinary people, William Hendricks argues that many Cultural Studies advocates are themselves ordinary people whose common interests power the academic labor movement. Labor collapses the distinction between critical scholar and oppressed worker—a distinction drawn, as Hendricks so eloquently suggests, upon "the smooth surfaces of our perceptions." The resiliency of the distinction depends, in part, upon the seeming prevalence of scholarly critique over organized action. How can advocates of Cultural Studies more effectively fuse critical energy and activist practice? Even the most radical forms of critique only serve to ventilate anxieties and preserve the status quo if not translated into action. How can we trouble the smooth surfaces of some literacy workers' perceptions about the material inefficacies of Cultural Studies? Such perceptions have, according to Eileen Schell, resulted from crises of disciplinary identity that are as yet unresolved. As literacy workers continue to negotiate these crises, what benefits might they gain from joining forces with organized labor?

Alan France: Yes, the problem of activism! I enjoy the protection of a strong union. I write letters to legislators when downsizing and privatizing issues threaten. I picket during contract negotiations. Everyone who cares about equity and especially equity for contingent labor should do this.

But this discussion has been framed—quite properly—by curricular issues. I think that the most important locus of activism for tenured faculty is the undergraduate major, which is primarily Literary Studies (in most institutions). The bottom line is that a Literature faculty is funded, more or less directly, by expropriating "surplus labor" from mostly contingent, most Composition, mostly women teachers. What I found maddening about Richard Miller's "Let's Do The Numbers" was that it was published in *MLA's PROFESSION* 1999, a place where it would be read by Lit faculty primarily, and not by Comp faculty. (I think everyone contributing to this discussion should read Miller's essay—and may also want to read Karen Fitts and my response in *PROFESSION* 2000.) Perhaps few research departments are as dependent on GTAs as Rutgers, but I know of none that are not similarly built on contingent labor.

Comp's status as professional work depends on making it a legitimate part of the curriculum. English majors (too often a euphemism for Literature majors) need instruction in rhetoric and writing; writing instruction needs to become integral to Lit pedagogy. This will not happen until we (in composition) begin

to build revolutionary cadres with disaffected Lit colleagues. This is so very hard to do because as Richard Ohmann has taught us, Literary Studies (and Cultural Studies all too often) is a class identity issue. I'm not asking a young colleague in 19th century women's writing not merely to "teach writing"; I'm asking her to make students' retextualizations of 19th century women's texts the "real" subject of her class; and in so doing to de-class herself as an expert controlling the disbursement of institutional power to students. I am asking her to join the abject Other—the Comp worker—instead of enjoying the stable boundaries of identity—the Professor (to allude to Kristeva). This is a hard sell. I believe that our activism needs to contest the "smooth harmonies" of our own institutions, especially our curricula. I can name only one or two of the English Professoriat at Rutgers who are the beneficiaries of the comp Managers, Kurt Spellmeyer and Richard E. Miller. That English faculty is presumably going about its business undisturbed: reproducing privileged readers of texts, many of whom will be going out as secondary school teachers to teach the reading of privileged texts; or else, at the graduate level, preparing more scholars of privileged texts to teach those texts to the next generation of undergraduate privileged readers of texts.

Nelson: As someone who spends half his time in activist commitments I remain in despair that so many academics feel the distance between research/teaching and activism remains a difficult one to bridge. For many of us the first responsibility should be to reform our own increasingly exploitive industry. For higher education in many areas sets salary and benefit standards not only for its own workers but also for the community as a whole. This is as true for Boston as it is for Champaign-Urbana.

As contingent labor increases in many industries across the world, we can set an example by resisting its many injustices. And we can form alliances between full-time and contingent workers that serve as models for other industries as well. The part-time composition teacher and the part-time cafeteria worker and the part-time sweat shop worker are one and the same. The tenured faculty member and the corporate manager who benefit from their exploitation are increasingly one and the same as well. To expose these relationships and dependencies in your own school and your own community is, as they say, to think globally and act locally. Cultural Studies can help theorize and clarify these issues.

Vaughn: I have interviewed a number of the founders of the grad employee union at UIUC. In the account of that campaign which I am preparing, I break down the interview research into two chapters, one of which focuses on where these individuals were coming from as they entered their graduate study and subsequent academic activism, and the other of which describes how they came to understand their roles as academic activists. It is a relatively small sample, to be sure—about two dozen (albeit fairly in-depth) interviews—but I will summarize the findings here, insofar as I think some of what these people have to say connects to Chris's opening questions.

First, few of the union founders came from politically liberal families, and those who did were actually less likely to have parents who were themselves in any way activists (defined broadly, to include politics, or community activism, or anything they remembered their parents being involved in outside of home or work). Neither they nor their parents tended to have belonged to unions. Several, though, derived or had practiced some form of faith-based activism.

Another cluster of indices surrounded the period between adolescence and starting grad school. Many people had performed what they considered activist work, though a surprising number of them seemed to feel that their activism had been ineffectual. A number specifically cited individuals—mentors—who had inspired them to think of their own scholarly roles as being necessarily activist. Most of the people I interviewed had also taken time off between undergrad and grad school, and a good portion took jobs involving manual labor at some point in their lives. Finally, when they got to grad school, many were drawn either to interdisciplinary scholarship, or opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogue.

The last set of indices describes the immediate circumstances of their union engagement. I labeled these solidarity, ownership, service, and reclassification. The first encompasses these individuals' experiences of being energized when they recognized how their own frustrations with academic labor were shared by colleagues across disciplines (a repeated refrain most dated from the first proto-union meeting they attended, where, for the first time, they encountered people from other departments saying things they thought were specific to their own). Ownership describes the sense that this struggle was immediately meaningful to them—more so than their earlier episodes of activism, in which the connection to the cause had been more mediated. By service I mean what one of them told me when he said, "I felt a duty that if I'm going to be part of [an] enterprise, I have to make it better." (This colleague, the union's first press secretary, was a ROTC Air Force physicist, who adamantly opposed my characterization of our work as "activism," and explicitly connected service to one's country with service to any institution to which one contributes.) Lastly, reclassification is the term I gave to the experience of rediscovering the union history of one's family. As I said, most of these people had no immediate experience of union participation, and neither did their parents, but many had grandparents with union backgrounds, and their contemporary activism in the academy brought those stories back into family conversation.

As I say, my sample was small, but I do find a lot of promise in these accounts. These were not, by and large, people coming out of excessively politicized backgrounds, much less left-leaning ones. But they could derive a sense of professional responsibility from a range of sources: their faith, influential professors, or an appetite for and/or exposure to a sense of the profession that was larger than their own discipline. I think it is also the case, as with many of us participating in this colloquy, that these were individuals whose attitude about academic labor bespoke an engagement with other kinds of work--another reason we might advise our own undergraduates not to head straight to grad school.

I won't belabor the part about their self-conceptions as academic activists. My account of that appears under the title "From Sociality to Responsibility: Grad Employee Unions and the Meaning of the University," in the November '99 issue of *Perspectives* (the newsletter of the American Historical Association). Basically, the accounts people gave of their participation as unionists followed a trajectory from simple social appetite, to an experience of the community this appetite revealed, to a sense of the responsibility one has to that community.

All of which is to say that I believe their experiences map onto many of the concepts identified in Chris's question: that these were ordinary people discovering common interests—scholar/workers who fused critique with action and experienced interdisciplinary identities; and for whom, perhaps, the biggest benefit of activism was precisely the experience of joining and organizing, or, given my own theoretical biases, the recognition that they needed to organize because they were always joined, and only required the occasion to realize that.

Hendricks: Patty Harkin worries that universities facing the prospect of paying contingent faculty a just salary with benefits might decide to eliminate first-year composition. That is certainly possible. In fact, it's being attempted. On the margins, even at the state-owned university where I work, in which all faculty, both tenure-track (85% of us) and contingent (15% of us) belong to a single union working under a unified contract. Because there are no TAs at Cal U, and because the minimum per-course payment for part-time faculty is \$4300 plus benefits, composition instruction is, relative to the national scene, fairly expensive. But it's hard for the administration to mount a frontal attack on FYC. State-wide (and Cal U, along with Al France's West Chester and 12 other Pennsylvania state universities, is part of a single state system), there seems to be (for now, everything changes) zero inclination in the State Board of Trustees or among the university administrations to ditch composition.

But there certainly is (surprise, surprise) an ongoing drive to try to depress instructional costs and faculty governance. And, locally, it would be a considerable embarrassment to Cal U's administration to suddenly

try to get rid of FYC just on this campus, especially after the recent faculty vote (hailed by the admins) to increase required writing in the Gen Ed program. (Now, all undergraduates are required to take two semesters of comp plus two writing-intensive courses in their major.)

So what does the administration do? Well, we're being attacked, as I say, on the margins. Two days ago, the English Department told the administration that no, we didn't think a high score on the CLEP test (the one requiring no writing) would be a satisfactory substitute for Comp I. For the last six semesters, every semester, the English Department has declined to sign off on sponsoring dual-enrollment high school English courses in which HS seniors could simultaneously get credit for our Comp I. You see the pattern. The attacks won't go away; they will keep on coming.

The larger points are these. First, while "a corporate university" (Harkin's phrase) will always try to downsize, faculty unionization makes these attempts more difficult. Second, unified contracts (tenure-track and contingent faculty working under a unified salary structure in the same union with the same contract) add an extra layer of protection for all while also being a sort of "alliance between full-time and contingent workers" (Nelson's phrase). Third, union organizing is not a one-shot deal; it's quotidian, ongoing, carried out everyday as the union has to defend its gains in myriad struggles. Fourth, the "corporate university" is not something that will go away soon--I'd say that all US college and universities are corporate and have been for some time. (Richard Ohmann provides an illuminating commentary on this point in the Fall 1999 number of *Radical Teacher*.)

Fifth (and as a consequence of four) the task for academic labor is not to wish, speak, or write the corporate university out of existence but to fight back, collectively, in this long war.

But everything I say depends, also, on local conditions, one of which, in my case, is working on a campus where the usual English Studies hierarchy (Literature on top, other subfields of English next, Composition always last) is not much in evidence—though from Al France's post I'd say this is evidently not the case at West Chester. At the same time, however, I don't much like making "local conditions" into the sort of mantra that excuses what often happens to Composition instructors at non-unionized research universities (and even at those research universities, like Temple and Rutgers, that are unionized but do not have unified contracts).

3. Demarcating Turf

Carter: Both Bill Vaughn and Eileen Schell have alluded to the ways that academic turf gets demarcated, defended, and transgressed. Bill suggests that the boundaries between WPAs and union organizers get drawn hastily, and argues that one dedicated person can perform both roles. His personal experience demonstrates the possibility of transgression, of performatively exposing the constructedness of boundaries. In a related post, Eileen claims that lines get drawn between Composition and Cultural Studies due to a pervasive fear that the former will be co-opted or corrupted by the latter. The ensuing turf battles signal the strong desire for disciplinary identity. Yet Eileen also indicates that the principles of socialist feminism infuse her own research and pedagogy in ways that defy limited disciplinarity. Like Bill, she breaches constructed boundaries.

The common longing to maintain the integrity of boundaries nevertheless has disturbing material effects in the academic workplace. In contrast to the hopeful cast of Bill's position, many non-unionized WPAs oversee programs where much of the literacy work is performed by part-time laborers who are largely underpaid, overworked, and female. Eileen's important book *Gypsy Academics and Mother Teachers* documents the degree to which the history of contingent labor exploitation in the university reflects a related history of overt and soft-managerial sexism. Certainly the offense of those histories stems from

greater structural problems than Composition administration, but the refusal of many administrators to acknowledge the extent of their complicity with the gendered abuse of workers only strengthens the oppressive structure. How then do we persuade such administrators of the necessity of Bill's kind of activism for the development of an equitable academic workplace? How do we transgress the boundaries our history has drawn? Might locating common turf between Composition and Cultural Studies allow us a space to re-imagine the labor practices that have been quietly naturalized?

Vaughn: First, a clarification. The campaign at Illinois has been going on since 1993, but the grad employees' union there has yet to achieve formal recognition. They have nevertheless secured considerable fruits of implicit recognition, by which I mean they have achieved benefits such as eye and dental care and substantial salary increases principally because the threat of a union has prodded the school's administration to respond. Still, many of the conditions Chris describes at non-unionized sites in general continue to obtain at Illinois.

Having said that, I would also credit the tenure-line WPAs at Illinois for creating a climate in which organizing has been encouraged. To a person, they have vocally supported unionization, and neither their assistants nor the instructors in the programs have ever had to fear for being active in the union. One recent product of such support occurred last spring, when about 60 of us illegally occupied the office of the school's Board of Trustees. Among those participating were myself, the acting (i.e. adjunct) director of professional writing; my assistant, the current acting director; the current assistant to the director of rhetoric; and a former such assistant. All of us would have acted without the blessing of faculty mentors and colleagues, but it also mattered, I think, that we did have their support. Similarly, I would like to believe it sent a strong message to the grad employee and adjunct teaching staff that their administrators were willing to risk arrest and reprisals on their behalf.

Many of my students from my seminar the previous fall on the teaching of professional writing were present for the various rallies that coincided with the occupation, including at least one who had seemed quite skeptical about unions when we first discussed the issue. He is now an organizer. I don't take credit for that, but I do see it as a product of the kind of example you can set for colleagues and students, which was first transmitted to me by my mentors and professors. So that would be my first piece of advice: set a good example.

Obviously, though, the above fails to address instances where you don't begin with sympathetic administrators who facilitate activism. To persuade that non-sympathetic population, I think you have to appeal to them on the basis of professional responsibility.

We have the situation we do now because several generations of academics have been unwilling to protect their profession. This happened, I suspect, at least in part because the reward structure of the academy only encourages success at the individual level, and success is more or less equated with published scholarship and/or patentable research. (The most insidious implication of this arrangement is the one faced by new teaching assistants, who are often outright told by peers or superiors that their teaching necessarily has to be subordinated to their own course work. Thus, from the moment many of them enter the profession, they are presented with a stark lesson in one of the principal compromises that organizes the way we work.)

Let me illustrate what I mean by professional responsibility. At Illinois, before we filed for an election, 60% of our bargaining unit, or 3226 assistants out of a total around 5800, authorized the union to represent them. This was in a unit with a plurality of research assistants, concentrated in such areas as engineering and the sciences. There were very few doctrinaire Marxists among them, and fewer even who had previously belonged to a union. I doubt very many read much Cultural Studies. They were, though, fellow

professionals, and if you can get them to recognize the problems faced by the entire academy, you can then work through the range of possible solutions, and demonstrate how, in the end, nothing short of collective action is really going to help much. And believe me, places outside of English and Composition are suffering.

I think the most important thing we all need to learn is how to talk to one another across disciplines. That's partly what I was getting at in earlier postings, where I defended the importance of learning administrative skills, and pointed out that one common thread among union activists at Illinois was an investment in interdisciplinarity.

Composition and Cultural Studies are well positioned to foster the kind of institutional dialogue that leads to organizing and collective action. But both of those actions need to start from where people actually are, and what we most have in common, I think, is not any particular vocabulary of resistance, but a commitment to the profession in general.

Schell: Chris asks: "How then do we persuade such administrators of the necessity of Bill's kind of activism for the development of an equitable academic workplace? How do we transgress the boundaries our history has drawn?" I think one way to "persuade" toward action is to make public the working conditions of those who teach off the tenure-track: to publicize salaries, part-time versus full-time ratios, working conditions, and to get the word out on part-time labor issues to guides and reference materials that go to students and their parents.

As the students against sweatshop movement is doing with the suppliers of sports apparel, so we need to with academic labor: monitor the situation, keep it in the news, keep in the minds of students and their families as they choose colleges. Public shame can be good. The Coalition on the Academic Workforce/MLA survey on English and foreign language departments does show salary data and so forth. We need more publicly available information such as this: information that gets labor practices out into the light.

The public display of this information coupled with grassroots organizing around labor issues will be the most persuasive argument that college/university administrators can hear: that the practices will be made public and that they matter because it's a quality of instruction issue.

That brings to mind another point. How do we call attention to the quality of instruction issue? Miller in his article implied that hiring full-time faculty to teach writing won't guarantee good instruction. It's almost as if he's saying that working conditions don't really matter, in some cases. This is a problem. We need to speak about what exploitive working conditions do to people's teaching. In an article Helen O'Grady wrote for *Moving a Mountain* (Schell and Stock, 2001, NCTE), she speaks of what "freeway flying" does to one's teaching. She speaks directly and openly about the costs to teaching when a teacher is fragmented between multiple institutions. Helen's essay shows the psychic and material costs to teaching when it happens under exploitive conditions.

However, narratives are not enough. I think there need to be institutional studies that document how exploitive working conditions harm/prohibit quality teaching. Why do we need studies and data? Because people like David Adamany, President of Temple University, can come out in the *Chronicle of Higher Ed* and say the Coalition on the Academic Work Force/MLA report on working conditions shows low salaries and problematic working conditions, but that it DOESN'T PROVE that working conditions affect teaching. When I read that comment, I was in disbelief for five seconds. I have seen comments similar to Adamany's in the social science literature on part-time employment over the past thirty years, and I don't think that line of thinking will go away. In other words, it must be refuted with evidence that teacher's

working conditions are students' learning conditions—that working conditions do matter.

Back to Chris's comment, I think that the real hope for addressing these issues rests with graduate education and the unionization movement (for grad students, part-time faculty, and tenure-track faculty). The unionization experience makes a difference in how academics come to view themselves and their work. Like Bill, I was part of a union in graduate school. I never thought about my work in the same way again. I'm hopeful because the graduate student unionization movements and the students against sweatshops movements have begun to gain momentum.

Goodman: One thing that has been conspicuously missing in these correspondences is any analysis of the content of writing curriculum. I feel this is a serious omission because I think that the only way fundamentally to challenge the problems that are being identified here is to end the current concentration of wealth and ownership of the means of production in the hands of an elite few, in other words, to end capitalism as we know it. Therefore, to make a Composition Studies workable (if such a thing were even desirable), the agenda should not so much be making adjuncts more comfortable or to get them better salaries and benefits, the kinds of things that local unions often focus on.

What is more important is that the current system of flexible labor exploitation throughout the global capitalist world be fundamentally reorganized to create conditions for fairness, equality, and justice. In other words, inequities in the workplace need to be challenged on the ideological level, in terms of forms of production, as well as on the level of the political economy of those ideological forms.

We can only create radical citizens by dismantling mainstream belief systems propagated by the mainstream corporate media, and so we have to teach writing in ways that explicitly go against capitalist hegemonies, to expose to students the way the current regime of capital is actually making their lives worse, undermining their political wills, and that they need to do something about it and can do something about it, and that writing could play a part in that challenge.

Sosnoski: As I read the preceding posts in this discussion thread, I found myself agreeing with both Bill and Eileen's responses to Chris' initial post. It seems intuitively correct that an academic endeavor such as Cultural Studies would not have the effect on the exploitative conditions of labor faced by teachers of writing as unionization would. Yet, I believe that CS has an important role to play in the struggle for better working conditions. In the emphasis placed on articulation by many of its advocates, as Patty Harkin has often noted, the "transgressing" of disciplinary boundaries is encouraged. Bill and Eileen, as Chris commented, bring this perspective to their activism.

I also believe that Chris is on target when he remarks, "The common longing to maintain the integrity of boundaries nevertheless has disturbing material effects in the academic workplace." The actual conditions of our work are well described by Evan Watkins in *Work Time*. In my view, maintaining disciplinary boundaries is a part of the mechanism of "token professionalization"—the institutional bonding to an unachievable ideal that, in Foucault's sense, disciplines subjects into subjugation. Cultural Studies demythologizes the academic ideal of the professoriate that binds overworked, underpaid, and exploited teachers to the university. This does not, however, address all of the problems in the situation.

On the one hand, we can ask: how is it, then, that persons who presumably are qualified to earn more money in better working conditions return year after year to an incredibly exploitative job? Are there NO alternatives to this exploitation? From this perspective, Cultural Studies, as institutional critique, can help to de-mythologize the view of professionalism that often keeps teachers from unionizing. Yet, on the other hand, the claim that writing teachers are hired without regard for their qualifications bears examination. I know from personal experience that unsuitable writing instructors have been hired as adjuncts, sometimes

by Literature professors who make staffing decisions without consulting the WPAs in the department. On this account as well, institutional critique is again appropriate. The problem becomes: how do we make institutional critique persuasive when addressing an audience of persons who value the university as an institution?

Bill suggests that “collective action . . . need[s] to start from where people actually are.” Eileen suggests that “one way to “persuade” toward action is to make public the working conditions of those who teach off the tenure-track.” With both suggestions in mind, at UIC institutional critique would start with Stanley Fish’s hiring practices that offer huge salaries to high profile literary critics like Walter Benn Michaels and a pittance to writing instructors. The Chronicle of Higher Education reports the former but not the latter. Hopefully, this colloquy can, in part, be a form of “counter-reporting,” so to speak.

4. Literacy Work: Faculty Work?

Carter: Those concerned about composition in the university generally agree that writing teachers should share many of the privileges of faculty, including job security, better benefits, higher pay, and greater academic freedom. They fail to agree, however, on whether those teachers should be faculty. Why the disagreement? What’s at stake? To quote the editors of *Literacy Work in the Managed University*, “Isn’t writing work faculty work?”

Vaughn: I don’t possess the history to explain the source of the problem, but my lived history very much bears out the disdain among literature faculty for Composition work and workers. Is it that Literature needed an equivalent to lab assistants, and invented writing fellows? You need lab assistants to do research, just as you need writing fellows to free up faculty for research time.

And just as English is grappling with the phenomenon of a permanent adjunct class, the sciences are seeing a shift toward a post-doctoral phase (sometimes entailing multiple such assignments) that interrupts a smooth transition from research assistant to assistant professor.

So yes, writing work is work—according to this narrative in the same sense that running an experiment is. It’s just that the old apprenticeship model—which, even when it worked, was always probably less successful in English than it was in the sciences—depended on a clear distinction between apprentice and adept, and now we have this huge pool of adepts-in-everything-but-the-name.

Now, my analogy assumes that teaching writing is akin to following protocols. It can be and is often reduced to that, but that’s probably not a description of the discipline most of us would accept. I don’t know what the magic bullet is here. When the English department at Illinois conducted a search for a new head, one of the candidates made a point of saying that if he were hired, he’d teach first year Composition every year. Would it make a difference if half or all of the faculty in the department did so? Somehow, the attitudes toward Composition have to evolve, if the labor circumstances are to improve.

Chris asks “What’s at stake?” I once had a WPA explain to me that the reason he taught his graduate professional seminar as an introduction to composition theory is that he couldn’t see giving someone seminar credit for a course in pedagogy. The reason many composition teachers lack the privileges of faculty is that many (literature) faculty can’t see giving someone faculty privileges for a job that involves teaching writing. Why? Because the profession seems to believe Literature is more important than writing, just as, in my other example, Composition theory is more important than Composition pedagogy.

The more precious faculty privileges become, the more tenaciously some of us insist that there exist clear hierarchies that determine who deserves them. So in that respect, writing work clearly isn’t faculty work.

Another issue at stake in Chris's question is how privileges are achieved. Do you earn them, or do you demand them? How long do you go on trying to earn them, before you start demanding?

Leo Parascondola: Chris, an important question. Bill, I am finishing a two-year stint as a writing fellow, and I take your point. Here at CUNY, writing fellows do no teaching but, instead, serve as "consultants" to participating academic departments, helping faculty to devise syllabi that integrate more writing. Since the remediation crisis of 1998, CUNY has used this Writing Fellows program to push the idea of "writing intensive" courses in all departments. The writing fellows have been the trailblazers of a sort, running faculty workshops, partnering with individual faculty, and meeting with students among their duties. Because so many CUNY students are inexperienced writers and readers, and because faculty in the disciplines are wedded to the transmission model of writing, the burden on the fellows is immense. We have to disabuse faculty of the notion that the transmission model of writing is best, convince them that an obsessive focus on surface features is counterproductive, and urge them to consider that they can expect their students to write more without worrying that they are losing the battle of "coverage."

There are 100 fellows, and the pay is lucrative by adjunct/grad student standards--\$22,000 for a 15 hour commitment per semester. (Finishing the dissertation is a major component of the financing package.) So, although we are better off than adjuncts in the system, we are relieving faculty outside of English from teaching writing at all. David Russell has written about this extensively. Russell's arguments about "activity systems" and the specific contexts and genres of the disciplines can be collapsed into Richard Miller's call for abandoning the first-year Comp course and leaving all writing instruction to faculty and grad students in the disciplines. This would be unproductive and disingenuous. I am not nearly convinced that this is a workable or even a desirable goal. On the contrary, if we are going to abandon or abolish first-year Comp, I believe we should go the route suggested by folks like Sharon Crowley, Ira Shor, and others—a complete reinvention of English Studies is in order.

Which brings me to matters of hierarchy, privilege, and tenure. There is in CUNY, perhaps, less disdain for Composition faculty than elsewhere, but there is still plenty floating around. Composition in CUNY is, like at most places, a cash cow and a disgrace to the profession. Our new union leadership, after many years of neglect on the part of the old regime, is addressing adjunct issues. We can only hope for better results. However, it's my strong feeling that there is no such thing as faculty status that does not carry with it reasonable guarantees of full-time employment for those who want it, accompanied by an sharp increase (pro-rated to tenured lines) in levels of compensation, decent health benefits, and increased opportunities for travel funding, faculty development, and related benefits.

As for hierarchy and tenure, as long as English is defined primarily as literary study and scholarship, these problems will not go away. Historically, the subordination of Composition to Literature has been the conceptual failure of English. But this is not mainly a conceptual or intellectual failure. The structure of English feeds the material needs of higher education for systemic dependence on cheap labor. We have many dragons to slay, and they won't all be killed overnight.

The field needs a more capacious definition of English Studies along the lines of what people such as Shor, Crowley, Russell, and others have called for. Even Eagleton's famous call for a primary focus on Rhetoric as a core subject for English Studies would be better than what we now have. In order to give literacy and composition work full and equal faculty status, the field needs an intellectual focus AND a material structure radically different from what now exists.

Tenure ought to be redefined as full and reasonable job security for all faculty; rank and hierarchy ought to be abolished; most importantly, the work of universities needs to be reconfigured so as to de-emphasize its dependence on corporate models and re-emphasize service to our students. The historical mission of U.S.

universities has been to service and maintain the professional and managerial classes, and, too often, our intellectual agendas have been driven by capital's need to enforce its own. Ideologies of "nation," "community," "citizenship," have contributed to the obfuscation on this issue, and I recommend all to Richard Ohmann's essay in our collection on this issue.

Patty Harkin: I'd like to address the issue of "abolishing rank," (as against tenure), from a number of different perspectives. I suspect we can agree that the managed university (whatever its name is in our local space) has been tending to increase the number of ranks. That is to say, for example, that many "Research I" universities now have a "super-full" rank—university professor, to which full professors can aspire. Purdue just initiated a kind of "super-associate" rank through which associate professors can get research leave, research assistants, travel money and of course labs, machines, and equipment so that they can get to be full professors more quickly. The interesting thing is that Purdue calls this a rank, not a grant. And at the other end of the capital/power spectrum, there are adjuncts WITH benefits, and those without, lecturers paid by the course and those paid by the term, and so forth.

Through these ever smaller-in-consequence but larger-in-number gradations, capitalism maintains itself by giving us something to aspire to—something (most importantly) to COMPETE FOR, and thereby to become more productive in some *measurable* way. Moreover, as we compete, we subject ourselves to ever more normalizing surveillance procedures, in which committees—often outside the department—LOOK AT our "dossiers" to see how good we are. It's crucial to note though that what we're competing for is symbolic capital for the most part, rather than the kind that you can take to the grocery store or the health care provider. So long as the university can get us to compete for symbolic capital instead of the "real" thing, we're pretty much screwed.

Bill Readings's discussion of excellence comes into perspective here—but Readings doesn't seem to see that the measurement itself (sans capital) has become the ideology. Our new Dean wants the university of Illinois at Chicago's English Department to be among the top ten in the country within the next ten years. Although I seriously doubt that Stanley Fish believes that such rankings *mean* anything, he does know for sure that the ranking itself is a kind of symbolic capital. So I can understand how many of the members of this conversation would be eager to abolish rank, but I suspect that the gesture would ultimately result in some other kind of symbolic capital to compete over—and that Bill's right to suspect that "the state apparatus" would use it to reduce compensation anyway.

On the other hand, as a person who grew up in an Army family, where people wore their rank on their hats, shoulders, and sleeves, I know how really vicious the system can be. As a person gendered female, I've been very uncomfortable with competition—especially competition for its own sake—or, what amounts TO ME to the same thing, competition for a certificate that says you're a very "normal" faculty member on the basis of whatever norm is going on that day. I'd like to see rank and grades and "standings" abolished—but it seems to me that capitalism itself would have to come down first. For what it's worth, I've decided not to "go up" for promotion to full professor. The surveillance is more painful than the reward is pleasurable. So when you see on my tombstone "Here lies Patty; She was ONLY an Associate Professor" please remember it was my choice.

Bill Hendricks: Isn't writing work faculty work? Of course. Who would disagree? Many would and do, it turns out.

Two weeks ago my university had its five-year NCATE review. I had the opportunity to spend some time with one of the NCATE visitors, a middle school teacher from North Carolina. She grew up and went to college in Pennsylvania; I have lots of kin in North Carolina. We compared notes on public schools. So far as we could figure out, 100% of public school teachers (and many Catholic school teachers) in

Pennsylvania are unionized. In North Carolina, on the other hand, no public school teachers whatsoever are unionized. State law (about which she complained bitterly, though in most other respects she said she'd enjoyed her teaching career in Carolina). So the legal climate and the relative strength of the labor movement within particular locales make a difference. They are changeable, but not easily or quickly.

Nor is it true that the material circumstances of school teachers in Pennsylvania are always better than those of school teachers in North Carolina. Often, maybe, but not always. Particularly in rural school districts and in districts in the Monongahela Valley where most of the steel mills have shut down, the taxable property base in some Pennsylvania school districts is so low that, unions notwithstanding, teachers' pay is pretty bad and cannot easily be raised by even the cagiest collective bargaining efforts. Last month, PSEA led a massive demonstration in Harrisburg demanding changes in the funding formula for public schools. Not one state legislator showed up at the demonstration, though many were invited. And only a couple of newspapers covered the event. Even in states with relatively strong labor movements, the war for labor rights, for justice, is a hard war. It is ongoing.

So far, unionized college faculty in Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education have fared better, across the board, than have unionized school teachers. Partly this is a result of having a unified contract across all 14 universities in the System. Partly this is a matter of including everyone, full-time faculty and part-time faculty, in a single salary structure, with part-time salaries pro-rated to full-time positions.

This is the power of a certain kind of collective. So, in this context, it might seem that I'd agree with Leo that abolishing academic rank would be a good idea. But I don't agree. I have just about zero concern with my title. But I have no doubt that if my union proposed abolishing academic ranks, that would be a welcome opening to the State, the kind of opening it always seeks, to attempt to re-structure (i.e., reduce) pay and benefits for all.

But it will be said that I have been insulated, privileged. And in a way that's true. But I'm really wary of imagining that the road to labor justice for all lies in testing the limits of equal opportunity suffering. Yet I have in a way been insulated, and not just in terms of the collective power that makes it possible for me to make a living from work that I like. I have also been insulated in having had what is, I guess, a sort of unusual experience in academic settings, an experience that has only some of the time suggested the usual professional hierarchies that Chris and Leo describe.

In graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh my favorite courses were called "teaching seminars," courses in which those of us teaching various introductory undergraduate courses got together (and for which we got full academic credit). These courses were noted for (at least this is what I noted) their capaciousness. Everything was thrown together, our teaching and our reflections on our teaching, reading and writing, theory and practice, "Literature" and Composition, the various agencies of language (call them rhetoric and composing) and the various ways (call them ideology or Cultural Studies) in which language eludes our grasp. And then we had to, collectively and individually, make sense of this melange, examine everything that had been tossed into the pot and see what sense we could make of it. (I bring this up in light of Leo's call for a new definition of English studies.)

And, now, as I think I've mentioned before, I work in an English department in which there are no "Composition faculty" because everyone teaches composition (as well as courses in literature, professional writing, English education, theory). Still, I'm aware of the hierarchies. I am not claiming that they're chimerical. What goes on in my department is not what goes on in every English department in the State System. Here's how I know. It may be that SSHE is one of the few places in the country right now where percentages of part-time faculty are decreasing and percentages of tenure-track faculty are increasing. (Thanks to some provisions in our current collective bargaining agreement.) But at the Legislative

Assembly in February those of us in attendance learned that this shift has so far been extremely modest. It's not happening nearly as fast as we hoped and expected. Sure, administrative challenges to and subversions of the contract are part of the reason. But another factor is, as we discovered, that in some departments (especially English departments), faculty are declining to take advantage of the new provisions, and their reluctance (in English departments) has precisely to do with wanting to keep a substantial corps of part-time faculty positions so that tenure-track English faculty can continue to be uncontaminated by composition teaching.

So the battle has many fronts. And it's hard to know from day to day who the enemy is. Or what they can possibly be thinking.