What We Are Becoming

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practice, sequenced writing assignments (both analytic and reflective) based on readings and experience in the internship setting—and the detailed evaluation they would receive. At that point, the Undergraduate Committee approved those two internships for credit toward the major, explaining that these particular internship classes were “adequately rigorous” to merit upper-division credit as type A courses.

Certainly both the writing concentration description on our Web site and the current status of our internship courses are theoretical hybrids, “impure” responses to institutional histories and constraints. But as we restory the narrative of composition’s lack of rigor or lack of center—two of the most onerous misunderstandings that shaped the current form of our description and ongoing efforts to expand our internship programs—we also open more opportunities amongst composition faculty to discuss our own often-differing theoretical objectives for the concentration. Indeed, the ongoing process of educating our colleagues has forced us to articulate our own perspective: Should the writing concentration focus more on rhetorical history and prepare students for entry to graduate programs in rhetoric and composition? Should the emphasis on technology be further heightened? Should we stress current faculty expertise in community literacies? How should we differentiate ourselves from the technical journalism programs or even from literary studies? Rather than hunkering down in an “us against the rest” narrative, rather than languishing in a business-as-usual framework, we are constantly revisiting and revising our own positions, perspectives, goals. The result has been a writing concentration that is anything but comfortable with the status quo, one that is vital and responsive to student needs and objectives.

RESTORING THE ROLE OF WRITING WITHIN AND BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY

Rampage’s final forecast of the challenges that faculty developing advanced writing programs will face includes the extra-departmental concerns that shape university-wide notions of writing: “the likelihood of having to debate ‘secession’ (from the English department) . . . insofar as these moves have already been constructed by some theorists as logical extensions of the move to program status and necessary preconditions for full disciplinarity” (2000, 2). Currently, our debates about our upper-division writing curricula have less to do with secession from the English department and more to do with state-wide mandates and pressures,
which have brought with them unexpected minor skirmishes and significant battles that directly impact our writing concentration curricula.

In the late 1980s, our state commission on higher education started to respond to legislative pressures to guarantee transfer credits between institutions. Significant battles indeed characterized the early efforts to agree on goals and curricula for the required first-year composition courses offered at all state institutions of higher education. As the years rolled by, however, programs drifted or changed direction radically, and changes in admissions policies and funding resulted in disparities between student populations. In just the past eighteen months, the two public Research 1 universities in Colorado (CSU and University of Colorado) have been mandated to require not just first-year composition but an additional writing course at the upper division. In addition to concerns amongst composition faculty across the state that the new advanced writing curriculum is just the first step in a competency exam to be aimed at the two-year institutions, we at CSU are facing a literal explosion of students in our upper-division writing course. Indeed, we face the prospect of phasing an additional four thousand students into our junior-level writing courses over the next three years.

Within this framework of the larger composition community across the state, the pressure to build consensus about appropriate criteria for the advanced writing requirement has added a great deal of strain to our department- and university-wide discussion of advanced writing curricula, which, of course, overlaps with our writing concentration curriculum. In addition to the pull on composition faculty resources as we administer an advanced writing program whose size will rival our first-year composition program, we (Kate, in particular) face the challenge of new faculty hiring, training, and evaluation, particularly since most of the advanced courses will be taught by non-tenure-track faculty in special instructor positions. And the initiative comes at what may be an unfortunate time. In the past year, we have been responding to another state-mandated requirement: the “GtPathways” initiative, which requires that all university core classes feature a writing-intensive component, such that writing assignments will constitute 25 percent of each student’s grade in each core course. Since the university did receive considerable funding for TA lines to support faculty teaching these writing-intensive courses, composition faculty have been asked to coordinate many of the efforts to train and mentor these new TAs in the teaching and evaluation of writing. Given these mandates, we composition faculty
find ourselves negotiating an intensified service identity in the English department and across the university. We have, like so many compositionists nationwide, assiduously resisted being identified primarily as service workers by emphasizing the intellectually dynamic nature of our writing programs through publications about administration work, by hosting the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Clearinghouse Web site, by offering a vital and successful MA in rhetoric and composition, etc. Yet these mandates have had a contradictory effect on composition’s status in the English department. On the one hand, many of our colleagues have become more aware of the university-wide demands on composition faculty’s time and energies; on the other hand, the mandates have solidified for many our primary role as administrators pulled into the ongoing corporatization and regulation of the university.

More immediate, still, is the perception of many English department colleagues that the composition program at CSU is empire-building, that while the new mandates are certainly demanding administrative work, they nonetheless represent new opportunities for composition programs and faculty—opportunities for funding, resources, upper-administrative support, and visibility to which colleagues in other areas of English may not have. Indeed, in 2006, composition received funding for a tenure-track faculty line to work with the GtPathways initiative. Though the funding for that position comes not from the English Department’s coffers but from the provost’s office, there is nonetheless the feeling among some of our colleagues that the composition programs have grown at the expense of other programs. Indeed, this is a primary concern in the department: that these new initiatives will draw on English resources and will dramatically affect other departmental programs.

We composition faculty certainly feel a measure of beleaguered injury, given these new developments, their concomitant reaffirmation of our service role, the misunderstandings about composition’s desire to expand our terrain, and the daunting department-wide concern about what may seem an unfair distribution of resources. We have only begun to write the identity narrative that will set the victim role aside in this case. The particular threads of this story will include using our writing program criteria and descriptions to build consensus among writing teachers and WPAs across the state about the values of our program and using specific syllabi and students samples from our courses to illustrate to writing teachers and WPAs across the state how we enact our values and set program standards appropriate for upper-division writing. On
the department level, we continue to remind our colleagues about the origin of the mandated growth of the composition program, and we emphasize the budget lines that separate composition from English department funding.

We’re hoping, too, that these current challenges will offer us more opportunity to forge a community of teachers who share goals and criteria for upper-division writing courses, as we are building an extensive and useful professional development program so that interested non-tenure-track faculty can further build their knowledge and skills—as well as their enthusiasm—for teaching advanced writing courses. Most important, we are crafting curricular innovations that will connect upper-division writing students with communities outside the classroom, whether those are disciplinary communities or the larger community of our city, through experiential and service-learning options in the writing classes. We see a real opportunity here to enhance our externship and internship programs further. We do not eschew our service role; neither do we see it as the sole focus of our work as rhetoric and composition specialists. Restorying this conflict will allow us over the next several years to implement a more robust range of offerings at the upper division—a development that will undoubtedly positively affect our writing concentration—and build community with teachers and WPAs statewide.

**RESTORING AND RESTORING AND RESTORING . . .**

Our stories and experiences of the embattled dynamics of the role of composition in our own department pale in comparison to many of the disturbing tales included in Howard’s discussion of the development of advanced writing programs in colleges and universities across the nation. Overall, we’re luckier than many—when it comes to collegiality in our department and the fact that we have a strong support system in place amongst our seven tenure-track faculty in rhetoric and composition. We also understand that many of the injurious responses we’ve received from departmental colleagues over the years are due not only to vast misunderstandings about the field of composition, which still remains so foreign to many of our colleagues, but also to the outrageously limited resources that our department, like many English departments, have faced over the years.

Nonetheless, we find the metaphor of restorying injustice generative and a means to engage in a process of, yes, healing from the moments when we’ve experienced what Zehr identifies as the three central effects of experiences of injustice: disorder, disempowerment, and
disconnection, all of which pose significant challenges to our sense of identity—professional and personal (2001, 189). If, as Howard suggests, many compositionists “play the victim role,” this may occur because we often feel a profound sense of humiliation and frustration when our contributions to a department are recast as “empire building” or our identity as scholars is devalued as “not rigorous enough.” As Zehr explains, the process of moving from isolation and shame to belonging and empowerment “requires us to re-narrate our stories so that they are no longer just about shame and humiliation, but are ultimately about dignity and triumph. Questions of meaning, honor, and responsibility are all part of this journey” (2001, 191). We hope that, by addressing our own experiences as we’ve wrangled with the three challenges in developing a writing concentration which Rampage identifies, we’ve contributed to this restorying for our own department and for others facing similar challenges. But restorying is restorying; it never allows for the finished narrative. With a community of compositionists as audiences and interlocutors, let the restorying continue. It’s bound to impact our advanced writing programs in profoundly important ways.

REFERENCES


On May 7, 2008, the Oakland University (OU) Board of Trustees approved a proposal for a new major and minor in writing and rhetoric, the culmination of over ten years of effort by rhetoric faculty in the Department of Rhetoric, Communication, and Journalism. On June 1, 2008, the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) officially launched the Department of Writing and Rhetoric as a stand-alone writing department. The writing program’s independence and the development of its major intertwine. Initial independence allowed the faculty to create curriculum based on contemporary disciplinary thinking, and that curricular focus persisted through its time in a blended department, flowering in the proposal for the major. Moreover, the program’s initial independence led to widespread faculty involvement in institutional service and administrative activities. The service and administrative work has been instrumental, though sometimes very subtly, in raising the writing faculty and program out of the second-class citizenship all too common for writing programs, regardless of their reporting lines. Now, as a department in the College of Arts and Sciences, with a major of our own, we can compete effectively with most other academic programs on campus, having our own representatives in the governance bodies and making our own case for resources.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The writing program at OU has never been a part of the English department, for reasons rooted in institutional history. Founded as Michigan

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1. The new (to the position) dean of the College of Arts and Sciences spent much of the 2007–08 academic year splitting rhetoric off from communication and journalism as a major element in achieving his long-range CAS goals. His passion came largely from the many years he spent as a senior member of the rhetoric faculty.
State University (MSU)—Oakland, OU admitted its first class of 570 students in 1959 and became an autonomous state regional institution in 1970 (Oakland University Timeline n.d.). Today it offers a full range of degrees and enrolls some 18,000 students—dramatic growth given its fifty-year existence. But it began as a liberal-arts-focused “honors” college for MSU with significant emphasis on the visual and performing arts. Faculty were recruited from top graduate schools across the country, and these “charter faculty” were deeply involved in setting curricular and academic policy. From today’s perspective, active involvement of faculty from many disciplines in writing instruction and policy-setting appears very desirable, but the OU reality reveals significant drawbacks when such involvement is not guided by faculty with expertise in rhetoric and composition studies.

A WAC-LIKE APPROACH TO FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION (FYC)

Initially at OU, no first-year writing courses were established. Instead, writing instruction was incorporated into first-year interdisciplinary seminars known as Freshman Exploratories, taught by charter faculty as part of their discipline-based coursework. These Exploratories were, according to both charter faculty and students enrolled in the early years, exciting and rewarding educational experiences. From the mid-1960s through the 1970s, each student was required to take two semesters of Exploratories, the first element of a three-part “series of courses designed to provide a broadening, intellectual experience in liberal education” required of all students:

These Freshman Exploratories[,] taught in seminar-sized classes, offer an opportunity for the student to explore a wide variety of liberal subjects, and are intended to develop the student’s ability to think, to discuss, and to write intelligently and critically. Freshman Exploratories satisfy the University requirements for freshman composition. Freshman Exploratories may be selected from the areas of Literature, Western Institutions, Fine Arts, Social Sciences, non-western Civilizations, Science and Mathematics. No two exploratories may be selected from the same area. (Oakland University Catalog n.d., 25)

Writing instruction was ancillary to the subject of the exploratory, folded into courses such as From Atom to Adam; Historical, Sociological, and Literary Perspective on the Black Experience in America; and Politics and Literature, taught by faculty from, respectively, the departments of biology, history, and English (Registrar record books Winter 1969, Fall 1969,
Winter 1970). As a result, faculty across the institution came to regard themselves as experts in writing instruction, with the unfortunate result that when writing instruction was moved to separate coursework, at a time when the discipline was professionalizing, faculty with little composition studies disciplinary experience wrote the charge to the new program.

ESTABLISHING A WRITING CURRICULUM

By the late 1960s, it became clear to OU faculty and administrators that more focused, systematic writing instruction was needed. Since no faculty positions existed for writing, decisions about writing-coursework requirements and placement were made primarily in OU’s governance forum known as the University Senate, composed of faculty, administrators, and staff. In the senate minutes of 1972, formative voices include the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, who was a historian, the dean of the School of Education, and faculty members from engineering, English, philosophy, history, political science, speech communication, chemistry, and psychology.² First, the senate acknowledged the need for separate writing coursework, “discontinu[ing] the use of Freshman Exploratories to teach writing and substitute[ing] . . . a proficiency standard” (Oakland University Senate 1972, April 5). Admissions testing would evaluate student writing for “proficiency,” and one senator (from history) commented that “out of her considerable experience in teaching freshmen composition, not more than 20% of the students [could] proceed without further instruction in writing.” Senators saw evaluation of writing as the work of the entire faculty, not of the English department: “the Advisory Committee on the proficiency standard was . . . a University-wide committee . . . intended to include predominately Arts and Sciences faculty, but [also] at least one member from each of the other Schools and Colleges” (1972, April 5). Following this decision, the university, after much senate meddling, created a writing program named the Department of Learning Skills and housed it administratively in the provost’s office. Both the name and the senate charge reveal a lack of disciplinary knowledge and a reductive approach to writing instruction that has haunted the program for over thirty years and has clearly been an impediment to the acquisition of new faculty and to the progress of our major proposal.

² Most of these faculty had taught the Exploratories.
The writing curriculum itself, both First-Year Composition (FYC) and developmental, was created in the 1970s by newly hired learning skills faculty, who were engaged in the emerging composition and rhetoric discipline, though initially they were MA- rather than PhD-credentialed. Because the program grew out of a cross-curricular program where writing instruction was not seen as a function of the English department, the coursework was not focused on literature. After nine years, the program was renamed rhetoric, aligned administratively with the then-tiny communication and journalism programs, and moved to the College of Arts and Sciences.

Since the three disciplines largely operated as separate programs for curriculum and because writing was not housed in the English department, the writing curriculum remained focused on rhetoric and composition.

EXPANDING THE WRITING CURRICULUM BEYOND THE FIRST YEAR

The Learning Skills (LS) period (1972–81) found the writing program responsive to the evolving national disciplinary approaches to writing pedagogy and curriculum. Largely a first-year program, the LS courses included basic writing, reading, and (predominantly) Composition I and II. The administrative linking with communication and journalism in the early ’80s was largely helpful for curriculum, despite myriad political problems, not the least of which was allocation of tenure-track lines. Communication and journalism both had upper-division classes and majors, and rhetoric faculty began to pursue that goal, both to offer the institution’s students more writing instruction and to expand their teaching variety.  

In the late 1980s, probably the most significant drawback to not being a part of the English department became apparent: turf wars. English asserted that it “owned” all upper-division writing, that rhetoric was formed and destined forever to be a lower-division program. (Only very recently did the English department faculty member who mounted the most adamant opposition apologize to me for what he sees now as a misguided attack on the rhetoric program and faculty.) Had we been departmental colleagues, we could not have proposed courses without department support, and English faculty would then have been our allies rather than our opponents. On the other hand, had we been in English, the writing program might never have been permitted to grow.

3. While a few of the writing faculty were occasionally invited to teach upper-division courses for other programs, in the main the faculty taught Composition I and II.
beyond its role as a service program, would likely have emphasized writing about literature, and would have even fewer composition and rhetoric faculty than it does. English has offered several writing classes in addition to its creative writing program, and virtually all of those classes have been staffed exclusively with part-time “Special Lecturers” or full-time “Special Instructors.”

No tenure-track position for writing has ever been pursued by the English department, and the English department writing instructors are primarily that department’s MA-credentialed graduates who studied literature exclusively.

The rhetoric program won the turf war over upper-division coursework largely due to the political astuteness of the Department of Rhetoric, Communication, and Journalism (RCJ) chair: when rhetoric was ready to propose 300-level courses in the late 1980s, I was strategically placed on the college curriculum committee to handle the vicious battle. Had the writing program not been represented on the CAS curriculum committee, we would surely not have been permitted to create upper-division classes at that time. Throughout our curriculum development work, such strategic service work has been instrumental in our prevailing, though often not without great trouble. Our later experience showed that we probably should have tried to continue representation on the CAS curriculum committee, as every course we proposed was sent to the English department for review and approval, while when English created two or three writing courses in addition to its creative writing courses, the rhetoric faculty were never consulted.

**Finding an Audience for Upper-Division Writing Classes**

The curriculum victory that allowed rhetoric to create such courses as Rhetoric (RHT) 320, Peer Tutoring in Composition, and RHT 334, Ethnographic Writing, established a foundation for developing our major proposal but was an empty victory: rarely in the ensuing fifteen years could we develop sufficient enrollments to mount the classes because typically they were merely general electives rather than graduation requirements. Rarely were we able to convince our department chair and dean that one of the classes should be taught despite enrollment of under ten students.

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4. By faculty contract, a “Special Lecturer” is a part-time faculty member who teaches sixteen or more credits per year and a “Special Instructor” is a full-time faculty member whose credentials are not appropriate for a tenure-track position (2006-09 Agreement).

5. Most of these courses have been transferred from English to our new Writing and Rhetoric Department by the dean.
Membership on major university committees helped significantly in raising the profile of the rhetoric program. And because many of these committees limit membership to one person from any department, we were able to serve on committees that also had an English representative—a distinct advantage in helping us develop audiences for our upper-division courses. In the late 1990s, when I chaired the university General Education Committee, the university began revising its general education program. As the general education revision process moved forward, another senior rhetoric faculty member served on the committee’s Task Force. The new general education structure, which came into the catalog in 2005, requires two “intensive writing” classes in addition to FYC. Whether or not the presence of rhetoric faculty in the initial revision work was a catalyst, having rhetoric faculty on these key committees built respect and acceptance for the program. Importantly, the increasing national interest in improving writing led to a program with many opportunities to attract students looking to fulfill requirements to RHT upper-division courses. As soon as faculty were invited to submit courses for general education certification, we applied for “intensive writing” status for most of our 300- and 400-level courses, and we have seen enrollments jump dramatically.

Yet another strategy we used to improve enrollments, particularly in classes that are cross-listed as graduate classes, has been to encourage our part-time faculty to enroll. Those who lack training in rhetoric and composition benefit by becoming more current with disciplinary research, at little cost because Special Lecturers by OU’s American Association of University Professors (AAUP) contract have a tuition benefit of two free courses (eight credits) per year.

**CREATING THE MAJOR PROPOSAL**

Having broken through the 300-level ceiling, we strategically pursued creating upper-division courses to serve as the basis for our major, knowing that the approval process for individual classes is much less onerous than for program proposals. The CAS curriculum committee approves courses; major proposals go through a full, complex governance process, passing through at least five committees before going to the board of trustees.

Rhetoric faculty began working formally on a major proposal in 1997–98. Talk about the major continued, but there was insufficient

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6. The prior graduation requirement was simply “writing proficiency” documented by a 2.0 or better in Composition II. Please see “Framework” for the complete new program.
outside the English Department

faculty time and energy to move it forward into a formal proposal for many years, given our severely limited number of tenured/tenure-track faculty. We would do some tasks but then teaching, service, and sometimes politics would intervene. We created a mission statement; we gained approval for several individual courses. We drafted and executed a survey of alumni about the importance of writing studies in the professional world. During that time, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) offered two extremely valuable workshops on creating a major (in 2001 and 2002), which I attended. And in 2000, Boynton published Coming of Age: The Advanced Writing Curriculum (Shamoon, et al.). Both the workshops and the book assisted us in refining our proposal concepts in line with national disciplinary trends and our institutional context.

Within the institution, periodically, we would gather information on the proposal format (which did keep changing). I talked several times with the assistant dean who controlled the CAS curriculum committee agenda. We deliberately kept the idea of the major-proposal-in-progress in front of administrators and faculty friends, though it aroused no great enthusiasm the way I recall a Studio Art proposal did. As I reflect on the problems we had winning approval for the proposal in the CAS curriculum committee, I conclude that part of the difficulty was simply the newness of the discipline: faculty from other departments had never encountered a writing major other than a BFA/creative writing degree, so were not predisposed to support one.7

We were careful to bow to institutional pressures; it has been most helpful that several of our faculty have held administrative appointments and chaired or been members of the major university committees, so we have generally been aware of what the hot buttons are. After we had created and obtained approval for individual upper-division courses, we attempted to see that they were taught at least once. At OU, new programs which require significant new funding are rarely approved by university committees and the Board of Trustees. We were under pressure to show that our major would not require either new faculty at the outset or significant change in a faculty teaching commitment to FYC. With most courses approved and taught at least once, we could say honestly that “no new faculty will be required to start up the major” and that tenured and tenure-track faculty would continue their FYC commitment.

7. We were told that one member of the CAS curriculum committee was harsh on our proposal simply because his program’s proposal the prior year had been roundly criticized.
THE MAJOR CURRICULUM

Of course, no proposal goes through governance, at least at OU, without considerable revision. Being open to such revisions and receptive to the often-misguided objections of faculty committee members from other disciplines, some of who have unrelated axes to grind, is essential. Since our goal was to win approval, we were compliant rather than defiant. Moreover, several years had passed between the initial drafting and the committee response, years which saw some significant personnel changes and increasing disciplinary emphasis on technology. The final approval of the writing and rhetoric major owes much to the sterling efforts of the two newest tenure-track hires and the tenured faculty member chosen to lead the new department, the three of whom revised the major’s structure and coursework into attractive, contemporary disciplinary tracks including new media and writing studies.

The design draws on national disciplinary principles. Writing and rhetoric faculty have incorporated insights from CCCC workshops on the major dating back to 2001, the book *Coming of Age: The Advanced Writing Curriculum*, Kathleen Blake Yancy’s 2004 chair’s address at CCCC in San Antonio, CCCC presentations on majors in rhetoric and composition (e.g., Giberson 2007), the spring 2007 issue of *Composition Studies* about writing majors, and this collection of how writing majors develop in institutional contexts. Moreover, the OU writing faculty have been active in CCCC and other national disciplinary bodies since the 1970s; our planning for a major reflects that disciplinary focus. Early documents exploring coursework for the proposal for a major (dated 1997–98) include Writing in the Electronic Media and Contemporary Rhetorical Criticism and limit majors to eight credits from rubrics such as COM (Rhetoric and Public Address) or ENG (Business Writing). Had our program been a part of the English department, the course list, even in its early stages, would have likely been much more a hybrid with creative writing, professional/business writing, and possibly some literature courses, rather than a course of study based on current disciplinary strands.

Students majoring in writing and rhetoric will take a twelve-credit, three-course core: WRT 160, Composition II (or equivalent); WRT 340, Issues in Writing and Rhetoric; and WRT 394, Literacy, Technology, and Civic Engagement. Majors then choose one of three tracks: Writing for the

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8. By historical accident, business writing was housed in the English Department; effective June 2, 2008, the dean has moved it to the Writing and Rhetoric Department.
Professions, Writing for New Media, or Writing as a Discipline. Each track has one required course and three electives. Students take two additional electives (either WRT classes numbered 200 or higher or, with advisor approval, such courses from other departments as ENG 383, Workshop in Fiction, or JRN 200, Newswriting) and a culminating WRT capstone course. The appendix gives the full list of courses in each track.

**OVERCOMING SECOND-CLASS CITIZENSHIP**

An associate dean at one point suggested we submit a proposal just for a minor, since that approval process at OU is much simpler than for a major, and then in a few years submit a new proposal for the major. We decided against proposing just a minor for two reasons: the amount of work required to prepare the proposal was much the same, and we were certain that arguments for tenure-track positions for a minor would be trumped by other departments’ needs in their majors. Approval of the major signals that the writing and rhetoric program has achieved equal status with other university departments and programs. The road has been long and difficult, but we probably would not ever have arrived had we been a part of the English department. From the initial creation of the Department of Learning Skills, the program had overtones of remediation, due both to its name and charge and to the broader faculty’s involvement in setting policy for the writing program. I remember a conversation with an English department chair a few years ago, discussing ways our faculty might work together. He offered the possibility that some rhetoric faculty could teach an occasional English class; I countered with the opportunity for English faculty to teach the occasional writing class. His response? “I don’t think our faculty would want to do THAT,” clearly seeing it as a step down in contrast to the “treat” offered to rhetoric faculty of teaching an English class.

Further, once the writing program was established, the institution and faculty from other disciplines continued to regard writing instruction as something faculty members from any discipline could do: disciplinary expertise was not essential. Staffing has long been problematic. We have a much larger percent and number of contingent faculty than any other OU program, and many of our part-timers came from the

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9. Since OU has primarily four-credit classes, a major of forty credits consists of ten classes.
10. For the full program, see http://www4.oakland.edu/?id=5836&sid=32, tab 13, attachment A.