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PROFESSIONALS AND BUREAUCRATS

The state didn’t send out the secret police to transform higher education into an entrepreneurial sector; we have done that all by ourselves by taking on the ethic of managerialism as the practice of institutional life.

Stuart Hall

I recently became the head of a first-year writing program that is in a situation that I very deliberately call a “crisis.” The character of this crisis, however, is all too familiar to many who have done program administration work at large, public, “second-tier” institutions. Prior to my becoming director, there was little general knowledge among tenure-track faculty of what goes on in the first-year writing program—who is teaching what under what conditions. I consider promoting awareness of the terms of labor in the writing program a fundamental part of my job as head of the program, and an essential piece of any strategy of transformation. Starting from the premise that what we do is powerfully shaped by how we do it, I am trying to move the program away from a rather deeply entrenched “new formalism” and toward a more social approach to writing. I am also trying to dramatically curtail the program’s use of part-time teachers. These two factors—pedagogical philosophy and terms of work—are connected within a broader economic and institutional dynamic. The shift in teaching philosophy cannot (and should not) be enacted without a concurrent shift in the terms of labor for teachers in the program.

My university is in a high-growth urban region, and its enrollment grows steadily year by year. The university projects continued steady annual growth over at least the next decade. The writing requirement is currently two sections—typically taken in fall and spring of the first year. To accommodate steady annual growth in enrollment, the writing program has expanded by an average of ten sections per year over the past ten years. During the year in which I began directing the program, it staffed and fully enrolled almost three hundred sections.

This rapid annual expansion in sections has been covered entirely by contingent teachers. This year, over 50 percent of our first-year
courses were taught by part-time teachers. Less than 1 percent were taught by tenure-track faculty, and only about 8 percent were taught by teaching assistants. The remainder, about 40 percent, were taught by full-time, non-tenure-track lecturers. In the first-year writing program, part-time faculty outnumber our full-time, non-tenure-track faculty by two to one. Consistent with the national average identified by the American Association of University Professors, our part-time faculty also turns over by about a third each year. We are a public university in a so-called “right to work” state: this means that our part-time teachers and lecturers have had the right to engage in collective bargaining taken away from them. Part-time teachers with MAs at my university make about two thousand dollars per class before taxes and receive no health care coverage, no paid vacation, and no assurances of employment beyond the current semester.

Because our steady growth in enrollment is being covered by a concurrent steady expansion in contingent hires, the department faces the same dilemma that English departments across the country often face. A number of responses are possible. Do we, for instance, just stay the course and increase our already-heavy reliance on a contingent instructorate in an atmosphere in which we have to make annual arguments for every new full-time hire? Do we revisit the first-year requirement—perhaps eliminating it or cutting it to one semester? Do we change the numbers of people who are required to take FYC through testing and adjusting exemption requirements? These are complicated questions involving a host of elements, including financial considerations, core requirements, and general curricular philosophies and goals. Disciplinary turf issues also enter the equation. Some colleagues in rhetoric and composition vehemently oppose cutting the requirement, in part because they feel that surrendering the first-year requirement means surrendering important disciplinary “turf” or the field—diminishing the overall position of writing.

Over the years I have been struck by how different FYC becomes depending on what we need of it at a given time—by how the enterprise is compartmentalized based on rhetorical expediency. In what sense is FYC the special “turf” of rhetoric and composition? How do those of us who self-identify as professional compositionists occupy it? Do we own it at all times or just when the turf is at stake? It is common in instances like discussions of the first-year requirement to retreat behind old, familiar battle lines, referencing present and past denigrations of our
field by literary faculty, and fortifying our collective professional identity through protecting FYC as the “turf” of writing.

Situations like this necessitate a more fully three-dimensional discussion of the FYC requirement, and undergraduate writing more generally. They need to be informed by a nuanced understanding of the deep connections between the political economic terms of labor in composition; the pedagogies that are encouraged by, and practiced according to, those terms; and the assumptions and institutional practices that shape them. They also need to be informed by a more complicated and up-to-date understanding of the history of the academic field of rhetoric and composition—particularly the professional dynamics that have emerged over the past three decades and the economic logics that now shape our work.

Being a professional in rhetoric and composition has required a willingness to cope with the unique contradictions that come with being in a scholarly field that is intimately connected to the introductory-level institutional requirement of FYC. My sense is that most Ph.D.s in rhetoric and composition are not prepared by our professional training or our scholarly discourse to fully grasp and effectively account for the organizational and professional contradictions we encounter when we enter into our professional lives. For the most part, we learn that we are doing scholarly work within an academic discipline and we do administrative work: we don’t struggle to examine the two as a part of a more general political economic framework. Rather, most of us are compelled to adopt a peculiar, transposable ethos that moves—sometimes opportunistically, sometimes desperately—from the scholarly/professional to the bureaucratic/managerial to the pedagogical, depending on the work we are doing at a given time. These roles are juxtaposed, often daily, but they are rarely brought into dialectic in scholarly forums. We assume a natural and rightful identification with FYC teachers, even as we expect full status as professional scholars and managers of FYC labor, without rigorously exploring how material conditions create irreconcilable contradictions between these roles. Our lives as administrators, scholars, and teachers therefore tend to play out in distinct realms, with their own distinct discourses and concerns. Discussions of pedagogy and literacy theory rarely deal with the material conditions of teaching and writing in the university. Discussions of academic labor and writing program management rarely touch on the specific effects of faculty hierarchies and pervasive managerialism on day-to-day pedagogy—or literacy in the university more broadly.
In this chapter I will describe the nature of this compartmentalization and its consequences for both the scholarly field of rhetoric and composition and for postsecondary writing education as a situated material practice (the two are not synonymous). I will start with a discussion of the issue of ownership of the first-year requirement—a primarily historical and institutional question. I then move to a discussion of the necessity of distinguishing professional from bureaucratic subjectivity, arguing that professional training in rhetoric and composition tends to avoid the distinction—with negative consequences.

**US AND THEM**

A number of very widely read histories—including those by Sharon Crowley, James Berlin, and Susan Miller—have dealt with the complicated history of the first-year writing requirement. While there are certainly important differences in their approaches, Crowley, Miller, and Berlin approach the issue of institutional position primarily in terms of the historical relationship between composition and the more powerful literary studies. Crowley points out that both fields have developed problematic relationships with FYC. Since its inception, the FYC requirement has been used for social and intellectual gatekeeping and enculturation. Moreover, because composition has been situated within English departments dominated by literary faculty, it has been assumed that writing instruction is intellectually unchallenging—and thus marginal to the primary, more important work of literature. Crowley points to the elements of classism, racism, and ideological interpellation that have long been intrinsic to the writing requirement. As she describes it, FYC is grounded in nineteenth-century hopes for literacy, assumptions about who was, and who could become, “an educated person” and about the most efficient ways of fitting people to compete aggressively, if obediently, in a capitalist society. Freshman English has always been a gesture toward general fears of illiteracy among the bourgeois, fears generated by America’s very real class hierarchy. (1998, 235)

Crowley believes that the first-year writing requirement is too firmly grounded in this “oppressive institutional history” to be salvaged.

Also making primarily historical arguments, Susan Miller and Jim Berlin have examined the practice in terms of its ongoing and semiotic relationship with literary studies. They argue that composition
has survived and flourished, in part, because it has functioned as “the other”—the necessarily inferior half of the literary/composition binary. To sustain its own status, literary studies needs composition as a foil against which it can assert its identity and superiority. Sacred texts gain their status and sanctity only when juxtaposed with the mundane and the everyday. As texts have been differentiated by level, so too have students by the level of development they are believed to have achieved. Miller makes the case that composition classes were initially offered as a way to differentiate economically privileged white males from the immigrants, women, and first-generation college students who were starting to find their way into American universities in increasing numbers with the development of a fully industrial economy. An early incarnation of composition was developed at Harvard. Charles William Eliot, who became president of Harvard in 1869, sought to admit students from “all conditions of life,” but those students would not be accepted as is; rather, they would be uplifted—made legitimate—by their literacy education, through a combination of composition and literature (1991, 52). Composition’s function within this curriculum was as a type of filter: it certified that deserving students, with a little help, were worthy of joining their social betters and moving fully into higher education. It was therefore identified with basic learning, “thought of as freshman ‘work,’ not as the study of writing throughout college” (53). More advanced work that can be embarked upon once students pass through the literacy gate became the realm of literary studies. Berlin makes a similar argument that identifies a consequential binary between composition and literary studies. Within English departments, composition classes enabled those texts deemed “literary” to become more highly valued in comparison to the functional, everyday, nonartistic writing that constitutes the realm of rhetoric and composition. Modernist claims concerning the distinction and transcendence of certain texts have been all but destroyed in literary theory; nevertheless, they can still resonate in departmental justifications for the subordination of writing to literature. The imagined trajectory of “basic students learn basic writing before they move on to the consequential work of literary study” has been functionally beneficial for those who work in literary studies.

This territorial distinction has played itself out in the ways that English curriculums are structured as well as in hiring and promotion practices. While literature classes continue to be staffed primarily by tenure-track faculty, FYC and undergraduate writing—at least at large,
public universities—continue to be taught primarily by people whose position at the university is tenuous: contracted, non-tenure-track faculty; graduate students; and part-time lecturers. This work has certainly been important to the general understanding of the professional ethos and institutional position of rhetoric and composition. However, while I am certainly persuaded by arguments that literary studies needs composition, I am also convinced that composition now needs literary studies, and that the contentious relationship between the two fields has enabled compositionists to mask certain aspects of our own problematic and sometimes opportunistic relationship with FYC. Professional enculturation into the field involves learning how compositionists have often had to work against literary studies to establish the field—oftentimes this “comp/lit” battle is playing itself out in low or high frequency in the very programs where we are doing our graduate study. This split has served a number of necessary functions in the construction of the professional identity of those of us who work in rhetoric and composition. Within the disciplinary metanarrative of rhetoric and composition, literary studies has been the elitist “other” against which “we” have struggled on a variety of fronts—“they” are the British and “we” are the Irish. Literary studies certainly bears much of the weight of the formalist conceptions of literacy against which expressivist and process pedagogy asserted itself—incompletely, as I argue in the next chapter. Moreover, because literary studies was well established before the open enrollment era, and contemporary composition came about much more recently in response to open enrollment, rhetoric and composition has been able to cast itself as the politically progressive, democratic element of English departments that might otherwise be more exclusionary and elitist. Finally, because the exploitation of writing teachers and the basement-status of writing education predates the rise of contemporary composition as a scholarly field, many in composition studies have continued to include contingent instructors who teach FYC in the field’s “us.” This “us” is broad enough to include those primarily contingent teachers who teach the vast majority of writing classes and the tenure-track Ph.D.s who have truly professional status, do research, and manage writing programs. But the way that we tend to distinguish ourselves from literary studies has enabled rhetoric and composition to largely avoid recognition and examination of our own opportunistic and contradictory relationship with FYC.
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The scholarly field’s strong identification with FYC is certainly logical. The rise of contemporary rhetoric and composition as a scholarly field has been as much an effect of the first-year requirement as its cause. In a sense, all fields produce what they study: literary studies, for instance, continually reproduces (and changes) the contents of the category of study called “literature”—and while the subject might appear stable, even minimal scrutiny shows that it isn’t. Contemporary rhetoric and composition studies is unique, in part, because a considerable part of its subject was produced by a bureaucratic imperative. The subject/object relationship between our field and what it studies is especially murky among academic fields in the humanities: what we study as scholars is more intimately, recursively involved with what we do as teachers and administrators.

The rise of composition studies has been concurrent with the rise in numbers of people who attend postsecondary education and enroll in basic and first-year writing classes. While FYC certainly existed for a century prior to 1970, it was the late 1960s and early 1970s that saw the development of what can be called “contemporary rhetoric and composition studies.” During this period, the contemporary field began to form as a distinct academic “discipline” with all of the institutional apparatus that the term implies. It developed with the assertion of its territorial claim over required writing classes—basic and first-year writing—as a substantial portion of its object of study. Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu (1999), John Trimbur (in “Cultural Studies . . .” 14), James Slevin (1991), and Ira Shor (1980) have described the importance of basic writing classes to the field’s emerging disciplinary identification during this time. Surveying these various descriptions, Horner notes a consistent linking of basic writing with the politically progressive project of democratization. Trimbur, Slevin, and Shor all identify the lessons and insights of teaching from this period in political terms: a “movement” for “cultural democracy” that explicitly called into question the social and political role of educational institutions and the politics of representing students, or prospective students, and their writing in particular ways, e.g. as “literate” or “illiterate,” “college material” or “remedial,” “skilled” or “unskilled.” (Horner and Lu 3).

The ethos of the field has deep roots in the project of democratization and open access to education. This democratization subsumed both texts and writers. Rhetoric and composition not only stood on the
importance of texts not distinguished as “literary” by whatever the current dominant terms of distinction are in literary studies, but also on the dignity and legitimacy of those student writers historically excluded from higher education and the corridors of power.

Ironically, the field’s more noble purposes have created what are perhaps our deepest and most problematic contradictions. The emergence of the field and the growth of the territory it claimed led to the creation of a professional layer of WPAs who not only manage FYC in English departments but who primarily self-identify as WPAs. A vibrant, important body of scholarship has grown with the expansion of access to higher education over the past four decades—as have tenured positions, graduate programs, journals, scholarly books, mounds of FYC textbooks, and endowed chairs in rhetoric and composition. In order to articulate the relationship between FYC and rhetoric and composition, it is important to explore more thoroughly the field as an ongoing, strained relationship between a *scholarly profession* that seeks full status as a “legitimate” academic discipline and a *bureaucratic practice* that has a legacy grounded in labor exploitation and oppressive conceptions of literacy and the political function of higher education. Professionals in the field are certainly generally aware of this relationship. However, it is far more rare to conceptualize present rhetoric and composition in terms of the deep contradictions created by its history; this is the conceptualization that is required and enabled by a political economic examination. The work of the field has been produced by a material history, and its work is being done according to historically produced hierarchical relationships and within economic constraints that considerably shape its character and aims. In spite of the institutional legitimization of a fully professional echelon of scholar/teacher/administrators, the work of teaching composition has remained largely both bureaucratized and deprofessionalized. We have argued for the dignity of students from all walks of life, even as we have managed, researched, and theorized a project that continues to be built on labor conditions that aren’t conducive to living with dignity (a living wage, health insurance, and secure employment).

While the general ethos that the field has constructed for itself is averse to institutional hierarchies, many of our practices continually maintain exploitative hierarchies. It is useful, if uncomfortable, to view the work of our field in terms of a hierarchical split between “professionals” and “bureaucrats.” This hierarchy needs to be continually
named and examined. During normal times, the entire project of FYC operates cheaply and, for the most part, quietly on a largely separate track from the rest of an English department—typically with a professional compositionist at its helm. In my department, entire years go by without a single section being taught by a tenure-track faculty member other than the director of the program. Yet when the project becomes threatened in some way—as when it is suggested that the first-year requirement be eliminated—the flinch-response is to circle the wagons and defend “our” territory. I don’t think that FYC is rightly the territory of the scholarly field of rhetoric and composition at most universities—rather, FYC is a separate colony of English studies over which rhetoric and composition now asserts a propriety interest as it cultivates and manages it for its own benefits as well as for the benefits of departments. Professional scholars are developing the management of FYC into a science (see, e.g., Miller 1999); some professionals develop textbooks for it and we write articles and books that theorize it, but day-to-day teaching remains in the hands of people who might have minimum or even no formal education in the field and a tenuous professional and institutional status. The professional work of scholars of rhetoric and composition is not only substantially produced by the bureaucratic requirement, it is produced by the positions and opportunities created for us by the ongoing use of contingent labor to teach writing. “We” (professional scholars) might claim it as a part of what we might call our “disciplinary imaginary,” the terrain that we consider a part of our professional focus, but we have a much less legitimate claim over it if we view it as labor—as embodied day-to-day practice. Thousands of sections of FYC taught in the United States every year are the labor of people who don’t have professional status in the field, and may not even primarily self-identify in the scholarly discipline. This scholarly/teaching work distinction mirrors the more general debate over who actually owns the labor of workers and the products of that labor in any given workplace. How do our institutions position writing teachers in relation to their work and the products of their work?

Though people have discussed the ethical problems with the use of contingent faculty in writing for years, there has been little exploration of how institutional status and professional identity shape writing pedagogy and research—how the entire system functions, or dysfunctions, as a whole. How do the parts fit together? It is important to examine what it means to be a “professional” who works within a field that is the effect
of a bureaucracy—maintaining a relationship with FYC, but (at least at M.A.- and Ph.D.-granting institutions) rarely actually teaching it. It is also important to examine what it means to be a contingent teacher of FYC who works within an institution in which she doesn’t have full or even partial professional status.

Max Weber articulated his highly influential “theory of bureaucracy” in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (1964), and Weber’s work is still the starting point for discussions of bureaucracy and professionalism in organizational theory. Describing bureaucracy in very neutral terms as a social-ordering mechanism, Weber advocated it as a means of rationalizing social relationships within organizations in a way that mirrored the rationalization of material environments with technologies. Bureaucracies can therefore usefully be seen as a social technology: they are formed to improve organizational efficiency and consistency through regularizing human activities and behaviors. As Weber developed “bureaucracy,” he anticipated structuralist and postmodern illuminations of the relationship between social context and subjectivity. He described a bureaucracy as a *Lebensführung*, or “order of life,” within which a particular ethos develops. A worker’s organizational identity—the character and goals of her work, the foundations on which she bases decisions—are largely determined by her bureaucratic culture. Within effective bureaucracies, workers become useful, consistent instruments of the organization.

In addition to coming to terms with the nature of the *bureau*, contemporary organizational theory has struggled to locate distinctions between professional and bureaucratic roles and functions (Du Gay 2000; Scott 2001). The distinction that is typically inferred between the two terms centers around the degree of autonomy, level of expertise, and the extent to which one’s work is managed by explicit, technical rules. Of course, the line between “professional” and “bureaucrat” should not be seen as overly hygienic: in real situations, professional and bureaucratic roles and identifications can be mixed and complicated. Generally, though, work in the professional realm is not subsumed by the goals and structures of particular bureaucracies. The ethos of professionals is more geographically and organizationally portable. Professionals may work within or manage bureaucracies, but they are considered experts in their fields, have a high degree of autonomy in their work, have high social prestige, don’t have to conform to many explicit rules that determine their daily work, and often belong to national organizations that
certify qualifications and determine membership. In contrast, the work and professional identities of bureaucratic employees are far more subsumed by particular organizations. Bureaucratic workers are generally less expert than professionals (or at least their expertise is less portable, more closely tethered to the operations of a particular site); they carry less social prestige; and their daily work is more highly managed according to terms that they may not have a hand in establishing. Generally, professionals are valued for the expertise they can bring to organizations to help determine and meet goals; bureaucratic employees are valued for the degree to which they can efficiently fill the established roles that will help organizations reach their goals.

It isn’t difficult to see bureaucracy at work in the administration of the typical large FYC program, nor is it too difficult to recognize the innate hierarchy in the professional/bureaucrat distinction in academia. A distinction has historically been maintained between the professional work of scholarship, which is typically constructed as intellectual and the product of highly sophisticated training, and teaching work—which is constructed as a technical skill that is naturally acquired by scholars with little or no specific training (Marshall 2003; Schell 1998; Strickland 2001). Teaching is consistently coded, and therefore undervalued, as feminine in the profession through its association with day-to-day, materially situated practice and its subordination to the “male” world of scholarship, and women disproportionately occupy non-tenure-track positions in English departments (Enos 1996; Fontaine and Hunter 1992; Holbrook 1991; Miller 1991; Schell 1998).

While composition exists as a “professional” endeavor as defined by all the traditional measures—i.e., through sustained, varied, sophisticated scholarship; the existence of distinct professional organizations; and the establishment of programs, tenure-line positions, and endowed chairs that are explicitly designated in the field—FYC at most large institutions remains a fundamentally bureaucratic project. Professionals theorize FYC, manage it as WPAs, and a few even teach it regularly. Meanwhile, the work of the average FYC teacher is dictated primarily by local administrative prerogatives and has little direct relationship to national scholarly conversations in rhetoric and composition. The local administrative objective is typically to maintain a quality university-wide writing requirement as cheaply and quietly as possible. At medium-to-large universities, over nine out of ten FYC classes are taught by contingent labor. Within that realm, all the characteristics we associate with
professional status—autonomy, prestige, expertise in the relevant field, participation in professional organizations, and so on—are either scarce or nonexistent (“Report on” 2001). The realm of professional rhetoric and composition is certainly concentric with the realm of bureaucrata
tized FYC, but the former by no means subsumes the latter.

A FYC program can, however, be a ready-made organizational instrument of rhetoric and composition theory for the professionals who wield it—FYC is a bureaucratic tool that can be effectively used to instrumentalize a particular view of literacy and learning. If you are a professional in rhetoric and composition who believes that writing portfolios, argumentation, critical pedagogy, or service learning are the way to go in FYC, then you can build a program around it. You can advocate or require specific texts and syllabi; you can develop training sessions, workshops, and required graduate courses around your particular view; and you can evaluate teachers based on their effective pursuance of goals that you develop and articulate. Because at most institutions the vast majority of FYC faculty have a more bureaucratic than professional status, their institutional function is to do the curriculum, not develop it.¹ This is not to say that the work of all contingent writing teachers is heavily prescribed, nor is it to say that many contingent faculty aren’t innovative in informed and important ways. Nevertheless, distinctions in the institutional status of teachers have a profound effect—in particular classrooms and in aggregate—on how we see and do writing education.

From a satellite view, the broad surface of the ongoing struggle between literature and composition might persuasively be articulated as “them vs. us.” However, within the “compartment” of program administration, the “us” of composition is strained to, and perhaps beyond,

¹. Certainly, the degree to which the teaching work is actually determined by admini
tistrative decisions varies from site to site. At my university contingent faculty are given much agency concerning the pedagogical choices they make. In contrast, a nearby institution prescribes nearly every aspect of its writing classes: insisting that all instructors use a common syllabus, a common text, common assignments, and a common rubric for evaluation. Moreover, a particular type of agency can be exercised by those who work within the confines of organizations, and this controlled but not wholly determined form of agency has been articulated in a number of influential studies. Berger and Luckmann (1967) described the relationship between individuals and organizations as dialectical rather than determined and therefore accommodating of a degree of deviation and novelty; others, like De Certeau and Bourdieu, have further elaborated theories of agency within highly rule-governed societal contexts.
the breaking point. Professionals and bureaucrats experience FYC in remarkably different ways; they have very different interests, roles, and dispositions; and the work that they do—including how they approach writing education in the classroom—is an extension of positionalities within relations of production.

**LEARNING COMPOSITION**

Though rarely explicitly acknowledged, socialization into the profession of rhetoric and composition often involves learning to live with the tension created by the field’s relatively recent struggle toward professional status and a continued, complicated relationship with the long-established bureaucratic project of FYC. If it isn’t an exercise in denial of the political economic, it is certainly at least an exercise in the bracketing of the political economic. The professional ethos that many of us who hold Ph.D.s in rhetoric and composition learn to assume in our graduate educations compels us to ignore the conditions that define the undergraduate writing instruction we do as TAs and adjuncts throughout our graduate study. Rather than exploring the contradictions that come with already being university writing teachers but not yet professionals, most of us learn to compartmentalize, survive, and move on. In the program I attended, those whom the university deemed most promising (based primarily on GRE scores) received research fellowships and were exempted from teaching work altogether, reifying the broader institutional distinction between teaching work and intellectual development and inquiry. This sent an early message that promising scholars should not be burdened with the work of teaching writing, and that teaching could simply be learned “on the fly” when graduates landed jobs. Those graduate students who weren’t on fellowships taught two/two loads and (depending on the availability of classes) also taught for reduced, adjunct rates in the summer. The adjuncts and TAs who staffed the university’s writing classes shared cramped office space, telephones, and sometimes even the carrels at which we were required to hold weekly office hours. Some graduate assistants were chosen to serve as “assistants to the writing program director”: among the perquisites for these positions were a course release and use of a desk in a smaller office on the third floor, which was shared with the two other assistants to the director.

The layout of the building made apparent the conceptual borders that distinguish professional from bureaucrat, faculty from staff, writing instruction from fully legitimate higher learning. The everyday
happenings in the building further reinforced these distinctions, and for those who were in the doctoral program, necessitated the adoption of plural identities. The same people who were “graduate students” or “doctoral candidates” upstairs in classrooms or in faculty offices were also “scholars” and therefore “professionals-in-training.” Within that compartment, developing professionals discussed the most relevant and advanced research in the field, envisioned and pursued research projects, prepared papers for conferences and publication, went to national conferences and joined professional organizations. We also attended departmental social functions for tenure-track faculty, and some even enjoyed personal relationships with faculty that were not fully circumscribed by school-related work and responsibilities. Downstairs was quite a different world. There, everyday material reality was not defined primarily by our status as future professionals, but rather by our status as already-realized teacher-workers fulfilling designated roles in a particular bureaucracy. We worked alongside our contingent “colleagues” teaching the hundreds of sections of FYC and entry-level technical writing courses offered by the department each year in a way that was consistent with the general philosophy of our writing program. There we also met with students—some of whom seemed as embarrassed as we by our institutional status and material circumstances—ate our lunches at a makeshift break area, and competed for time on the handful of networked computers we were intended to share.

It would be difficult to overstate the difference between the “rhetoric and composition” that we discussed and theorized upstairs in classrooms and faculty offices and the, in terms of our scholarship, largely invisible FYC teaching labor that we performed out of the basement carrels. “Upstairs” we talked about Aristotle and Burke; postmodernity and technology; gender and race; current traditionalism, expressivism, and process; deficit, cognitivist, and social constructivist models; portfolios and assessment, etc. We learned the prevailing orthodoxy, which defines itself against the unsophisticated authoritarianism of current traditionalism and the quaintly modernist naiveté of expressivism. We learned that context is always important, that discourse must always be understood and negotiated in terms of power, and that privilege and hierarchies must be continually recognized and questioned. And yet, strangely, the relationship between “composition” as a professional, scholarly endeavor and the fully bureaucratic, institutional context of our everyday paid work in FYC remained vague. The socio-material realities of the teaching
labor we already performed rarely entered our scholarly discussions in meaningful ways. The economic terms of the work (broad administrative funding decisions as well as our own lack of benefits and low paychecks); the ways in which we were evaluated and monitored as teacher-workers; the feudal power disparities created by a dynamic within which our managers were also our teachers, dissertation directors, and mentors; the various material strains exerted on our teaching work as a result of our tenuous institutional status and our precarious economic circumstances (circumstances that for many led to semisecret additional jobs outside of the university)—these were not an integral part of the way we were encouraged to understand truly “professional” work in the field. Within a highly regarded curriculum that covered everything from advanced theories of discourse to empirical research methodologies, we became expert at contextualizing writing education everywhere but in our own building and working lives.

What is the broad impact of this mode of socialization on postsecondary literacy instruction and the concerns of research in the field? Among the characteristics of the professional culture of rhetoric and composition is the omission of the embodied, bureaucratically situated labor of contingent teachers as a factor of significance in the professional, intellectual realm of the field. Rather, in graduate schools, most of us learn to adopt the compartmentalized subjectivities that allow us to avoid recognizing the inherent contradictions of our work throughout our professional lives. Absent a defined status as university workers already doing legitimate, important work for our departments and universities, we learn to separate most of our bureaucratic teaching work from our efforts to advance toward a professional career. The socialization of the professional compositionist often involves assuming the efficacy of FYC and assuming that we are to be its managers and theorists. Even as we are taught to admire a historical devotion to “the noble work of teaching,” we also learn that research, publication, and the establishment of a scholarly presence are minimum requisites for professional status. Teachers of FYC are everywhere and nowhere. They are not the primary audience of scholarship in composition; the primary audience is other professionals. Absent the professional legitimacy and status that would come with the fuller recognition of the teaching work they are already doing for the university, graduate students defer professional legitimacy until they have acquired a Ph.D. and a tenure-track job. In the process they learn that they are different from the part-timers and
contract staff with whom they typically share offices—“staff” are labor, “TAs” are management/professional trainees. Peripheral, but progressing toward the real according to the terms of the discourse of scholarship and workplaces, graduate students learn to identify with their managers/mentors and work toward joining their ranks. Meanwhile, rhetoric and composition as a field of research and intellectual inquiry remains strangely “out there,” detached from the material realities of what they are already doing in their everyday lives as writing “staff.” At least in terms of FYC, teaching is more interesting and even relevant as the subject of professional conversations than as praxis. Pedagogy certainly remains the focus of composition scholarship, but the conversation is framed in a way that removes the teaching of writing from its material, bureaucratic context.

By the time many of us do achieve a professional status in the field, the routine contradictions of the profession have often been so deeply internalized that they can seem natural and inevitable. This is not to say that they are invisible, however. It is not that most of us don’t understand that the use of contingent labor to staff so many undergraduate writing classes is a serious problem. It is nearly impossible to be naive about the terms of teaching labor in composition, and so it is difficult to be subject to “false consciousness” in the dogmatic Marxist sense. Rather, we tend to both admit the issue and dismiss it—a process that is enacted largely beneath the level of the primary scholarly discourse of the field. In so doing, we engage in a brand of what Slavoj Zizek describes as “cynical reasoning” (1989, 29). We recognize the distinctions between the layers of labor in our profession, but we are conditioned to couple that recognition with a dismissal of its significance to the general profession and perhaps a lack of faith in our ability to address it. Professionals don’t allow the dirty work of day-to-day bureaucratic administration to spill over into the more advanced, legitimate work of scholarship. The seeming lack of interest of many who mentor graduate students into the field further conditions future professionals not to deem the problem worthy of interest or energy. Indeed, this cynicism can sometimes even pass for sophistication and be interpreted as a sign of maturation. Applying complex analytical paradigms to critiques of cultural hegemony and social injustice are appropriate for scholarship and classroom discussion—for broad-ranging theoretical discussions of race and gender, for instance—but applying the same analysis to the bureaucracies many of us create and maintain within which graduate students’
teaching work is conducted puts one at risk of being dismissed as naive or out of touch. Professionalization through graduate studies therefore often carries an implicit denial of the material. Our professional lives as scholars and future-classroom-teachers move on a different track from our working lives as already-classroom-teachers. Within this logic, until graduate students realize that professionals manage (rather than being subject to) the flawed, innately contradictory, bureaucratic enterprise of FYC, they are not yet ready to assume the sober work of leadership in our departments and professional organizations—work that involves budgeting, hiring and firing, making policies, and troubling compromises. Some even see this role in a kind of benevolent way—the WPA “looks out for” adjuncts in the department, protecting them as best she can. The “canny bureaucrat” who makes deals with administrators in the best interests of contingents fills such a role (Harris 2000; Miller 1999; Porter et al. 2000). Whether covertly benevolent, nakedly managerial, or both, graduate students learn to enter the terrain of FYC as administrators and the terrain of broader academic careers as scholars in the traditional mode.

**PROCESS, PRODUCTION, AND MYSTIFICATION IN COMPOSITION**

Pedagogical technique also now helps mark the distinction between composition professionals and FYC. While contentious and ongoing theoretical discussions inform pedagogy within the professional realm, FYC has not been directly responsive to the sophisticated critique and pedagogical theory that has come to define the theoretical mainstream over the past decade. Few textbooks designed for use in FYC courses reflect the “post-process” informed critiques that have defined much of the recent scholarly discourse.\(^2\) Few invite students to examine the power dynamics, cultural milieu, and material conditions from which they write—fuller examination of context might evoke uncomfortable or even dangerous questions about the very historical and organizational logics that create writing programs and profitable lines of writing textbooks. Portable and easily digested by the nonspecialist, most composition texts therefore seem frozen in the particular version of process that gained ascendancy in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In other words, they tellingly fail to embrace the more radical implications of a fully social view of writing.

\(^2\) I examine textbooks, and what they can tell us about postsecondary writing education, with much more depth in the next chapter.
Recognizing and perpetuating the distinction between the professional and bureaucratic realms in the field, publishers have clearly identified contingents as an important marketing niche and now often even bypass “professionals”—who often don’t use textbooks in their writing classes—and appeal directly to both the disaffection of FYC workers and the rhetoric of empowerment that ironically frames their pedagogical project. For instance, Houghton Mifflin maintains a Web site designed to market writing textbooks directly to non-tenure-track faculty, and they unabashedly appeal to the disgruntlement and lack of institutional standing of this niche. “Wishing you had a voice?” the promotional materials for the Houghton Mifflin Web site ask—then visit “adjuncts.com.” The opening statement at the Web site seeks to express empathy for a target audience that feels undervalued: “At Houghton Mifflin, we understand the valuable role that adjuncts play in higher education, and we hope the information on this web site helps you negotiate those challenges.” At the Web site visiting contingent teachers will find interactive features, various kinds of support materials, and (of course) composition texts from Houghton Mifflin (Houghton Mifflin 2004). Houghton Mifflin enacts a marketing strategy that identifies alienation and voicelessness as defining characteristics of this market niche and subtly constructs itself as an understanding entity, in contrast with the exploitative bureaucracies within which many adjuncts work but don’t feel valued. The Web site offers interactive forums, textbook reviews, pedagogical advice, and even links to *The Adjunct Advocate: The Magazine for Adjunct College Professors.*

Of course, the goal of any publisher is to sell books. And in the content of textbooks the focus moves from the potentially voiceless teaching subject to the student who, herself, stands in need of the critical thinking skills and nurturing pedagogical stance that defines empowering process pedagogy. The marketing and the introductory descriptions of composition textbooks draw expertly on the rhetoric of student empowerment that has become entrenched as the normal science of FYC. With the strange, powerful magic offered by these textbooks, the adjunct who can only wish she had a voice is transformed into someone who is able to show students how to find theirs. Consider the following passage from a popular FYC text published by Bedford/St. Martin’s. Through the text—produced, marketed, and sold by a major publisher—the professional/theorist speaks directly to the FYC teacher/worker:
Traditional textbooks too often place students and teachers in opposition: The teacher acts as the provider of knowledge, while students are positioned as passive absorbers of this wisdom. *Work in Progress* would, I hoped, foster the development of a genuinely collaborative community, grounded in mutual respect and a shared commitment to learning. Learning and teaching are, after all, both works in progress. (Ede 2001, vii)

Can the “genuinely collaborative community” envisioned by Ede here be fostered by a textbook? Answering this question may require another: is “the teacher” in this classroom a part of a “genuinely collaborative” professional culture, or is she expected to come out of a more rigidly hierarchical culture in which she is largely invisible and has little or no professional standing, and then manage to create such a culture within the walls of her classroom? This passage appeals to a broad “we” that can be taken for the national, generic ethos of FYC. Indeed, it reproduces the field’s disciplinary imaginary—one that places an all-inclusive composition against the elitist tradition of literary studies, as it denies the material, institutional realities of teaching and learning in postsecondary writing. “We” are invited to approach this textbook as teachers who are fully aligned with process/empowering pedagogy and the values it carries. “We” don’t subscribe to banking models within which teachers are authoritarian dispensers of knowledge and students are “passive absorbers” of that knowledge. “We” embrace a democratic model that fosters “a genuinely collaborative community, grounded in mutual respect and a shared commitment to learning.” We value collaboration. We emphasize process rather than product. We respect our students and the knowledge and experiences they bring into the classroom. We are definitely, absolutely, 100 percent not current-traditionalists.

My question is where are “they”? Increasingly, those who are teaching FYC were themselves FYC students in process classrooms. The pedagogical values and assumptions concerning literacy and learning that process carries are the clear dominant in FYC. It is true that what gets called “process” is, in practice, often what Joseph Harris has called a “new formalism”: it is “process” employed toward technocratic ends (1997, 56). Nevertheless, at least to the degree that orthodoxies can be maintained among a variously trained, ever-evolving, casualized instructorate, process is the orthodoxy. Ironically, this construction of empowering pedagogy helps to enable the misrecognition of the clearly disempowering socio-material conditions that define work in FYC. When
we place the teacher of FYC in a position of authority, casting her in a struggle against authoritarian pedagogies, we (mis)place her in the professional realm of pedagogical theory and research, masking the powerful political economic forces that determine the shape and conditions of her work and her students’ work. Few of us can fully believe in this mirage, but it is a part of the necessary game we play in scholarly and administrative discourse: it keeps discussions of academic literacy and the bureaucratic aspects of writing programs moving along on their present, distinct tracks.

Primarily through the employment of contingent labor, English departments deliver large numbers of sections of writing instruction to the university on the cheap. This is perhaps the most obvious relationship through which surplus is extracted within university labor dynamics. It is also perhaps the most mystified and invisible facet of postsecondary education within the general culture outside of academia. In its continually reproduced FYC metanarrative, rhetoric and composition reifies the FYC instructor as a legitimately professional intellectual who engages in an ongoing fight against authoritarian pedagogies and for the empowerment and edification of students. The rhetoric within which FYC is often couched thereby mystifies the material terms of teaching labor. In contrast, broad outcomes statements, new curricular initiatives, large-scale writing program assessments, textbooks, and the philosophies that drive them frame the material terms of everyday production in FYC. Within these selective frames, the labor of teaching is folded neatly into the fully professional work of administrator/researchers, where it becomes visible only in terms of sections filled, outcomes achieved, and curriculums successfully implemented. Instrumentalist management techniques—standardized syllabi, uniform grading rubrics, mandatory texts, mandatory evaluations—can ensure that FYC teachers are present and productive but not granted too much agency even in the classroom. Within our professional rhetoric, we rarely see the contingent writing teacher as a socially, indeed bureaucratically, situated material body—one who might teach many, many writing students but may very well be indifferent to, and bewildered by, the scholarly discourse of rhetoric and composition.

Take, for instance, outcomes statements like one published in College English by a group that formed on the Writing Program Administration Listserv (Harrington et al. 2001). The statement lists desired outcomes for the tens of thousands of students throughout the country who take FYC each year. The outcomes generally strike a balance between
contemporary research concerning language and learning and the bureaucratic realities of English departments and the universities within which they are situated. What is troubling is the position from which the statement is written, which assumes the naturalness of the authority that WPAs wield over the armies of mostly non-tenure-track instructors who will be charged with meeting these administrative prerogatives. There is no indication that any part-time teachers or TAs were even consciously included in the drafting of the statement. This is a conversation among professionals about the proper aims of the bureaucracies and bureaucrats they manage. I don’t deny the usefulness of such statements to WPAs; however, I think they are artifacts of our field that should be critically examined for what they say about our work. Among the questions that should be raised by such a statement: What assumptions about FYC, pedagogy, disciplinary hierarchies, and academic labor dynamics inform it? Why is the theory that informs this statement a contentious, participatory realm for WPAs but a matter of calcified, determining policy for those beneath them? How are people and their work positioned differently in debates about theory and outcomes statements?

TURNING TOWARD THE SOCIAL AS AN ASPECT OF THE MATERIAL

The field is beginning to grapple with the problems presented by the use of contingent FYC labor in its major scholarly forums. That conversation, however, remains primarily administrative or purely labor-oriented. It doesn’t address how administration and labor are intertwined with classroom learning and writing, disciplinarity, and the production of professional discourse. Some, for instance, argue that we should accept that FYC classes will be taught by a subordinate tier of faculty whose primary identification is with teaching rather than with scholarship. This teaching tier is distinct from the more professional tier of the field (those who hold Ph.D.s), which Richard Miller describes as concerned with “overseeing the labor of others, interacting diplomatically with department chairs and college deans, working within a budget, writing grant proposals, and performing other such managerial tasks” (1999, 98–99). Miller joins those who generally, if reluctantly, accept the use of a separate tier of faculty to teach writing as an inevitable fact of life and seek pragmatic, locally situated means of improving their working conditions. Typically speaking from the perspective of WPAs, they outline ways that WPAs can work for practical gains within bureaucracies: for instance, through becoming what Miller calls “intellectual bureaucrats”
(see also Harris 2000; Murphy 2000; Porter et al. 2000). This position recognizes the bureaucratic aspects of academic work and explores ways to work “within the system” to make the use of contingent faculty more equitable, dignified, and effective. It is important to note, however, that while this strategy might undermine the binary between theory and empirical research, it maintains the binary between professionals and teacher-workers, as it conjures the image of scholar-administrators using research and administrative acumen to enact local change—for, rather than with, non-tenure-track FYC teachers.

A number of problems have resulted from the willingness of many to embrace a managerial relationship with FYC. It emphasizes individual, rather than collective, action, usually ignoring the successes brought about by unionization and essentially giving up on the project of making FYC a more fully professional and intellectual project. Additionally, it can become yet another way of silencing the contingent—as the paternalistic WPA assumes the authority to represent the interests of FYC teachers. Finally, it tends to promote a particular brand of pragmatism that accepts that the ascendancy of neoliberal managerial practices and the casualization of teaching labor are inevitable facts of life. If the field is set to accept the dual assumptions that FYC is rightly taught by a sub-tier of faculty and that the natural position of the professional compositionist is as manager, we must also accept the unsavory fact that our field has come to depend on the existence of exploited labor for our disciplinary identity, function, and survival. The management function has taken a place among the subjects of our professional work alongside literacy and language. The historic lack of significant, collective action by professional WPA organizations to address labor inequities could already lead one to such a conclusion.

An even deeper problem with embracing a managerial ethos, however, is that it reinforces the historic and ongoing undervaluation—and the feminized coding—of teaching, especially the teaching of writing, within the academy. Rather than finding creative ways to advocate for those who work “beneath” us—a plan that, not so coincidentally, solidifies the position of the WPA—we should work toward a situation in which those who teach writing are legitimate professionals with advanced education in rhetoric and composition. Given the realities of funding, this could very well mean cutting back or eliminating the first-year requirement and allowing writing courses to stand on their own within broader English curriculums. These are the options that I
am pushing in my own program.\(^3\) Among the aspects of rhetoric and composition that make it unique in the humanities is that the work of its teachers involves the application of advanced research on literacy and learning, rather than the explication of that research. Margaret Marshall argues that to be more properly valued within our departments, we need to work to increase the visibility of teaching in the evaluation process. When we accept the institutional subordination of teaching work as an immutable fact of life, we don’t recognize the manner in which composition scholarship has intellectualized writing pedagogy. She advocates measures designed to make innovation and excellence in teaching more visible—eventually more fully professional—in English and writing departments.

Regardless of the path, we need change not only to address immediate problems that typically fall under “administrative” or “labor” categories; we need to connect administration and labor to the socio-material conditions of teaching and the production of research and theory more broadly. If FYC is the “turf” of rhetoric and composition, we should cultivate it as active insiders, erasing the borders that currently characterize the relationship between the professional field and the bureaucratic enterprise. Our scholarship, administration actions, and pedagogy should become an integrated scholarly praxis that is fully historically situated.

This praxis would not only help the field to more progressively address its own labor issues, it would be generative of progressive pedagogies that examine issues of socioeconomic justice. The two are inextricably linked. Systems of pedagogical work—whether “professional” or “bureaucratic”—create the ideological frameworks within which student writing is performed. We have a large body of research and theory that argues that writing is never just writing: it is the formation

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\(^3\) Of course, there is nothing new in this position. The Wyoming Resolution proposed and endorsed (but not implemented) by CCCC’s in 1986 proposed grievance and censure procedures for the exploitation of part-time faculty. The conversation surrounding the resolution connected the terms of labor for teachers with the quality and character of writing education more generally (see Gunner). If more in the field had taken Sharon Crowley’s advice and taken measures to eliminate the first-year writing requirement, would postsecondary writing education be in a worse position now? Without relying on the debilitating crutch provided by part-time labor, it is certainly possible that many institutions would have found ways to do writing education more responsibly and more effectively; it is also plausible that the field more generally might have found a more legitimate place in undergraduate curriculums.
of consciousness and the enactment of politics (for instance, Berlin and Vivion 1992; Downing 1994; Fox 1990; Horner and Lu 1999; Shor 1996; Trimbur 1994). In addition to examining pedagogical theory, however, we need to recognize and be more accountable to the relationship between our own labor practices and professional ethos and the character of the literacies that we sponsor and promote in our classrooms. This accountability could help the field to escape the embarrassing and cynical contradictions of promoting empowering models of literacy in classes taught by casualized teaching labor at the very bottom of academic institutions. The production of writing in composition classes cannot be properly or adequately examined in isolation from the conditions and relations of labor in English departments.