



Rhetoric & Writing at BGSU

Rhetoric & Writing Notes - Winter 2001

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The First (But Not the Last) Alumni Update: Roxanne Cullen

I came to Ferris State University in 1983 at a time when the department was trying to build a real writing program. I quickly became involved in large-scale writing assessment. Ferris has a long track record in that area and I am pleased to say that I have been involved since the beginning. I think that in many ways, it was my experience teaching General Studies Writing at Bowling Green that made the large-scale writing assessment seem so manageable. After watching Kathy Hart [GSW Director for most of the 1980s] pull off the GSW proficiency examinations semester after semester, conducting a pre-post writing exam was a piece of cake. Later we moved to portfolio assessment and we continue to conduct regular programmatic assessment as well as university-wide outcomes assessment, all using multiple measures.

The other thing that I ended up doing was getting the first campus-wide walk-in/referral Writing Center off the ground here at Ferris. My experiences with the Writing Center at BG made this project an easy one too. I directed the Writing Center for ten years at which point I was asked to step in on a temporary basis to chair our department. Since then I have been named department head, a full-time administrative post. We have 40 tenure line faculty who teach writing, literature, journalism, Spanish, French, and German. I have oversight of the Writing Center, the student newspaper, and two literary magazines, as well as three minors, a BS in English Education both secondary and elementary, a BS in Technical Communication, and a new BA in English. We are, still, primarily, a writing program with required courses for students across campus at the frosh, soph and junior years. We have a very strong writing across the curriculum program which is assessed through the General Education Writing Committee which I chair.

Bowling Green's rhetoric and composition PhD program served me very well, and I have nothing but fond memories of my professors and fellow students in the program. In fact, it would be interesting Alumni Update, Continued for me to see some tidbits of information about what other students have been up to since graduation. So why not follow my lead and e-mail an informal Alumni Update for a future issue of Rhetoric & Writing Notes?

• Roxanne Cullen <Roxanne_Cullen@ferris.edu> is a professor and Head of the Department of Languages and Literature at Ferris State University in Michigan. Why not take Roxanne's suggestion and send your own Alumni Update to <richgeb@bgnet.bgsu.edu>?

Some Sabbatical Thoughts: Ten Years after the Doctorate: Gail Corso

It's hardly imaginable, but ten years have gone by since I received my doctorate from BGSU. At that time, I was interested in processes to support collaborative learning and writing. In my dissertation, I wondered what special combinations of social styles a writing instructor might consider as students worked together on writing. Today, as an associate professor of Communication Arts at Neumann College outside of Philadelphia, I have come to realize that preferred learning styles often influence how writers choose to proceed with writing tasks, and that collaborative processes may be supported by technological advances.

At my small liberal arts college with a professional focus, I teach four or five classes (writing, communications, literature, or interdisciplinary courses). I also coordinate writing at the developmental and core level, support the faculty with materials for writing in their disciplines, administer proficiency essay exams each semester, advise 20 or so students in the Communication Arts major program, co-advise the online literary magazine, facilitate the annual writing contest, and advise the Communication Arts club. As a faculty member I collaborate with several other colleagues on the Curriculum committee, and for the past several months, I have been doing preliminary research for a proposal to create a masters program in English. Never before coming to Neumann did I think that life as the composition specialist at a small college would lead me into a whirlwind of collaborative projects with colleagues, students, and community members.

It was with great joy that I returned to BGSU for three brief visits as I worked on several projects in my 2000-01 sabbatical. A sabbatical typically is a time for a faculty member to retreat from academic routine. It is a time to reflect upon one's role, professional goals, and areas for growth related to publications, presentations, service, or improved pedagogy. For me it has been a time to step back from teaching and to focus on developing areas of Some Sabbatical Thoughts, Continued administrative skill, and an increasing awareness of the technology and software for representing text in more visually stimulating ways.

create a small database. Each day becomes a retreat to writing of one kind or another.

One day as I was waiting in the Writing Center for my dear friend, Louise Golden--who's at BGSU from Savannah State University for post-doctoral study this year--a student asked me for help with her project. I tutored her and three other students, and I explained to the tutors in the room how, twelve years ago, I had been a tutor in the same center while working as teaching assistant.

My sabbatical visits to the BGSU campus have been hectic but exhilarating. It truly is a joy to return to the student/researcher role, as I try to develop better understandings of assessment, management of information, and tools for writing in webbed environments. While "sabbatical" suggests a retreat from typical duties--perhaps even a reawakening--I know that this time at BGSU will only support my growth as a rhetor.

•Gail Corso <gcor@jersey.net> is an associate professor of Communication Arts at Neumann College.

In the Grad Student Spotlight: Cynthia Mahaffey

Fourth-year Rhetoric & Writing student Cynthia Mahaffey has had a very active year--not even counting her dissertation research and her teaching in BGSU's Chapman Residential Learning Center.

Before the semester started, she led an interactive session on "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Students in the University Classroom" as part of the GradStep professional development conference the BGSU Graduate College holds each August for new graduate students. In October, Cynthia and grad student colleague Josephine Booth shared a panel at the fall meeting of the Michigan College English Association. And in November, she worked with another PhD student, Dawn Gordon, and former faculty colleagues from Grand Valley State University on a panel at the National Council of Teachers of English meeting in Milwaukee.

As 2001 began, Cynthia and Rhetoric & Writing faculty member Kris Blair led a session on "Balancing Teaching and Research" for the BGSU Center for Learning and Technology.

And Cynthia learned that she had been selected as the 2000-01 recipient of the Dr. Jeannette C. Danielson Sampaticos Scholarship Award for a non-traditional woman graduate student.

Dissertation Abstract: The Rhetoric, Writing, and Action in Context of Teresa of Avila: An Appraisal: Barbara Toth

In general, this study argues for a unified and more comprehensive picture of the writing and rhetoric of Teresa of Jesus, also known as Teresa of Avila, a sixteenth century Spanish nun. One of the primary purposes of this dissertation is to add to the fledgling collection of rhetorical studies which corroborate Teresa's reputation as an independent thinker and rhetorician in her own right (as opposed to her being in the shadow of Augustine, Erasmus, and Martin Luther, for examples).

In particular, this study argues for a rhetorical/pedagogical look at Teresa's work that accommodates the Carmelite/Christian/mystical tradition from which she grew, an un-mined area presently. It rescues Teresa from well-meaning but myopic scholarship, which says more about the methods of scholarship than the aim or subject of the research.

As Teresa was a prolific writer and a complex person utilizing complex rhetorical strategies within an extremely complex historical and religious context, both these aims are warranted.

Completed: January 2001

Advisor: Bruce Edwards

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Some Grad Student Activities

Christine Sauer spoke on "Removing the Mask of Silence Using Cybergrlls: Strategies for the Language Arts Classroom" at the NCTE annual meeting in Milwaukee last November.

Two PhD students served on a panel on "Queer and Straight Teachers and Students in the First-Year Composition Classroom" at NCTE's November convention in Milwaukee. Dawn Gordon spoke on "Contesting 'Political Correctness' in Teacher Statements: Contextualizing Straight and Queer Student Discourse in the Composition Classroom." Cynthia Mahaffey chaired the panel and presented "Creating Safe Space for Queer and Straight Subject Positions for Queer and Straight Students, Teachers and Writing." The other panel members were Wendy Wenner and Kathleen Blumreich, former faculty colleagues of Cynthia's from Grand Valley State University in Michigan.

Rhetoric & Writing students also worked together on a panel at the Michigan College English Association meeting in October 2000.

Russell S. Sprinkle

Written commentary has been a focus of study in composition journals for decades. But never has a systematic, theory-based, reflective method for examining written commentary been introduced to the field of composition studies. This dissertation introduces such a method and advances arguments supporting its pragmatic value.

Based on the concept of "Reflexis" (a mingling of reflection and practice), this dissertation provides a method for instructors to uncover, abandon, reorganize, improve and/or confirm existing cognitive schemes for providing feedback to writers. Three reflective models based on current composition theory are used to demonstrate this method: (1) Revision Responsibility; (2) Shared Criteria for Assessing Student Writing; and (3) Degrees of Control.

A demonstration, analysis and explanation of each reflective model show how the systematic examination of written commentary can (1) illuminate emerging commenting patterns; (2) help instructors become more aware of the ways in which their commenting strategies align (and do not align) with current writing instruction theories; (3) help instructors analyze, evaluate, integrate, and improve their written commentary; and (4) help instructors establish clearer goals for written commentary. These demonstrations show how systematic examination of written commentary can enable writing instructors to better understand theories that inhabit their commenting strategies.

In addition to demonstrating the efficacy of each reflective model, this dissertation also provides step-by-step guidelines to help teacher-researchers (1) develop new reflective models based on existing writing instruction theories; and (2) systematically examine their written commentary.

Finally, this dissertation refines the scope of the reflective models by presenting additional opportunities for their use: model building, self-study, and faculty training workshops.

Completed: January 2001

Advisor: Richard Gebhardt

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Focus on the Rhetoric & Writing Program: Program's Goals Emphasize Development of Scholar-Teachers

The Rhetoric & Writing PhD Program seeks to prepare women and men to be scholar-teachers who understand the professional synergy of mastering knowledge, advancing it through their own inquiry, and sharing knowledge and habits of inquiry with students in the courses they teach and administer.

To advance this ideal, the faculty has adopted the following goals to guide curriculum planning and course preparation in the Rhetoric & Writing Program.

1. Graduates are prepared to teach a range of rhetoric and composition courses.

• Graduates are prepared theoretically and practically to work in computer environments.

• Besides first-year writing classes, graduates have experience with at least one of these:

Intermediate Writing, Writing Administration, Writing Across the Curriculum, Writing Center, Teaching and Leadership, and Teacher-Training in Writing.

2. Graduates are familiar with research in a variety of methodological systems.

3. Graduates understand and can discuss major competing theories and contested issues within rhetoric and composition.

4. Graduates understand and can discuss the rhetorical tradition and significant disciplinary texts and authors/theorists that shape the field of composition.

5. Graduates understand the impact of rhetorical history on contemporary rhetorical theory and composition practice.

6. Graduates are oriented to the place of scholarship in faculty work and rewards, and they have begun to work in professional contexts by developing ideas for submission to editors and conference chairs and by giving conference papers.