

Conference on College Composition and Communication
October, 1989

Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing

Introduction: Writing Instruction in American Colleges—The Commitment to Educational Quality

A democracy demands citizens who can read critically and write clearly and cogently. Developing students' powers as critical readers and writers demands in turn the highest quality of instruction. This quality is the goal to which the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the learned society founded in 1949 to serve as the professional association for college teachers of writing, is committed. And yet the achievement of this goal is at risk, for the quality of writing instruction is today seriously compromised. The purpose of this document is to examine the conditions which undermine the quality of postsecondary writing instruction and to recommend alternatives to those conditions.

Quality in education is intimately linked to the quality of teachers. Higher education traditionally assures this quality by providing reasonable teaching loads, research support, and eventual tenure for those who meet rigorous professional standards. Such standards are applied and such support extended to virtually all faculties in higher education—but rarely to those who teach writing. At all levels of the academic hierarchy, current institutional practices endanger the quality of education that writing teachers can offer their students. The teaching, research, and service contributions of tenure-line composition faculty are often misunderstood or undervalued. At some postsecondary institutions, such faculty members are given administrative duties without the authority needed to discharge them; at others, they are asked to meet publication standards without support for the kind of research that their discipline requires. The English graduate students who staff many writing programs are regularly assigned teaching duties that they cannot responsibly discharge without neglecting their own course work.

More disturbing still is the situation of those college teachers of writing

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who now constitute an enormous academic underclass. More than half the English faculty in two-year colleges, and nearly one-third of the English faculty at four-year colleges and universities, work on part-time and/or temporary appointments. Almost universally, they are teachers of writing, a fact which many consider the worst scandal in higher education today. These teachers work without job security, often without benefits, and for wages far below what their full-time colleagues are paid per course. Increasingly, many are forced to accept an itinerant existence, racing from class to car to drive to another institution to teach. The CCCC recognizes, with respect and gratitude, the extraordinary contributions that so many of these teachers have made to their students and schools. But it is evident that their working conditions undermine the capacities of teachers to teach and of students to learn. These conditions constitute a crisis in higher education, one which dramatically affects the public interest.

This crisis must concern all faculty and administrators at postsecondary institutions. As the American Association of University Professors has affirmed, when institutions depend increasingly on faculty whose positions are tenuous and whose rights and privileges are unclear or non-existent, those freedoms established as the right of full-time tenurable and tenured faculty are endangered. Moreover, the excessive reliance on marginalized faculty damages the quality of education. Even when, as it often the case, these faculty bring to their academic appointments the appropriate credentials and commitments to good teaching, their low salaries, poor working conditions, and uncertain futures mar their effectiveness and reduce the possibilities for loyalty to the institution's educational goals. All lose: teachers, students, schools, and ultimately a democratic society that cannot be without citizens whose education empowers them to read and write with critical sophistication.

With these considerations in mind, and in response to the many educators who have requested our help in developing standards for effective writing programs, we provide the following guidelines. These guidelines are based on the assumption that the responsibility for the academy's most serious mission, helping students to develop their critical powers as readers and writers, should be vested in tenure-line faculty. That is the standard to which every institution should aspire. Because assumptions to the contrary have become well-entrenched in institutions of higher learning during the past fifteen years, however, we offer guidelines as well for the professional recognition and treatment of part-time and temporary full-time faculty during the period when these positions are being transformed to the tenure track. It is our hope and expectation that this period of transition will be brief. Ultimately, every institution should extend to teachers of writing the same opportunities for professional advancement (e.g., tenure and promotion) and the same encouragement of intellectual achievement (e.g., support for research and reasonable teaching responsibilities) that they extend to all other faculty. As colleges have the right to expect of writing specialists the highest level of performance, so

they have the obligation to extend the greatest possible support. To do less is to compromise writing instruction for future generations of American students.

Part One: Professional Standards That Promote Quality Education

Tenure-Line Faculty

- A. To provide the highest quality of instruction, departments offering composition and writing courses should rely on full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty members who are both prepared for and committed to the teaching of writing. The teaching of writing courses need not be limited, however, to those faculty members whose primary area of scholarship is rhetoric and composition. Because of the significant intellectual and practical connections between writing and reading, composition and literature, it is desirable that faculty from both areas of specialization teach in the composition program. Ideally, faculty from each area should have the training and experience necessary to teach in both the literature and composition programs.
- B. Whenever possible, faculty professionally committed to rhetoric and composition should coordinate and supervise composition programs. Evidence of this commitment can be found in research and publication, participation in professional conferences, and active involvement in curriculum development and design. Those who supervise writing programs should also be involved in determining policy and budget for their programs.
- C. Research in rhetoric and composition is a legitimate field of scholarship with standards comparable to other academic fields. In salary, tenure, and promotion considerations, research and publication in rhetoric and composition should be treated on a par with all other areas of research in English departments. As recommended in the "Report of the Modern Language Association's Commission on Writing and Literature" (*MLA/Profession* 88, 1988: 70–76), postsecondary institutions should count seriously certain kinds of professional activity, sometimes undervalued within current measures of scholarly achievement, that are particularly important to this field. These activities include: (1) the publication of composition textbooks as a primary form of original research; (2) collaborative research on articles and books that draw on diverse scholarly backgrounds and research orientations; (3) professional activities such as workshops and seminars for faculty at all levels; and (4) the particularly demanding administrative service that is often a regular part of a composition specialist's responsibilities. These are "measures of evaluation and standards of practice that do justice to the professional achievements of teachers of rhetoric and composition" (*MLA/Profession* 88, 73).

- D. Because it is fundamentally necessary to the quality of education at all levels, research in rhetoric and composition should be supported not only at research institutions but also at those institutions primarily dedicated to teaching.
- E. While insisting on the importance of research in rhetoric and composition, we join with those professional associations and learned societies who have affirmed that postsecondary institutions should develop flexible standards governing tenure, standards that accurately reflect the mission of the institution. At the vast majority of colleges and universities, and even at research institutions, distinguished teaching and service should warrant serious consideration for tenure and promotion.

Graduate Students

- A. Graduate students' teaching experience should be understood as an essential part of their training for future professional responsibilities. They are primarily *students* and should never, for mere economic expediency, be used to replace tenure-line faculty in the staffing of composition programs. Graduate students' teaching loads should not interfere with their progress toward their degrees: an average of one course per term is ideal; more than two courses per term is unreasonable.
- B. Graduate teaching assistantships for writing courses should be awarded only to students (1) who demonstrate superior writing ability, and (2) who present evidence of successful experience in the teaching of composition or who have had training in the teaching of composition. The standards for admitting graduate students and for awarding teaching assistantships should not be compromised by the need to staff the composition program.
- C. Each institution should provide adequate training and supervision of graduate writing instructors, and this training should be conducted by someone with appropriate preparation or experience in rhetoric and composition.
- D. Nearly all graduate students teaching writing in English departments are fully in charge of their classes. Because the university entrusts to them such serious responsibility, their special status among graduate students should be recognized and their compensation, benefits, class size, and course load should be adjusted accordingly. In this adjustment, attention should be given to hours spent inside and outside of class and to the increased responsibility for grading, classroom management, and preparation.

Part-Time Faculty

CCCC and other professional associations generally recognize two legitimate reasons for hiring part-time faculty: (1) to teach specialized courses for which

no regular faculty are available and which require special practical knowledge (e.g., hiring a distinguished reporter to teach one class in journalism); and (2) to meet unexpected increases in enrollment. Abuses in this second category are cause for the most serious concern. Assuring and sustaining quality in education is incompatible with relying, purely for fiscal expediency, on part-time faculty appointments in rhetoric and composition.

- A. The commitment to quality education requires that the number of part-time writing teachers in the second category be kept to a minimum. We recognize, however, that at the present time many administrators and department chairs have become dependent on part-time faculty lines. In the process of transforming these lines to the tenure track, administrators should impose severe limits on the ratio of part-time to full-time faculty. The percentage of part-time instructors in writing programs should not exceed what is necessary to meet *unexpected* increases in enrollment. When more than 10 percent of a department's course sections are taught by part-time faculty, the department should reconsider its hiring practices.
- B. To assure that students receive the instructional excellence to which they have the right, the educational qualifications and experience of all part-time faculty should meet the highest professional standards. Part-time teachers of writing should (1) demonstrate superior writing ability, (2) demonstrate professional involvement with composition theory and pedagogy, and (3) present evidence of successful experience in the teaching of composition.
- C. *Recommendations for part-time faculty.* Administrators and department chairs should recognize the professional status of part-time teachers. Recommendations 1–5 (see below) apply to all part-time faculty, even those hired only occasionally to meet truly unexpected increases in enrollment. Recommendations 6–10 apply especially to part-time faculty who are regularly employed, even when departments abide by the 10 percent guideline recommended above. These faculty members, described by AAUP guidelines as those “whose contribution to the academic program of the institution and to its academic life is equal to that of a full-timer except for the proportion of time given to the position,” deserve special consideration in matters of governance, job security, and incentives for professional development. That we recommend the following guidelines for the just treatment of part-time faculty should in no way be construed as condoning the practice of relying on part-time positions instead of full-time, tenure-track positions.
 1. Expectations for part-time instructors' teaching, service, and research should be made clear, in writing, at the time of hiring, and these instructors should be evaluated according to those written expectations.
 2. Whenever possible, part-time instructors should be hired as much

- in advance of their teaching assignments as possible. We recommend the preceding term.
3. They should receive adequate introduction to their teaching assignments, departments, and institutions.
 4. They should receive a salary that accurately reflects their teaching duties and any duties outside the classroom they are asked to assume. Compensation, per course, for part-time faculty should never be lower than the per-course compensation for full-time faculty with comparable experience, duties, and credentials. Part-timers should be eligible for the same fringe benefits and for the same cost-of-living, seniority, and merit salary increases available to full-time faculty.
 5. Part-time faculty should be given mailboxes, office space, telephones, and clerical support.
 6. They should be given a voice in the formulation of department policy regarding courses and programs in which they teach (for example, by voting at department meetings and by serving on curriculum and hiring committees).
 7. They should have the same right as full-time faculty to participate in the design of evaluation procedures.
 8. They should have access to research support and travel funds to attend professional conferences.
 9. During the period when departments are converting part-time positions to full-time tenured lines, departments should offer long-term contracts to part-time faculty who have demonstrated excellence in teaching.
 10. Part-time faculty who have been employed for six or more terms or consecutively for three or more terms should not be terminated without a full term's notice.
- D. Taking into account recommendations made by the AAUP ("The Status of Part-Time Faculty," 1980), we recognize that some institutions have responded innovatively to requests for tenure-line part-time positions. Where such positions are entirely the equal of full-time positions in terms of eligibility for tenure, prorated salary, fringe benefits, merit raises, support for research, participation in governance, and so on, we find this practice acceptable. But such positions are and should be exceptions. The quality, integrity, and continuity of instruction and the principle of academic freedom are best ensured by a full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty.

Full-Time Temporary Faculty

The permanent use of temporary faculty is a contradiction in terms and should be avoided. As the AAUP repeatedly insists, the regular employment of full-

time temporary faculty is “unjust and inequitable” and represents “a threat to academic freedom” (“On Full-Time, Non-Tenure-Track Appointments,” 1978). Two guidelines should be followed.

- A. Full-time temporary appointments should be used only to fill non-recurring instructional needs (e.g., short-term visiting professorships or replacements for tenure-line faculty on leave). The use of these positions to provide instruction that is a regular part of the institution’s curriculum is exploitative.
- B. The rights and privileges afforded to individuals with full-time temporary appointments ought to be congruent with the policies of the AAUP, and their working conditions and salaries ought to be in compliance with those outlined in this document for teachers of writing.

We recognize that where an institution has relied heavily on part-time positions, their transformation to full-time tenure-track lines may have to proceed in stages. Except in the cases noted above (visiting professorships and leave replacements), full-time temporary positions are tolerable only as a stage in converting part-time to full-time tenure-track positions.

Part Two: Teaching Conditions Necessary for Quality Education

The improvement of an individual student’s writing requires persistent and frequent contact between teacher and student both inside and outside the classroom. It requires assigning far more papers than are usually assigned in other college classrooms; it requires reading them and commenting on them not simply to justify a grade, but to offer guidance and suggestions for improvement; and it requires spending a great deal of time with individual students, helping them not just to improve particular papers but to understand fundamental principles of effective writing that will enable them to continue learning throughout their lives. The teaching of writing, perhaps more than any other discipline, therefore requires special attention to class size, teaching loads, the availability of teaching materials, and the development of additional resources that enhance classroom instruction.

For these reasons, we offer the following guidelines, widely supported by professional associations in English.

- A. No more than 20 students should be permitted in any writing class. Ideally, classes should be limited to 15.
- B. Remedial or developmental sections should be limited to a maximum of 15 students.
- C. No English faculty members should teach more than 60 writing students a term. In developmental writing classes, the maximum should be 45.
- D. The effectiveness of classroom writing instruction is significantly improved by the assistance students receive in writing centers. Centers pro-

vide students with individual attention to their writing and often provide faculty and graduate students with opportunities to learn more about effective writing instruction. Because these centers enhance the conditions of teaching and learning, their development and support should be an important departmental and institutional priority.

- E. Because rhetoric and composition is a rapidly developing field, all writing instructors should have access to scholarly literature and be given opportunities for continuing professional development.
- F. Because writing instruction requires so much individual attention to student writing, it is important that all instructors have adequate and reasonably private office space for regular conferences.
- G. The institution should provide all necessary support services for the teaching of writing, including supplies, duplication services, and secretarial assistance.

NCTE Promising Researcher Award 1989 Winners

The following winners of the 1989 Promising Researcher Award have been announced:

Don Zancanella, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM

Teachers reading/readers teaching: Five teachers' personal approaches to literature and their teaching of literature.

Melanie Sperling, University of California, Berkeley, CA

I want to talk to each of you: Collaboration and the teacher-student writing conference.