WHEN WRITING GOES PUBLIC: AGITATION, INTERVETION, AND DISRUPTION IN PUBLIC ARGUMENTS ABOUT WRITING

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The Counterpublic Function of Composition: Agitation, Intervention, and Disruption in Public Arguments about Writing

Introduction

In the August 19th, 2014 Sunday Book Review of the *New York Times*, Rivka Galchen, an award-winning Canadian-American novelist, and Zoe Heller, an English novelist, discuss in separate essays whether or not writing can be taught. In Galchen's essay, she celebrates the affective, magical quality of writing, espousing that in writing, like any "intellectual endeavor, the extremes of its work come from an unteachable dark." Heller, however, is a bit more pragmatic. Lamenting the lack of formal education on "structure" or "style," Heller asserts that "knowing how to write—understanding the basics of what used to be called 'rhetoric'—still matters, even in the Internet age." The two essays succeed by presenting a dramatic contrast between both the mysterious aspects of composing and the rigid, mechanical heuristics that harken back the rhetorical education of ancient Greece. But what is perhaps most dramatic about this exchange is not what the two authors are arguing about but what they are leaving out: the professional field of research on writing and writing instruction, a field that has been publishing about written composition for at least fifty years.[1] The *New York Times,* having chosen to seek the input of commercially successful novelists as opposed to the expertise of researchers and teachers who study writing can be seen as a snapshot of a larger trend in public discussions of writing: any time the topic of writing

[1] While James J. Murphy dates instruction in writing as far back as ancient Greece, the *official* birth of composition studies as a field is necessarily in dispute. Stephen North puts the date at the 1963 CCCC convention, but Robert Connors places the birth around 1800 in an effort to teach "literacy skills for the professional and managerial classes" (*Composition-Rhetoric* 6). Whose argument is correct is beyond the scope of this project; here it is only important to note that composition studies is indeed a professional field of inquiry that is often neglected in public perceptions of writing and writing instruction.

comes up in the public sphere, the field of composition itself is generally absent from those conversations.

This is not to say that the public is unconcerned with writing. From what Robert Connors describes as the "illiteracy crisis" of the 1880s and 1890s, to Merrill Sheils's oft-quoted 1975 *Newsweek* article: "Why Johnny Can't Write," to Rebecca Schuman's 2013 *Slate* article: "The End of the College Essay: An Essay"—writing and literacy have always held a unique place in the American public sphere. In fact, Ryan Skinnell argues that composition is an inherently *public* discipline because writing and writing pedagogy are "always already part of public conversations" (144). The problem, though, according to many scholars in composition, is that the field of composition does not have the kind of legitimacy needed to wield influence in public debate on what writing is or how it should be taught. Lester Faigley uses the example of the persistent public perception of writing pedagogy as rote instruction in grammar: "In spite of nearly thirty years of scholarship," Faigley writes, "composition studies has not reached square one in convincing much of the public that writing should be understood as a process" (77). Paul Butler, echoing Faigley, writes that any time issues of writing, rhetoric, or literacy are brought up in the public sphere, they are "discussed authoritatively by 'experts' outside the field of composition" (58). In the absence of a response by writing studies practitioners, Butler writes, those with uninformed ideas about composition "claim *the* authoritative word on these topics for an important part of the reading public" (58). In other words, while the public seems to be invested deeply in issues related to writing, the public perception about writing remains largely uninformed by the work of composition scholarship.

This dissertation was born out of the tension I describe above: the diligent work in the field of composition to elucidate the nature and function of writing and the apparent lack of influence that that research has in public discussions related to writing. When I began this dissertation, one of the central questions I had hoped to answer is *why*. But in my research I discovered that asking *why* compositionists are not influential in public debates about writing is perhaps too broad of a question and would yield any number of intersecting and complex answers. For one, it could very well be that much of the energy in the field is focused on work that is more easily recognized and rewarded in university contexts. Or, as Peter Mortensen writes, after all the other duties of being a modern professor are done, there is little energy left to be publicly engaged: composition's drive to present work in writing and literacy to *other academics* is in itself a fulltime job, he writes, and "at the end of the day, little intellectual energy remains for the serious and difficult task of going public with what we do, with what we know" (182). Perhaps, then, the myriad of potential reasons *why* the field is not as engaged with public problems related to writing has more to do with the very assumptions behind what it means to *go public* in the first place, especially since the general consensus is that the field is not doing it—or at least not doing it well.

Thus, in response to persistent calls throughout the history of the field to make the work of composition more publicly engaged, I situate this dissertation in terms of two overarching questions: 1) How does the field of rhetoric and composition, broadly defined, respond whenever arguments about writing and writing instruction *go public*?; and 2) What are some practical strategies for practitioners in the field to engage in future public debates about writing? These two questions are geared toward unpacking and critiquing the assumptions about public engagement in rhetoric and composition, and are better suited, I

argue, to address the pressing calls throughout the discipline's history to become more publicly engaged. Asking the question in terms of *how,* in other words, requires that we address what we *mean* when we call for more public engagement. For example, while scholars in the field have been calling upon composition to go public with their work for several decades now, most of these calls ask compositionists to go public in rather traditional ways: either writing for broader audiences (Mortensen), cultivating a more productive ethos to talk about pedagogy in the public sphere (Skinnell), or becoming more visible public intellectuals (Roen). However, might there be other ways of *going public?* Might there be other conceptions of what it means to be *publicly engaged*? Might there be more strategic and nuanced ways to bring the disciplinary expertise of rhetoric and composition to bear on public problems related to writing? This dissertation seeks to expand what counts as public engagement and considers alternative ways writing studies practitioners have been publicly engaged in the past in order to imagine new ways of becoming publicly engaged in the future.

Public Engagement in Rhetoric and Composition

As I mentioned above, the history of composition reveals persistent calls to become more publicly engaged. In 1982 Michael Halloran suggested composition can train civically savvy leaders who embody "all that is best in a culture and [bring] it to bear on public problems through eloquent discourse" (246). The goal of bringing disciplinary knowledge to bear on public problems implies, as Joseph Harris argued in 1997, is to imagine the writing classroom itself as "a public space where students can begin to form their own voices as writers and intellectuals" (155). Also in 1997, Elizabeth Ervin, taking up Bruce Herzberg's argument that service learning classrooms should become "radically democratic," argues that

in order to provoke civic behavior in our students, composition instructors must fashion their classrooms as "secondary" associations that promote more "interpersonal allegiances and commitments" (394). These early calls in the field provide a foundation for understanding the discipline of composition as one inherently concerned with addressing public problems.[2] These conversations also showcase that despite persistent claims that the field is *not* publicly engaged (considering the field's lack of representation in public debates about writing), scholars and teachers have indeed been engaged in public issues related to writing for quite a long time, just not in traditionally recognizable ways. For example, through community outreach and service learning initiatives, many of the engagement practices of writing studies practitioners have relied on local, situated knowledge and theories of the public that are multiple, dynamic, and shifting. Paula Mathieu names this the *public turn* in rhetoric and composition, and attributes it to the increased study of "public writing, public-oriented course content, place-based writing, Web-based publishing, service learning, community literacy,

[2] These scholars differed on how public problems can be addressed in the classroom, however. Harris, for instance, claimed that a writing classroom functions as a public space instead of an entry point into academic discourse. Rosa Eberly, however, posited that "writing classrooms will never be public spaces because of the institutional supports and constraints that allow it to exist" (172). To Eberly, writing classrooms are *protopublics* where students "practice public discourse in a writing classroom by thinking, talking, and writing about and for different publics" (172). These early conversations reveal that bringing disciplinary knowledge to bear on public problems has been an early concern in the field.

ethnographies of communication, and community publishing" in the field (8). [3] Having its roots in composition's social turn, which rejected what James Berlin called current-traditional rhetoric in favor of a theory of writing that emphasized the "social as the foundation of subject formation" (281), the public turn draws from innovations in public writing, civic engagement, and service learning to investigate broader purposes, audiences, and civic functions of writing and literacy.[4] Mathieu calls the turn outward as a shift toward "the streets." The term "streets," for Mathieu functions as a metonymic device to reference "those places outside of universities and schools that have become sites of research, outreach, service, or local learning" (xii). These "real exigencies" that students encounter "outside" the classroom account for the sustained interest in civic engagement, service learning initiatives, and other university-community partnerships that make up the public turn in writing studies. Moreover, edited collections like Rose and Weisser's *Going Public: What Writing Programs Learn from Engagement* or Ackerman and Coogan's *The Public Work of Rhetoric: Citizen-*

[3] The public turn does not come without its critics. From Herzberg's important critiques of service learning to J. Blake Scott's work exposing the "hyperpragmatism" of reflective service learning writing assignments, to Amy Wan's critique of the conflation of citizenship and desired writing skills—there has been a growing and lively conversation in the field about public writing, civic engagement, and service learning over the last two decades. In "Finding a Place for School in Rhetoric's Public Turn," David Fleming worries that the public turn's "outward-looking profile" might be "neglecting aspects of classroom education that are not necessarily antithetical to a genuinely *practical* mission for rhetoric and composition, aspects of schooling that, in fact, could contribute in important ways to a public turn in the field" (215). More and more research is pointing out the conflation of "internationalization" with the market-driven goals of increasingly global corporations. For instance, J. Blake Scott, in another essay, has made the case that many "responsibility reports" of pharmaceutical companies mimic many of the "service learning initiatives" of American colleges. Most recently Donna Strickland has made the case that calls for the writing classroom to prepare students for democratic citizenship function as "marketable commodities for the quality workplace." Moreover, Strickland writes that James Berlin's famous commitment to social justice in the writing classroom was merely another strain of a long-standing "literacy myth" that represents a postmodern form of "banking pedagogy" critical pedagogues have fought so long to supplant.

[4] Catherin L. Hobbs and James Berlin show, however, that the field's interest in public writing did not emerge exclusively in the social turn. For example, they cite Fred Newton Scott of the University of Michigan who advocated alternative social rhetorics in the early 20th century, which took the form of a "rhetoric of public service," or rather, "a commitment to using discourse for the public good" (258). Scott maintained, they write, that the main objective of the university should be "the preparation of citizens for a democracy who are trained to use their specialized knowledge for the welfare of the community as a whole," which call for analyses of the rhetor in relation "to the entire rhetorical context—the audience and larger community, the subject from these perspectives, and the role of language in each and all" (258). In between the two world wars, many other kinds of social and civic pedagogies arose in colleges and universities.

Scholars and Civic Engagement further reflect the field's ongoing focus on situated, local, and nuanced understandings of public engagement. Thus, another aim of this dissertation is to showcase some of the many ways practitioners in the field are *already* publicly engaged. And this is not to sustain the status quo, but rather an effort to reinterpret how the field brings its disciplinary knowledge to bear on public problems as a way to reimagine new ways of engaging public debates about writing.

In our contemporary moment of volatile public discourse and what David Scobey has called an "atmosphere of mistrust" in "public debates over higher education" (8), it is especially important to consider the ways compositionists can contribute to public problems related to writing in nuanced and meaningful ways. Mathieu describes this vision as one based on *radical hope* (xii). Radical hope, Mathieu writes, is a "critical, active, dialectical engagement between the insufficient present and possible, alternative futures—a dialogue composed of many voices" (xv). Contributing to the resolution of public problems, in other words, is a kind of engagement based on *dialogue,* or a kind of relationship building aimed at envisioning a new status quo. In 2008, Nancy Welch described this vision in terms of fighting for social justice in a public way: "Within the urgency and constraints created by neoliberal policy," Welch writes, "we face the fundamental tension," which is "an abundant need for people, particularly those lacking official credentials, to engage in public argument; and a dearth of space, opportunity, and freedom for most people to do so" (9). For Welch, becoming publicly engaged is a power struggle in which those at a deficit continually find ways to assert themselves into discussions amid institutional and social structures that are designed to stifle alternative voices (19).

The public turn scholars I highlight above reveal new visions for becoming more publicly engaged and an opportunity, I argue, to employ strategies that rely on a definition of engagement that includes the building of relationships in ways that are situated, multiple, and persistently attuned to issues of power. David J. Coogan and John M. Ackerman call this "the public work of rhetoric," or rather, a commitment to forming relationships within and across the communities where writing studies practitioners live and work, a blurring of the boundaries between experts and novices, and a new investment in the immediate, local, and always contingent issues faced by larger publics. Perhaps, in other words, the history of public engagement in rhetoric and composition and work in *the public turn* more generally implies that angling for a voice in a *New York Times* debate about the nature of writing is only one of many ways writing studies specialists can help address public problems.

Public Intellectualism Reconsidered

Rethinking what counts as publicly engaged necessarily entails rethinking the traditional model of the public intellectual as one who bestows expertise to the general public through publications geared toward popular audiences. This traditional model is already critiqued from a variety of fronts. For example, there is a prevailing belief beyond the walls of academe that public intellectualism is dead or dying in American culture. Nicholas Kristof's 2014 editorial "Professors, We Need You," laments that there are "fewer public intellectuals on American university campuses today than a year ago," which he attributes to over-specialization and "turgid prose" that renders academics cloistered like "medieval monks," unable to impact audiences beyond those in their own departments. Kristof's arguments are not unlike Russel Jacoby's 1987 *The Last Intellectuals,* which argues that the disappearance of public intellectuals came in the 1950s and 1960s, when America's leading

intellectual leaders were absorbed into the professoriate and now publish more to preserve their self-interests as academics rather than to preserve the public good. Richard Posner's *Public Intellectuals: A Study in Decline* characterizes this trend as a devaluation of the intellectual market: "[A] successful academic," Posner writes, "may be able to use his success to reach the general public on matters about which he is an idiot" (51). In other words, Posner is arguing that the public sphere suffers from *too many* professors purporting to be public intellectuals when in fact they are merely academic specialists speaking outside their expertise on matters to which they are not accountable.

Academics generally respond to this critique defensively, pointing out the diverse array of scholars doing notable and interactive work with immediate relevance to public concerns (Voeten). And, a quick survey does indeed reveal a more complicated picture of academics who disseminate their work in more public venues: For example, most recently, *Public Seminar*, a digital forum in which experts weigh in on public issues, published Cornell historian Edward Baptist's touching piece about the controversy in Ferguson, Missouri ("Ferguson and Fatherhood: My Turn to Give the Talk"). Harvard historian Jill Lapore has written for the *New Yorker* since the 1990s and has been featured many times on radio and television. Another Harvard historian, Henry Louis Gates Jr., is one of the most prominent and respected public intellectuals.[5] Aside from historians, there are also notable scientists who are considered public intellectuals like Bill Nye or Richard Dawkins. Even in the field of writing studies, there are notable figures like Mike Rose, Doug Hesse, or Les Perelman whose columns in the *Washington Post* cover topics ranging from schooling to machine-

[5] Gates' television show *Finding Your Roots*, documentary series *The African Americans*, and many essays on African American interest website *The Root*, engage public debates about race and racism on a regular basis.

grading.[6] Clearly there are scholars from various intellectual backgrounds whose work is read by academic and nonacademic audiences alike.

But, just like calls in the field of writing studies for more public intellectuals (or lamentations in the national press about the lack of public intellectuals), many of the intersecting discussions cited above rely on an outdated and unhelpful model of public intellectualism as primarily the dissemination of scholarly ideas to a wider public audience. This notion of the public intellectual, Arthur M. Melzer writes, is a modern product of the Enlightenment that charges a specific class of intellectuals with being "enlighteners and agents of progress" (8). This Enlightenment ideal is championed by many in academe, notably, as Nathan Crick points out, in Alan Wolfe's *Chronicle of Higher Education* editorial "The Calling of the Public Intellectual," which describes a public intellectual as someone who "brings academic expertise to bear on important topics of the day in a language that can be understood by the public" (B20 qtd in Crick 129). Crick critiques Wolfe's definition of the public intellectual as a kind of "academic public relations officer" which reduces public intellectualism to "a measure of one's personal motivation, publishing history, and courage to tell the truth, and as such it is a title that one can bestow upon oneself" (129). Moreover, Ellen Cushman argues that merely translating specialized knowledge into less specialized language does nothing to "widen the scope of our civic duties as intellectuals" (330). Public intellectuals, Cushman writes, need to interact *with* publics, using their privilege to "forward the goals of both students and local community members" to "extend access to the university to a wider community" through service learning and activist research (330).

[6] Not to mention the growing field of scholarship *about* engagement and public intellectualism, like the work of Nancy Cantor, Andrew Petter, Duane Roen, or earlier authors like Ernest Boyer, whose 1997 *Scholarship Reconsidered* sought to redefine what constitutes knowledge-work in the academy.

A closer look at the list of public intellectuals cited above highlights some of the faults in the Enlightenment model of public intellectualism that Cushman and Crick point out. Most of the audiences to whom they are writing are elite. Most of the venues in which they are publishing are elite. And many of the authors are male. The question, then, is: who benefits from an Enlightenment model of public intellectualism? Certainly not, as Cushman argues, "community members in under-served neighborhoods" (329). Broadening the scope of public intellectualism, as Cushman suggests, reveals a more dynamic and situated role for the public intellectual. Frank Farmer describes the figure proposed by Cushman as a "community intellectual." This shift in terminology, Farmer writes, "would remind us that there are *other* publics and *other* intellectuals whose efforts, while often unheralded, make an authentic difference in the lives of our neighbors" ("Community Intellectuals" 204). In the field of writing studies, for example, there are teacher-scholars who "make an authentic difference in the lives of our neighbors" through public work every day, but "public" in the sense that they *engage*, or rather, they bridge, connect, and/or confront different communities through their work in a localized, community-centered approach.[7] Thus, throughout this dissertation, I deliberately refrain from invoking phrases like *public intellectual* or *public intellectualism* to describe writing studies' efforts to impact public problems about writing. Instead, I choose *engagement*, which better encompasses the situational nature of public work. Below, I argue that much of the work of public engagement in the field of rhetoric and composition is predicated on how practitioners *orient* themselves toward public problems. These stances, or *public orientations*, encompass the "repertoire of uses" that Farmer

[7] See Cushman, "Toward a Praxis of New Media: The Allotment Period in Cherokee History"; Jeff Grabill, *Writing Community Change*; Flower, *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*; Goldblatt, *Because we Live Here: Sponsoring Literacy Beyond the College Curriculum*; or Steve Parks et al., *Circulating Communities: The Tactics and Strategies of Community Publishing*.

describes and extends the conversation by *naming* and then *defining* some of the variable ways writing studies scholars engage in public problems that concern writing and writing instruction.

Public Orientations

Born out of the discussions summarized above, this dissertation argues that public engagement in the field of rhetoric and composition is more than publishing texts that explain the work of composition to outsiders. It also involves the cultivation of strategic *relationships* made durable by the differing ways academics orient themselves to public problems through what I call *public orientations*. A dynamic repertoire of public orientations, I argue, better equips writing studies practitioners to engage in public debates about writing in meaningful ways. Describing engagement in terms of orientations, moreover, is distinct from what some scholars call style. Paul Butler's 2008 *Out of Style: Reanimating Stylistic Study in Composition and Rhetoric* designates style as "a set of language resources for writers to exploit" (13). In a more recent rhetorical approach to public engagement, Anna M. Young's *Prophets, Gurus, and Pundits: Rhetorical Styles and Public Engagement* also describes public engagement as the cultivation of rhetorical style. Young argues that style is "the discourse of our moment, an argument intellectuals make for (or against) broader relevance" (7). Cultivating rhetorical styles, Young argues, will also help intellectuals reimagine new ways to mobilize their expertise in the public sphere.[8] But while the stylistic theories of Butler and Young are important, I argue that they focus too narrowly on the cultivation of

[8] Young offers six styles of public intellectualism: the Prophet, Guru, Sustainer, Pundit, Narrator, and Scientist, each with their own exemplar who brings that particular rhetorical style to public audiences. For example, the prophet, Cornel West, exhibits a "status as an authentic, called prophet of God and American politics who rises in a time of crisis to deliver judgment and outline a hopeful path to redemption for the sinners in his midst" (40). Or, the Guru, Deepak Chopra, cultivates an intellectual style "always shrouded in intellectual mystery, using media to cultivate an intimate relationship with followers, marshaling the resources of two worlds" (60). To Young, successful rhetorical styles generate mainstream visibility and large followings.

style as a means to *explain* composition research to disciplinary outsiders. And though it is certainly true that cultivating an appealing style to showcase the broader relevance of writing research is worthwhile, I contend here that another important part of engaging in public debates about writing involves a reconceptualization of what counts as public engagement in the first place.

Engagement in the field is more than convincing nonacademics that writing is important. It is also a kind of *orienting of oneself* toward the situational nature of a public problem and bringing the disciplinary knowledge of writing studies to bear on those problems through local relationship-building. In this way, the field can celebrate the role of more collaborative models of engagement that rely on intellectual exchanges among multiple and dynamic *publics,* while also celebrating important exemplars of the public intellectual style, as Young's book so eloquently does. Adopting public orientations, moreover, is another way to engage in public debates about writing through the building of relationships, which is distinct from style.

Thus, instead of style, I choose the term *orientation*. Borrowing from Kenneth Burke, who defined orientation as "a bundle of judgments as to how things were, how they are, and how they may be" (*Permanence and Change* 14), orientation better encapsulates the repertoire of potential public stances one can choose depending upon the rhetorical characteristics of the situation. Scott R. Stroud describes Burke's theory of orientation as "the sort of background filter that gives meaning to stimuli that one is consciously experiencing" (50). In other words, Burke sees orientation as habits that govern our actions. And for Burke, language has the potential to function as a way to forge *new* orientations. Through the concept of "piety" or what Burke calls "a desire to round things out, to fit experiences

together into a unified whole," (74) Burke suggests that one can *reorient* oneself, or what Paul Stob calls responding to "the need to shift one's orientation, to *re*adjust one's symbolic system to operate more fruitfully" (238). Burke calls this "reorientation or verification by way of verbalization" (Burke 84 qtd in Stob 238). For this project, orientation is a term that refers not necessarily to stylistic adaptations intended to engage with a general public, but a methodology for *operationalizing language* to respond to different problems. John Dewey, after all, argued that there are not necessarily "public problems" but rather, publics are "forged in a way amendable to the specific problems it encounters" (Stob 235). Thus, orientation as a concept better suits the field's engagement strategies and showcases, like Dewey and Burke, the more "problems-solving and community building possibilities of language" (Stob 229). I approach the concept of public engagement as a dynamic repertoire of rhetorical orientations that compositionists can choose to adopt depending on contexts.

Specifically, I outline three public orientations that academics can use to engage in public debates about writing: agitation, intervention, and disruption.

- Agitational Orientations is the field's default stance, which is oriented toward critique of the status quo. As a mode of critique, agitational orientations allow for day-to-day pedagogical moves in the writing classroom that critique inherent power differentials, efforts to stand in solidarity with disenfranchised groups, or through circulating counterpublic discourse through scholarly publications and/or more traditional public outlets. Agitation, in other words, is what publicly engaged scholars do on a regular basis.

- Interventional Orientations are stances that prioritize partnering with members of the status quo, or powerful groups whose objectives the field generally opposes but with whom practitioners might find common ground in order to work toward a common good. Compositionists working with legislators on drafting language policy, partnering with for-profit companies on peer-review software, or creating, funding, and negotiating campus literacy centers represent engagement strategies that require interventional orientations.
- Disruptive Orientations are stances that eschew collaborative partnerships in favor of completely upending the status quo entirely. Academics with disruptive orientations position themselves in their professional relationships in such a way as to assert, broadcast, and actualize change, but the results of disruptive engagements cannot be known in advance. Organized strikes, curricular revolutions, or even radical theories can all be potentially disruptive, because they may have a lasting consequence beyond agitation: they are intended to upend or usurp.

Each of these public stances relies on a nuanced definition of publics as multiple and dynamic. Reconsidering public engagement as a repertoire of stances suggests that when academics engage in public arguments about writing, they draw from a range of potential orientations that aren't *public* in the sense of communicating to a unified social whole (*the* public), but public in the sense that it *engages* by connecting, bridging, or confronting different *kinds* of groups and stakeholders through the interaction and circulation of texts and

ideas. In the context of the public turn in composition, as well as the looming shadow of legitimization over the field I alluded to above, reconceptualizing public engagement in terms of cultivating situational orientations also complicates adages in the field about writing studies' lack of public relevance.

Moreover, thinking of engagement as harnessing a repertoire of public orientations makes a unique contribution to public turn scholarship by offering suggestions for ways writing studies practitioners can make more meaningful and sustained contributions to public problems relevant to writing. Without a diverse range of engagement practices, the field delivers itself, as Mortensen warns, "to mere spectatorship in national, regional—and, most importantly, local—struggles over what counts as literacy and who should have opportunities to attain it" (183). Thus, in addition to reproducing scholarship for nonacademic audiences, writing studies scholars need to consider other ways to use the knowledge of the discipline to engage public problems.

Theories of the Public

In order to recast public engagement as a dynamic repertoire of public orientations, I draw upon theoretical discussions of publics and counterpublics. Specifically I rely on John Dewey's 1927 *The Public and its Problems*, which understands the public not as a normative category but as a set of problems that require people who "have a common interest in controlling these consequences" to come together (126). In his 2014 JAC article "The Work of Rhetoric in the Common Places: An Essay on Rhetorical Methodology," Jeff Grabill summarizes Dewey's position and the role of rhetoric, writing that for Dewey, there is no such thing as *the public*. Rather, "we must begin by assembling a public in any given

situation and inquire into the nature of the problems that this assembly wishes to solve." For Grabill, following Dewey's line of thinking means that the first act of rhetoric is

> the assembly of a *we* and then caring for that assembly (because publics, communities, organizations, groups, and similarly such things are not persistent; they form and fall apart; they come and go). This work is exceptionally difficult, of course, which is why Dewey correctly understood it as a critical problem for his time and, I argue, for ours (Grabill 256).

For the purposes of this project, I argue that developing public orientations is an important way to assemble a *we.* Orientations allow writing studies practitioners to assess the situational characteristics of public problems and cultivate stances toward them. These stances determine the different kinds engagement practices available, and all of them rely on relationships with others: either forging a counterpublic through circulating agitational discourse; partnering with establishment groups through interventional orientations, or confronting establishment groups through disruptive orientations.

Another important consideration is Michael Warner's notion of counterpublics. In his oft-quoted "Publics and Counterpublics," for example, Warner's describes *public* as spaces organized "by nothing other than discourse itself…only as the end for which books are published, shows broadcast, Web sites posted, speeches delivered, opinions produced. It exists *by virtue of being addressed"* (51). In other words, a public is merely the circulation of texts, or the "concatenation of texts through time" (52). Warner's notion that publics are constituted through the circulation of discourse underscores the open-ended, shifting, and contingent movement of discourse as well as the multiplicity of publics. Specifically for this project, Warner's theory of the public is fruitful because it allows multiple and dynamic

spheres to overlap and exchange information across several platforms. *Counterpublics,* Warner argues, is a specific kind of circulating discourse that functions in a deliberately conflictual relationship with the dominant social order. Nancy Fraser, in her "Rethinking the Public Sphere," first used the term to describe the way disenfranchised groups circulate their own discourse in opposition to mainstream norms. As an example, Fraser cites the late-twentieth century U.S. feminist subaltern counterpublic, "with its variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places." These counterpublic spheres invented "new terms for describing social reality" (67). Warner, however, extends Fraser's definition and argues that what makes a counterpublic a counterpublic is not necessarily a reformist stance but maintaining "at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status" (86). Counterpublics do not just try to reach a wider public, Warner argues. By their very nature they exist *in contradistinction* to a dominant public—either at the level of genre, speech, or style. Addressees in counterpublics, Warner writes, "are socially marked by their participation in this kind of discourse; ordinary people are presumed to not want to be mistaken for the kind of person who would participate in this kind of talk or be present in this kind of scene" (86). Warner's notion of counterpublic accounts for the *poetic* nature of public discourse—or rather, the ways in which the circulation of discourse creates a social world, a sense of the ways things are and/or should be. Adopting Warner and Fraser's more situated and dynamic understanding of publics and counterpublics necessarily means opening up how the field of writing studies can understand its role in the public sphere as something beyond articulating

research to nonacademic audiences toward a more counterpublic function that is *poetic* and in conflict with the status quo.

One way to incorporate renewed meditations on publics and counterpublics is to consider the ways academic disciplines can, in certain situations, serve counterpublic purposes. Farmer's *After the Public Turn: Composition, Counterpublics, and the Citizen Bricoleur*, for example, argues that the viewpoint that compositionists rarely "write back" to misguided public perceptions of the field of writing studies is misguided. Instead, he argues that this "writing back" does not have to take the form of the traditional public intellectual. Rather, *going public* might mean rethinking that label entirely and cultivating instead a "repertoire of uses, methods, and functions by which we gain access to larger publics" (139). Incorporating insight from Fraser and Warner, Farmer argues that composition can be counterpublic and serve, in certain situations, a "counterpublic function" in relation to dominant publics that have the power to "determine how we get represented publicly" (147). Put a different way, Farmer argues that composition can adopt a counterpublic stance by appropriating the figure of the *bricoleur*, or one who tactically uses the materials at her disposal to devote the work of composition to creating counterpublics, either through scholarly or pedagogical methods. The *bricoleur*, Farmer writes, enacts a counterpublic function:

> Only when circumstances compel her to do so, and in a manner best described as improvisational, tactical, and, most likely, unheeded. By refusing the celebrity status that accompanies the title of public intellectual, we are (ironically perhaps) better equipped to do genuine intellectual work in public that reflects the nature of our disciplinary inquiries—in our institutions; our

> local and regional communities; our extracurricular, language, and writing groups; and even possible other counterpublics we have yet to notice. (149)

This new kind of public engagement, Farmer argues, can "alter received understandings of what counts, or ought to count, as legitimate public discourse" (153). Drawing from Dewey's definition of publics as situational communities forged in response to specific problems; Warner's definition of publics as the circulation of texts and his assertion that there are *counterpublics* that are constituted by conflictual relationships to the dominant public; and Farmer's argument that disciplinary publics can serve a "counterpublic function"—I argue in this dissertation that one way compositionists function in counterpublic ways is by accessing a range of public orientations that allow them bring disciplinary expertise to bear on public problems through the building of relationships. Developing public orientations, in other words, is a way to engage in public problems related to writing by forming different kinds of relationships (relationships that vary depending upon the situational nature of the problem). Particularly in relationships where compositionists are placed in unequal power differentials, compositionists can rely on orientations to exploit the counterpublic function of composition as method of engagement.

Below I outline this theoretical framework of public engagement in more detail, specifically through agitational, interventional, and disruptive orientations. After defining each term and situating it in a particular scholarly literature, I provide brief examples to elucidate the term in more detail. Also, in each example in the following section, I focus specifically on issues relevant to problems in higher education—more specifically, problems scholars of writing and writing instruction are likely to encounter. I do this for a couple of reasons: one, because I want to show how the stakeholders in each example, while situated

and contained mostly to campus settings, do indeed form different publics, publics that bridge, confront, and/or connect with one another through different public orientations. Secondly, I want to show, like Dewey, how publics are forged through the specific problems they encounter, and how those publics manifest themselves, as Warner writes, through the circulation of discourse.

Agitational Orientations

Agitational orientations are oriented toward critique. These stances tend to understand public problems as power issues in which academics side with the least powerful. To be agitational is to be oriented toward critique of the prevailing social order. In scientific terms, agitation sometimes refers to a process of stirring things up, deliberately disturbing a substance's molecules to turn it into a new substance. This metaphor works well for agitational orientations because it involves academics deliberately using their positions to critique existing structures in an effort to *shake up* the status quo. Over forty years ago, John Waite Bowers, Donovan J. Ochs, and Richard J. Jensen's *Rhetoric of Agitation and Control* first introduced the term agitation in their study of dissent rhetoric. A classic in modern communication theory, Bowers et al.'s work presents a taxonomic framework for understanding the rhetorical dimensions of social movements. They describe agitation as a set of three circumstances: when "(1) People outside the normal decision-making establishment (2) advocate significant social change and (3) encounter a degree of resistance within the establishment such as to require more than the normal discursive means of persuasion" (3). Agitators, according to Bowers et al. are those impacted by unfair policies of what they call "the establishment." Wishing to confront these *establishment groups*, agitators express their discontent through a range of discursive and non-discursive strategies to

critique the prevailing social order: petition, promulgation, solidification, polarization, nonviolent resistance, escalation/confrontation, guerrilla-and-Gandhi, and revolution (22). These terms play out in a variety of ways, which Bowers et al. lay out in a kind of flow-chart for successful dissent. For the purposes of this study, though, I use the term agitation primarily for its generative potential to name public orientations that academics can harness to critique the status quo.

As an orientation, agitation also delineates a kind of counterpublic. For example, Bowers et al. describe agitation as "persistent, long-term advocacy for social change, where resistance to the change is also persistent and long term" (3-4). This kind of persistent advocacy aligns with Warner's definition of counterpublics, which he defines not as a subcategory of the mass public, but as a discursive circulation of texts "constituted through a *conflictual* relation to the dominant public" (84-85). Agitational orientations, then, do not merely seek access to wider publics, but function primarily *in conflict* with dominant interests, which are constituted by the many genres, speech acts, and styles of address that publicly engaged academics use on a daily basis. Agitation is the most traditionally recognized form of publicly engagement. Warner also argues that counterpublics are relationships among strangers "socially marked by their participation in this kind of discourse; ordinary people are presumed to not want to be mistaken for the kind of person who would participate in this kind of talk or be present in this kind of scene" (86). Agitational orientations, then, are not just rhetorical strategies or the cultivation of a distinct rhetorical style, but participation in a *kind* of discourse marked through its "conflictual relationship" with the status quo. Moreover, taking Farmer's suggestion to consider the "counterpublic function" of academic disciplines, or rather, the ways in which composition

scholars can use their disciplinary knowledge to serve an oppositional or *conflictual* relationship to the social order, then the term *agitation*, I argue, presents one potential example of a kind of an orientation rhetoric and composition scholars harness to engage in public debates.

Also, writing studies practitioners can serve a counterpublic function through an agitative orientation, circulating discourse that, as Warner argues, is "constitutive of membership and its affects" (87-88). In other words, teachers and scholars of writing wishing to agitate against the status quo can work to employ the counterpublic function of their discipline through what Fraser might call their "variegated array" of journals, presses, listservs, workshops, academic conferences, or through their own campus networks. These disciplinary means of circulating counterpublic discourse reveal the variegated ways academics, from a variety of identity positions and power relationships, can contribute to public culture. And it is important to note that the success or failure of agitational orientations, or rather, the actualization of social change, does not necessarily impact whether or not something *is* agitational. In fact, to be agitational means one is *oriented toward change*. Agitational orientations reflect an effort to, as Warner writes, identify oneself as conflictual in some way. In this way, agitational orientations function as a kind of *default stance* for academics wishing to challenge social norms. Academics adopt agitational orientations to critique the status quo in the classroom, publish critiques of the status quo in their research, or other efforts at maintaining solidarity with disenfranchised groups.

Example of Agitational Orientations: Cultivating Safe Spaces

One illustration of an agitational orientation is the use of LGBTQ *safe space* stickers. This example of agitation is by no means representative, nor do I wish to codify agitation to the lengths that Bowers et al. do in their celebrated book. Here I only want to outline merely one possible rhetorical function of agitation as one of the many *potential* examples that rhetoric and composition scholars can harness in their teaching, research, and service.

"Safe Space" stickers are an agitational form of public engagement. In an academic setting, one is likely to see these stickers on many an office door of professors who are, on a minor scale, engaging in a public conversation about gender normativity. But LGBT Safe Space Ally programs, as Poynter et al. note, include anyone willing to publicly display support in the form of stickers, signs, or other identifiable artifacts. In the "Safe Space Kit," The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) describes safe places as a "welcoming, supportive, and safe environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students," because "for many students, simply knowing that allies exist can be a source of support" (2). Combining both gay and lesbian traditional triangle shapes and the rainbow gay pride flag, the Safe Space symbol is an argument for the "diverse, accepting community we hope to build." Moreover, "by displaying the posters and stickers, you can make yourself a highly visible ally within the school community" (3). While certainly no solution to oppression—for instance, Catherine O. Fox and Tracy E. Ore

note that safe space initiatives are too often organized "around uncomplicated notions of heterosexism and homophobia" (63)—displaying safe-space artifacts nevertheless requires an agitational orientation because it confronts a status quo of gender normativity and heterosexism. Displaying *safe space* stickers immediately agitates against public perceptions of normativity, and requires an orientation toward social change, a stance that conflicts with dominant and abusive attitudes toward LGBTQ people. Whether or not the change is actualized, or whether or not the establishment listens, does not impact the agitational orientation. This orientation is indeed a form of public engagement because it is oriented toward a public problem.

Moreover, LGBT "safe space" artifacts foster solidification that "identifies members of an agitation group" in a non-discursive way, calling out to members of a counterpublic that they have support, and calling out to the establishment that there is a status quo that needs to be subverted (Bowers et al. 36). There are risks, of course, depending on one's job security, gender, race, or other limiting factors that constrain academics and intellectuals—just as with any form of public engagement, but not to the same degree that other public orientations might elicit. Amid calls for rhetoric and composition scholars to produce more publicly visible scholarship, such as Doug Hesse, who famously asked in his 2005 CCCC address "Who pays attention to writing teachers?" (343-344), I argue here that thinking about publicly displaying solidarity for oppressed groups as a kind of public engagement makes

room for the overlapping and layered kinds of engagement strategies available to academics.[9] Agitational orientations, as a kind of critique of the status quo, serves a counterpublic function by identifying and aligning with the interests of the disenfranchised. Moreover, agitation does not necessarily require visibility on a mass-scale. Agitational orientations involve commitment to social change at a local level, and the Safe Space sticker is but one example of the small, but important ways scholars can *go public*.

Interventional Orientations

While agitational orientations are oriented toward critique, interventional orientations are oriented toward action. Interventional orientations seek to build partnerships with members of the status quo, groups that Bowers et al. call *establishment groups.* Intervention is a collaborative orientation in which groups at a power-deficit partner with a group that possesses significant power and influence in order to solve a public problem of mutual interest. I chose the word *intervention* to represent this orientation for two important reasons. For one, the word implies a purposeful kind of engagement oriented toward change. In the sciences, for instance, an intervention is some intentional act that attempts to change something. *Intervention studies* are experimentally based projects in which some kind of *intervention* is introduced to a variable in order to study its impact. In popular usage, an *intervention* for a loved one is a deliberate attempt to enact a behavioral change. There is an undeniably action-oriented quality to the term intervention. Moreover, intervention also implies a kind of power dynamic: one intervenes into something ongoing. From the Latin

[9] It is important to note here that the Safe Space sticker, while a form of agitational engagement, is by no means on the same level of activism as say, a civil rights march. It is, as I mentioned, very "low-risk." However, my goal here is to broaden the scope of public engagement to include small-scale, local agitational engagement practices like Safe Space stickers to make room for scholars and academics who might otherwise feel disempowered or too busy to become traditional public intellectuals. Moreover, by naming something as small as displaying a Safe Space sticker as a form of public engagement, I hope to make room for other, more consequential work that writing studies practitioners do—work perhaps still invisible to many in the academy—as public engagement.

inter, or between, and *venire,* to come, an intervention is something that *comes between* something ongoing: a kind of interruption. And the word interruption implies a power dynamic in which someone *unlistened to* asserts their voice. When someone intervenes, they deliberately assert a voice, position, or idea, into a conversation.

Also, while one might perceive the term intervention to be fundamentally non-collaborative, intervention is not an insular process. To intervene necessarily requires a receptive audience. One cannot *intervene* into a debate if the engagement strategies are not received, heard, or negotiated with others. John Trimbur famously argued in his critique of Kenneth Bruffee's definition of collaboration that it is important in collaborative projects to preserve the value of *dissensus*. Collaboration is not necessarily an effort to reach a utopic version of consensus, he writes, but to identify differences and to "open gaps in the conversation through which [those] differences may emerge" (614). In other words, intervening into a discourse requires more than just an intentional act. To create "action," one needs an audience with whom to listen and collaborate in the creation of discourse. To intervene effectively, one does not need to be calling out into a public square, but to be taken seriously and actively engaged with an intended audience. Linda Flower describes this process as "talking across difference," a method that goes beyond dialogue toward what she calls "intercultural inquiry." Intercultural inquiry moves beyond a discussion that simply "swaps stories" toward a more literate strategy in which difference becomes "a resource for constructing more grounded and actionable understandings" (40). Thus I deliberately use intervention in an untraditional way in order to describe a kind of partnership between those invested in a specific problem, the ones *doing the interruption,* and establishment groups representative of the ongoing problem. Interventional orientations function as a kind of

rhetorical collaboration in which groups at a power deficit cooperate within the establishment while simultaneously arguing for and positioning themselves to benefit from the engagement in some way.

Flower's theory of "intercultural inquiry" is especially helpful in elucidating some of the characteristics of interventional orientations. Flower describes the ways scholars engage with communities in productive discussions through the negotiation and building of meaning together as a kind of "collaborative inquiry" (50). Flower argues that collaborative inquiry is most visible "in the literate practices that define community problem-solving dialogue." For example: 1) Dialogue motivated by a community problem as it is felt by the people who experience it (situated knowledge); 2) These events spark a dialogue in which the focus isn't merely two sides airing their positions toward one another but rather "examining real options and possible outcomes;" 3) The mutual goal of inquiry becomes realized when through specific literate practices of seeing the "story behind the story," "rivaling" and delineating "options and outcomes" which create a "disequilibrium of a hybrid discourse" (51). In Flower's community problem-solving dialogue heuristic, the situated knowledge of a community is brought to bear on a pragmatic discussion of outcomes where a mutual problem is agreed upon and a solution is achieved through a "hybrid discourse." In the context of Flower's theory of intercultural inquiry, interventional orientations name the way writing studies specialists orient themselves toward public debates about writing when faced with the challenge of working together with establishment groups in problems of mutual concern. By enacting an intercultural collaborative method of inquiry that attempts to "elicit real differences without polarizing people and to negotiate conflict without silencing it" (Flower 64), interventional orientations allow for writing studies specialists to intentionally

respond to specific situated problems in collaboration with other groups or leaders in policy-making positions in a collaborative yet intentional way. As a public orientation, intervention also encompasses the distinct power differentials embedded into efforts of public engagement, which reveals the term's more generative, meaning-making possibilities. Below I outline one particular example of intervention in a local and institutional context, but, as before, it is important to note that this is merely one potential example of intervention.

Example of Interventional Orientation: The Creation of TCU's New Media Writing Studio

One brief example of a partnership that needed an interventional orientation was the creation of TCU's New Media Writing Studio in 2006. In this example, a team of English faculty worked together with university administrators to argue for and secure the funds to open a center on campus that facilitated the teaching and learning of multimodal composing. The team had to orient themselves to the issue in such a way that both the administration and the department could benefit from the partnership. For example, the Director of Composition at the time, Carrie Leverenz, made sure the proposal for the Studio provided opportunities to foster and support multimodal composing for any discipline or department on campus. In her 2012 *Computers and Composition* essay "Growing Smarter over Time," Leverenz details this experience of arguing for and opening the studio, which housed 22 computers and served "both as an open lab and a classroom that could be reserved by instructors on a per-class meeting basis" (52). Through an interventional orientation, which leverages a partnership with a more powerful group to tackle a mutual issue, the team devised an "emergent" approach to administration, or rather, a bottom-up method in which the participants learned "to be new media composers even as we also had to learn how to support others' learning" (54). This "non-hierarchical sharing of work" led to "frequent collaboration" between

different stakeholders, from students to teachers and other departments and administrators on campus (56). In other words, through what I am calling an interventional orientation, the team devised a strategy to facilitate collaboration both within and across departments in such a way that the English department benefited specifically (new classroom spaces and access to new technologies) as well as the TCU administration (increased exposure and opportunities professional development across disciplines). Leverenz reflects that, "in order to gain power, we need to find ways to align our interests with the interests of those in power" (61). Interventional orientations facilitate such alignments of academics' interest with those in positions of power toward the goal of making change or addressing a problem, in addition to collaborative exchanges that lead to meaningful and sustained engagements.

The New Media Writing Studio's interventional orientation allowed for Leverenz's team to facilitate reciprocal intellectual exchanges. They mitigated the limitations of collaborating within an institutional hierarchy and found innovative ways to engage the surrounding community: offering workshops for public school teachers, creating a certificate in New Media Writing, and implementing other initiatives designed to provide "a service that is institutionally necessary" in order to make a persuasive case for long-term funding (61). Leverenz invokes complexity theorist Mark Mason who writes that desired outcomes involve "*intervention* at as many levels as possible…so that sufficient momentum is generated in a particular direction to displace the inertial momentum of the current dispensation and to create a dominant inertial momentum of the desired policy" (61 qtd in Mason 42, my italics). While Mason's use of the word *intervention* may not imply the definition I offer, it is telling that in order to gain momentum, one must seek to *intervene* to shift a particular policy. I am suggesting here that the creation and administering of the New Media Writing Studio is an

example of using an interventional orientation to leverage a partnership in order to, as Mason writes, generate momentum in such a way as to initiate desired change. The creation of the Studio required what Leverenz describes as rowing "many oars at a time, starting with our own" (61), or rather, dedicated faculty working closely with administrators on campus to argue for a shared institutional mission of multimodal writing support. Such an intervention required not only collaboration with those in positions of power, but the rhetorical savvy to bring the disciplinary knowledge of writing studies to bear in the institutional dialogue.

Moreover, the creation of the New Media Writing Studio at TCU required more than an agitational orientation. Leverenz and her team needed to work together with the establishment in a collaborative method of inquiry to solve a problem that mattered both to them and those in charge of administering funds and maintaining the institution of the university. This required sustained engagement with those who benefit from structures of power, or whom Bowers et al. might call "the establishment," in order to negotiate and sustain the studio on campus. This collaboration was also ambiguous and open-ended: their emergent-learning approach did not foresee what the actualization of the engagement would entail. But they worked with the establishment toward what Flower would call a "mutual goal of inquiry" to benefit their institution and their community. Harnessing an interventional orientation, the faculty charged with creating and maintaining the New Media Writing Studio were also *publicly engaged*, not because they wanted to reach *the* public with their efforts, but because they bridged different publics on campus; the New Media Writing Studio intervened into a debate about the role of learning spaces on college campuses by addressing situated needs of different kinds of publics together with groups in charge of making administrative decisions.

The risks of taking on an interventional orientation can be high. Without an adequate support system, intervening in a mutual public problem with an establishment group can potentially be unsuccessful or even futile. Also, it requires more collaboration than agitational orientations. While agitational orientations do often necessitate collaboration, they do not usually imply a partnership with members of the status quo. Interventional orientations, on the other hand *need* collaboration with those groups. The creation of the TCU New Media Writing Studio is a helpful example of an interventional approach to *going public* with our teaching, research, and service because sometimes, in order to address important public problems, writing studies practitioners need not only to agitate against the status quo, but to collaborate rhetorically *with* establishment groups through grant applications, the establishment of literacy centers, or, as I unpack in much more detail in Chapter 4, for-profit companies and educational entrepreneurs.

Disruptive Orientations

Another public orientation rhetoric and composition specialists might use to engage in public debates about writing is disruption. Disruption is an orientation that goes beyond critique, eschewing collaboration with establishment groups in favor of significantly and unapologetically intruding into the status quo. Disruptive orientations, in other words, can either intentionally or unexpectedly alter the status quo in a fundamental way. While agitation involves a commitment to promote social change and critique the status quo, and intervention is a strategic collaboration between different groups to address a shared, rhetorically negotiated problem of mutual interest, disruption is oriented toward a complete overthrow of the status quo; a usurpation of the social order; a paradigm shift.

The word disruption has been used in many different contexts. One of the most popular uses of the word disruption comes from Clayton Christensen's famous 1995 *Harvard Business Review* article "Disruptive Technologies: Catching the Wave," which outlines the impact of technological innovation on the rate at which the performance of a product improves over time. Disruptive technologies, he writes, create new markets for products in other, generally unexpected areas.[10] Once disruptive technologies establish new markets the performance trajectory increases to the extent that it satisfies the needs of the customers in those new markets. "Generally," Christensen argues, "it is often difficult to project how big the markets for the [disruptive] technology will be over the long term" (47). While there are many problematic aspects of Christensen's use of the word disruption, I reference Christiansen here merely to point to how different scholars, from different disciplinary perspectives, have all used the word to evoke a sense of a paradigm shift, an interruption, and a general sense of unpredictability.[11]

The use of the word disruption to mean paradigm shifting, unpredictable intrusions into public discourse is also a recurring theme in the field of rhetoric and composition. Through their analyses of personal accounts of feminists from the 1970s, for example, Joy Ritchie and Kathleen Boardman's 1999 *CCC* essay describes disruption as "interrupting the conversation" in a way that fundamentally changes it. This strategy, they write, usually relies on postmodern theory to "critique disciplinary practices and structures that have shaped

[10] For example, Christensen describes the emergence of smaller diameter disk drives in the computer industry, which offered less storage capacity but cheaper designs and more sophisticated power structures which made possible the development of new markets for portable computers (45-46).

[11] Of course, there are limitations to Christiansen's use of the word disruption for the way I am employing it here. Disruption, for Christensen, also means reducing the quality of a product to the level actually required by the consumer in order to reduce cost. So, for example, if a consumer really only needs a moderate amount of computing power for their product, there is no need to sell the best and most powerful version year after year. The market is *disrupted* because lesser (newer) companies who do not try to have the best product sell a "good enough" product at a much cheaper cost.

composition" (596). In a 2009 issue of *JAC* based on a symposium at the Thomas R. Watson Conference, Vanessa Kraemer Sohan similarly invokes postmodern theory when she describes the conference theme as embodying a "rhetoric of disruption," or rather, a method of exploding traditional binaries "that rule rhetoric and composition's understanding of 'deviations' from the standard, including what has traditionally been considered 'error' or dismissed as 'alternative' or 'hybrid' discourse unsuitable to the academy" (270). Disruption, in this sense, is not just refusing to follow the rules but refusing to play the game. In a 2010 special issue of *The Writing Instructor* focusing on "Disruptions of/in Professional Writing Pedagogy," Mary Godwin describes curricular reconfigurations as disruptive. Using Christensen's metaphor of disruptive technologies to describe innovations in the field of professional writing, Godwin writes: "When technologies disrupt with equal parts innovation and intrusion, central parts of writing teacher pedagogy like personal management skills to handle due dates, team meetings, classroom instruction, peer review, collaboration, and office hours" are completely redefined. The experience of displacement moves the classroom "out" into the more broadly defined spaces of the community, with results that are "often surprisingly productive and unexpectedly innovative." Disruption, Godwin argues, intrudes into nearly every aspect of one's teaching and research and is a crucial part of curricular reconfigurations in writing studies. The above discussion informs my approach to disruption as an orientation that allows one to intrude *significantly* in power structures that keep subordinated groups subordinate. Looking back to Christensen's famous description of "disruptive technologies" as innovations that unexpectedly create new markets for consumers, I also understand disruption as a public orientation that both advocates for widespread social change and accepts the unexpected or emergent ways in which that change

occurs. The disruption may outlive the disruptor, or rather, the actual disruptive acts might not be discerned completely until sometime after the disruption occurs and change in the status quo becomes apparent.

My definition of disruptive orientations also draws heavily from postmodern thinkers like Jean-Francois Lyotard, who famously defined postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv). To Lyotard, metanarratives promote essentialist, totalitarian epistemologies that rely on consensus for legitimation. Consensus, Lyotard notes, "does violence to the heterogeneity of language games" (xxv). Contrary to the Habermasian notion of rational consensus as the ultimate goal of communication, Lyotard argues instead that consensus functions as normalizing centers of power that reject any kind of knowledge that may destabilize accepted positions. Such behavior, he notes, is "terrorist" for it gains legitimation by "eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him. He is silenced or consents, not because he has been refuted, but because his ability to participate has been threatened…the decision makers' arrogance…consists in the exercise of terror. It says: 'Adapt your aspirations to our ends—or else'" (63-64). Disruption, in a postmodern sense, is a significant interruption into established truth claims, a rhetorical act that does not rely on consensus for legitimation, but rather rejects legitimation entirely and finds freedom in dissensus and/or plurality. As an orientation, disruption presumes the value of interrupting the persistent "nostalgia of the whole and the one" and adopting a stance for waging "a war on totality" and becoming "witnesses to the unpresentable" (81-82). In this sense disruption is the most unpredictable form of public engagement: a range of strategies that comes with enormous risk and uncertain (and often

delayed) rewards, rewards that often promise only that assumptions about what was once *normal* will no longer hold.

Finding Examples of Disruption

In defining disruption in this way, my aim is not to assert my own metanarratives on what forms disruption can take, but to speculate on the powerful unpredictability of adopting disruptive orientations and its potential to usurp the status quo in some way. Thus finding examples of disruption is simultaneously easy and difficult, for the status quo is usurped and expanded in small and large ways all the time. Walter Benjamin famously noted that the "state of exception" is in fact the rule on which the status quo is built. Disruptive orientations do not always lead to political revolutions, either. For example, Julie Jung in her 1997 essay "Revision Hope: Writing Disruption in Composition Studies," argues that disruptions can be found in many different rhetorical situations academics encounter: from the texts we write, the conferences we attend, and the syllabi we administer. Jung argues that anything that can "delay closure and thereby create spaces where theories and relationships can be rethought, renegotiated, revised" is a kind of disruption (437). Jung's reminder is important for considering how interruptions, usurpations, and unexpected intrusions into the status quo happen in both the macro and micro realms. For Jung, disruption happens particularly in the classroom. Jung notes how she would spend "hours designing courses that I bring to my students with the best theoretical intentions only to find that their presence makes those courses come to life in ways I could never have predicted" (439). Students disrupted her syllabi in unimaginable ways, finding loopholes, exploiting weaknesses, even learning in unanticipated ways from assignments. In this example, Jung's students were being disruptive

because they completely changed the theoretical expectations of the course, and more importantly, henceforth prompted a reconfiguration of the goals and expectations of the class.

There are also power dynamics at play in disruptive orientations. Borrowing from Roland Barthes's famous essay on photography, Jung describes disruption as a moment of *punctum*, or the piercing moment of profundity one encounters when they notice something unanticipated in a photo—a puncture in the bounded stillness of the image that extends beyond its borders. Jung's description here is helpful, both in its framing metaphor of the *punctum* and in its acknowledgement of the uncomfortable, "somewhat scary" experience of disruption that creates new expectations out of old ones, but in order to *be* disruptive, one has to be *put* in a position to disrupt. For example, when Jung's students disrupted her theory of the syllabus, they were to a certain extent at a power-deficit in their usurpation of the authority that Jung had over them.[12] Disruption is an orientation that counterpublics, which are by definition in unequal power relationships with the establishment, cultivate in order to intrude, interrupt, and push back against the dominant social order.

While Jung describes a specific kind of disruption at the classroom level, it is also important to understand how disruptive orientations play out on a macro level. Take for example the 2-day strike of the faculty union at the University of Illinois at Chicago in February of 2014. Demanding salary increases to $45,000 minimum for non-tenured faculty and a 4.5 percent merit pay increase for the academic year, around 1,100 tenured and non tenured faculty members walked out on a planned strike when the administration would not budge (Esposito). In April, the faculty union members at UIC prevailed, receiving their first contract that guarantees salary increases for both tenured and non tenured faculty (Guy). The

[12] Even though, in general, the syllabus is often one of the only agreements students have with instructors about course goals/expectations, the instructor is nevertheless always in a position of authority over the students.

strikers harnessed a disruptive orientation, which allowed for significant intrusions into the status quo (which in this case was stagnate faculty salaries) in the form of a strike.[13] The UIC faculty strike relied upon a disruptive orientation by seeking not merely critique of or opportunities for collaboration with establishment groups, but leveraging their relationship with them in such a way as to reframe the status quo entirely. The faculty union's organized, deliberate strike eschewed partnership and challenged dominant narratives about wages of non tenured faculty in higher education, providing a fresh sense of urgency to previous conversations about faculty wages in the public sphere.

In many ways the UIC strike also embodies some of the more uncertain, unpredictable elements of disruptive orientations. For example, Rebecca Burns, a reporter for *In These Times*, an independent magazine focused on democracy and economic justice, reported that "the UIC strike represents a new height of coordination between tenured and non-tenure-track faculty, who often bargain contracts separately and sometimes see their interests as divergent." In other words, the unexpected repercussions of this disruption (in terms of faculty relations) are perhaps yet unknown, and the consequences for future political battles in other public conversations about faculty unions, the worth of intellectual labor, and the relationship between tenured and non tenured faculty are yet to be seen. Nevertheless this highly organized deviation from the norm at UIC represents a parallel form of disruption to that offered in the classroom reflections that Jung chronicles. While one was intensely personal and local and the other highly strategic, each required a disruptive orientation, or rather, an orientation toward a public problem that prioritizes not just critique, and certainly

[13] It is worth mentioning that the faculty strike would not have been possible if not for the support of a powerful faculty union. This fact points to the different levers of power and privilege necessary for many to feel comfortable adopting disruptive orientations to engage in public debate.

not collaboration, but a unique form of engagement in which rhetors defiantly oppose the prevailing social order.

Committing to a disruptive orientation is a risky form of public engagement. For one, it is almost impossible to be disruptive without support, whether from colleagues, one's department, unions, or the institution itself. Disruptive acts almost never happen in isolation. This kind of solidarity is a privilege that many in the field of rhetoric and composition do not have. Without proper institutional, social, or other support systems (and even *with* these things) disruptive engagement strategies can potentially result in the loss of employment, tarnished reputations, vulnerability in public debates, or being forever misunderstood and/or misappropriated.[14] Students who disrupt the theoretical frame of a syllabus risk being shut down by a zealous professor worried about relenting his authority over the course. Faculty members on strike risk losing their jobs. And perhaps most risky of all, the actualization of disruption is unknown, temporally unbounded, and unpredictable. Disruptive rhetors must accept the fact that they may not be around (either geographically or temporally, meaning that significant time might have to pass) to experience the impact of their disruptive deeds.

The Overarching Argument of the Dissertation

The main argument of this dissertation is that public engagement in the field of rhetoric and composition is more than publishing texts that explain the work of writing studies to outsiders. It also involves the cultivation of strategic relationships made durable by the differing ways academics orient themselves to public problems through what I call public orientations. I offer three specific orientations: agitation, intervention, and disruption, which seem to be the dominant (though certainly not all encompassing) orientations toward public problems related to writing. Each orientation exists on a spectrum and may often overlap

[14] Or, taken to its extreme, incarcerated, victimized, ejected/rejected, boycotted, blacklisted, or discredited.

with others. For instance, agitation can be seen as the default stance of public engagement for practitioners in the field, intervention as a second step toward collaboration and bargaining, and disruption as the cumulative moment when agitation and intervention have failed.[15] But these categories can also be utilized separately depending upon the demands of the rhetorical situations academics face. Are there moments that require disruption? Or are there moments when intervention is preferred? When is it the right time to agitate? In subsequent chapters of this dissertation, I suggest that rhetorically analyzing the public orientations adopted in previous moments in the field of composition yield crucial insights about effective engagement practices, as well as about how engagement can work to potentially restructure and reorient our professional and institutional identities.

Moreover, this project stresses the importance of expanding how we understand, practice, and theorize public engagement because it invites academics to think strategically about how to orient themselves and their work beyond an outdated model of public intellectualism that assumes scholars work in isolation to bestow disciplinary knowledge in layman's terms to nonacademic audiences in the form of popular publications. Warner, Fraser, Farmer, and other modern public sphere theorists remind us that publics are multiple, diverse, constituted through the circulation of discourse, and include publics often *counter* to dominant publics. Therefore, for academics who wish to confront, bridge, and/or connect audiences beyond (and within) the academy about issues related to writing, practitioners must envision engagement as a strategic deployment of disciplinary expertise along a range of public orientations that exploit what Farmer calls the "counterpublic function" of

[15] I also want to stress that I have separated these three terms here artificially. In reality, they do not work linearly in a clear-cut pattern. They *can*, I suppose, but to assume they *should* is too restrictive for the generative potential of public orientations.

composition. Each orientation comes with its own habits, risks, rewards, and potential outcomes, and taken together, can add to a growing repertoire of engagement practices.

Agitation, intervention, and disruption, I argue, are three separate but overlapping stances available to the counterpublic bricoleur. Farmer argues that the *bricoleur* is a multifaceted handyperson able to make room for the situational use of his or her expertise, or rather, one who *makes* counterpublics by utilizing a repertoire of tactics to become intellectual activists (36).[16] The three orientations I theorize in this chapter are examples of situational, nuanced, and inherently *rhetorical* stances available to compositionists wishing to engage in public debates about writing. Against this theoretical backdrop, I devote the remaining chapters in this dissertation to analyzing three moments from composition's past, present, and encroaching future where academics and outside groups had mutual interest in a problem related to writing and/or writing instruction. First, I analyze discourse surrounding Linda Brodkey's disruptive redesign of the first-year writing curriculum at the University of Texas at Austin in the summer of 1990; next, I analyze discourse around the interventional orientation of the NCTE in their partnership with the authors of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) in the summer of 2009; and finally I analyze another interventional orientation, this time of three universities that entered into partnerships with a for-profit company that hosts Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). From my analysis of these three moments in the field, I argue that identifying and naming the public orientations of compositionists who engage in public debates about writing expands what the field means by engagement and ultimately who in the field is capable of being publicly engaged. In other words, an expansion of the concept of public engagement allows us to name important work

[16] Farmer here is borrowing from Levi-Strauss's use of the term *bricolage,* which he defined as a method by which people use "all the available tools and materials "at hand" to accomplish some purpose" (32).

already going on in the field as public engagement, which may help carve out a space for teachers and scholars of all types to reconceptualize their identities as those of publicly engaged scholars.

Methodological Approach

In order to answer the major questions of this project: 1) *how* do practitioners in rhetoric and composition respond to public arguments about writing and 2) what strategies can practitioners adopt for future public arguments about writing—I apply a mixed-method approach that combines case study and the rhetorical analysis of public discourse. Specifically, I rhetorically analyze public discourse from three moments in the field when writing studies specialists rely upon public orientations in some way to respond to public arguments about writing. The texts I analyze range from newspapers, magazines, press releases, scholarly research, public policy reports, Listservs, and blogs—to find rhetoric and composition practitioners adopting public orientations to engage in some way with a public argument about writing.

Specifically, I define these *moments* as specific bodies of written discourse that emerged around a particular rhetorical occasion related to writing and/or the teaching of writing. This includes both texts geared toward mass publics, like newspapers, as well as texts intended for academic publics, such as scholarly research. If publics, as I understand them, are multiple, diverse, and constituted by the circulation of discourse, then there are many different kinds of texts available that speak to the ways writing studies practitioners become engaged in public issues related to writing. Many of my texts come in the form of newspaper articles. In the classic "Public Opinion and Teaching Writing," Anne Ruggles Gere analyzes newspapers to argue that "popular press publications [are] an expression of

public opinion about teaching writing" (265). In other words, analyzing texts like newspapers that are geared toward mass publics can show, to a large degree, the public's attitudes toward writing, and this discourse has a lot to teach us about how writing is valued. However, nonofficial discourse can also reveal public orientations toward writing. Thus, in addition to consulting institutionalized media, I also seek out nonofficial discourse like academic research, student newspapers, alternative magazines, blogs, and Listservs to analyze compositionists' orientations toward public issues related to writing. In *Distant Publics*, Jenny Rice similarly understands the study of public discourse as "the best site for making interventions into material space" (7), and utilizes what she calls a "publics approach" to "uncover the ways people read themselves into these rhetorical acts" (15). Drawing from Gerard Hauser's definition of publics as the exchange of vernacular discourse, Rice situates her method in terms of a rhetorical public sphere in which "publics materialize as clusters of conversations happening at various times, across different places." This, she writes, "is what Hauser calls 'vernacular voices,' or the networks of nonofficial spaces from which discourse on public matters emerges" (19). For these "nonofficial places," Rice analyzes letters in popular and underground newspapers, pictures, songs, poems, blogs, message boards, bumper stickers, flyers, community newsletters, rallies, and neighborhood meetings—or anywhere in which discursive and non-discursive exchanges happen.

Taking a cue from Gere and Rice, I analyze how writing studies practitioners harness public orientations to engage in public issues related to writing by consulting both journalistic archives and also the vernacular voices about writing. Together, these approaches provide a substantive way to map out public *orientations* writing studies specialists use to engage in public issues. My hope is that this research expands the concept of engagement

beyond merely reproducing disciplinary knowledge for nonacademic audiences by offering a range of examples of how writing studies scholars draw upon agitational, interventional, and disruptive orientations in varying degrees to engage rhetorically in public problems related to writing, which complicates adages in the field about writing studies' lack of public relevance and also the different ways engagement can occur.

Chapter Synopses

Chapter two argues that disruptive orientations are forms of public engagement that are 1) often constituted by moral panics and are 2) socially and historically contingent. As evidence, I analyze the public discourse surrounding the controversy at the University of Texas at Austin in the summer of 1990, when compositionist Linda Brodkey came under severe public scrutiny over her disruptive redesign of the freshman writing course *Writing About Difference*. Brodkey's disruptive orientation toward her curricular redesign, I argue, was a form of public engagement in the way it disrupted dominant public perceptions of writing and writing instruction by producing a kind of moral panic in response to the course's implementation. This specific example from the field's past also highlights how disruption has historically functioned as a form of public engagement in rhetoric and composition, and the need to be able to account for the role played by disruption as practitioners engage in future public arguments about writing.

Specifically, I consult primary texts in the form of the UT student newspaper, the *Daily Texan*, and other regional and national newspapers covering the controversy at that time including the *Austin American Statesman, Houston Chronicle, and New York Times,* in addition to other popular publications, underground magazines, media accounts, and academic scholarship. The fierce opposition to *Writing about Difference* and the institutional

backlash that resulted in Brodkey's departure from the university, I argue, was disruptive because she was oriented not toward critique but toward transforming the status quo, and her efforts ultimately created unexpected reverberations throughout UT's institutional culture and the culture of the field of rhetoric and composition more broadly that can still be felt today.

Chapter 3 argues that *interventional* orientations are forms of public engagement that work through sustained partnerships with establishment groups or groups with significant power and/or influence over a particular public problem of mutual concern. As evidence, I analyze discourse documenting a partnership between the NCTE and the authors of the Common Core, a set of national standards for K-12 curriculum developed in 2009 and released in 2010. The NCTE's orientation toward the partnership, I argue, was a form of public engagement because it facilitated a collaborative relationship aimed at bringing the disciplinary knowledge of writing studies to bear on an important public problem related to writing: education language arts standards. The NCTE's values clashed significantly with those of the Common Core authors, however, a gap they were unable to mitigate without the sustained engagement needed for reciprocity and genuine intellectual exchange.

Specifically I consult the final draft of the English Language Arts (ELA) standards composed by the cadre of Common Core authors, in addition to a collaborative response to an early draft of the ELA standards authored by an ad hoc committee of NCTE. Ultimately, while many see the partnership as a failure (NCTE's suggestions were not incorporated in any meaningful way into the final draft of the ELA standards), I argue that NCTE's interventional orientation in this debate on writing standards had unanticipated results,

including a reinvigorated conversation in the field about assessment, accountability, and writing standards in secondary and postsecondary education.

Chapter four argues that interventional orientations *also* benefit from sustained reflection on the situational characteristics of the partnership. As evidence, I analyze discourse surrounding the awarding of 12 Gates Foundation grants worth nearly 3 million dollars to teams at Duke, Georgia Tech, and Ohio State to partner with for-profit company Coursera to host Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) at their institutions. Each MOOC team's orientation toward the partnership, I argue, was a form of public engagement because it facilitated a partnership with an establishment group that brought broader national and international attention to the risks and rewards of MOOCs in higher education as well as increased attention to the writing programs at their institution—a move that impacts multiple intersecting publics.

Specifically, I analyze in each case digital and print coverage of the MOOC grants in newspapers, press releases, scholarly research that emerged from the engagement, and the public responses to the MOOCs from other writing specialists on a variety of digital media, including listserv messages and blogs. This discourse especially reveals how interventional orientations not only benefit from sustained engagement, but are also predicated on the influence of four key situational factors: motivations, benefits, costs and contexts. By critically reflecting on these characteristics of their intervening, I argue, writing studies specialists can more productively engage in public issues related to writing through interventional orientations.

To many scholars in rhetoric and composition, it is evident that the field is in the midst of a new intellectual era of scholarship and teaching (Mathieu, Weisser). Public

writing, community engagement, digital composition—these new directions invite us to turn outward to analyze writing situations and audiences beyond the walls of our classrooms. This distinct turn toward the public also allows us to reflect on the ghostly presence of legitimation that hovers over 50 years of professional literature. The civic legacy of the study and teaching of writing also compels us to look more deeply into how we can become responsive to the communities and institutions in which we live and serve. Thus, this project calls for more public engagement and offers a set of research questions that attempt to discern how the field engages in public issues where writing matters and how the field can engage in public issues in more situated and rhetorically sophisticated ways. Investigating these questions, I argue, will lead the discipline to a more dynamic and productive understanding of writing studies and the public turn.

CHAPTER 2

Disruptive Orientations: Linda Brodkey and the 'Troubles at Texas'

Introduction

In the last chapter I argued that public engagement in rhetoric and composition can be characterized by a range of stances or *public orientations* toward issues related to writing. Engagement, moreover, is not only about building a reputation through the act of publishing texts for wider audiences but also building relationships between and across different groups through orientations. Counterpublics, or groups that circulate discourse in a conflictual relationship to the interests of the dominant public sphere, are crucial to this understanding of public engagement because they carve out spaces for and name the ways groups in power-deficits respond to public problems. Frank Farmer, extending this debate about counterpublics, argues that practitioners in rhetoric and composition can be counterpublic in certain situations, particularly in relation to establishment groups who have largely determined "how we get represented publicly" (147). By harnessing the counterpublic function of composition, Farmer argues, practitioners in the field of composition can better align their disciplinary inquiries to the interests and needs of public problems related to writing and writing instruction. I argue that through the articulation of three public stances: agitation, intervention, and disruption, the field can gain a better sense of what public engagement can look like from this perspective and a broader understanding of how the intellectual work of the field has already been publicly engaged in the past and can be publicly engaged looking forward.

In this chapter I single out a specific moment in the history of the field when practitioners in composition harnessed public orientations to engage in public debates about

writing. I argue that Linda Brodkey, who was hired by the University of Texas at Austin in the summer of 1990 to revamp the freshman composition course *English 306: Rhetoric and Writing* (E306), cultivated a *disruptive orientation* in her establishment of a new course, *English 306: Writing about Difference*. Brodkey's curricular redesign was a form of public engagement in the way it disrupted dominant public perceptions of writing and writing instruction by producing a kind of moral panic in response to the course's implementation. This specific example from the field's past also highlights how disruption has historically functioned as a form of public engagement in rhetoric and composition and the need to be able to account for the role played by disruption as practitioners engage in future public arguments about writing.

It is important to note that Brodkey's redesign of E306 was not initially disruptive. The new course was actually collaboratively designed and vetted through several administrative channels. In late spring and early summer of 1990, Brodkey, in conjunction with the Lower Division English Policy Committee (LDEPC), revised and submitted the syllabus for *Writing about Difference* which "focused on argumentation and required students to read and write critically about "difference" in the context of antidiscrimination law and discrimination lawsuits" (Brodkey, "Making a Federal Case" 236).[1] The proposed changes were vetted, successfully passed through multiple levels, and by late May, the UT News and Information Services published a preview of the new course. By early June, the

[1] Brodkey writes in *Writing Permitted* that the university had fired most of the lectures in English in the mid 1980s and by 1989, when Brodkey was hired, "only a handful of graduate students were enrolled in the Ph.D. program in rhetoric and composition," to which the department responded by reducing what had been a two-sequence course (one in writing about literature and another in expository writing) to just one course on expository writing. The new writing course was taught mostly by graduate students in literature who were, as Brodkey writes, largely ignorant "to writing as a field of study" (140-141). Thus, the common syllabus, for Brodkey, was also an attempt to "teach the teachers how to teach writing while teaching writing to the students enrolled in their classes" (211).

Austin American Statesman reported that the proposed changes to the course focusing primarily on difference were a "good step" for the university.

However, by late July, through the concerted efforts of several UT faculty members, backed in large part by conservative organizations like the National Association of Scholars (NAS), the debate about E306 reached new heights, and the ensuing interdepartmental politics and mounting public criticism of the course garnered unprecedented local and national attention, and E306 was postponed indefinitely on July 23, 1990 (Barton). Six months later, the Dean of the Liberal Arts resigned. By February, 1991, Brodkey resigned as well (Friedman 9). And even though Brodkey had general support from the faculty and the LDEPC, establishment groups, whose values clashed significantly with Brodkey's, wielded their extensive power to thwart Brodkey's efforts and eventually forced her out of her position. What happened over the course of that year could be described as a fiercely contested public debate about the purpose of writing instruction, academic freedom, and what Sharon Crowley has described as a political and cultural battle over "the mutual property" of freshman English (231), an ordeal Brodkey most certainly did not anticipate during her tenure at UT.

While several scholars interpret the *Battle of Texas* as a unique moment in the field when composition butted heads with powerful political forces outside of the discipline's control, or as a warning to other writing program administrators about the powerful forces working against compositionists who desire to formulate progressive writing curricula—we still have a lot to learn from what came to be known as the *Battle of Texas*. For example, Devon Christina Holmes's dissertation on E306 argues that studying the *Battle of Texas* can help us "locate hopeful possibilities for other compositionists who are committed to

implementing innovative first-year composition courses but find themselves confronted by powerful opponents with competing perceptions about the compositionist's identity, authority, ethos and the role of first-year composition courses" (124). Here, Holmes offers a Deweyian pragmatic perspective that Brodkey *could* have implemented to compete rhetorically with what she calls "powerful conservative forces" (95). While I agree with Holmes that the *Battle of Texas* can help us formulate more effective and meaningful ways to respond to powerful public and departmental critiques of progressive writing pedagogy, the discourse around the *Battle of Texas* also reveals how E306 was a disruptive form of public engagement—an orientation toward usurping and intruding into public perceptions about what writing was and how it should be taught. Through the analysis of local and national newspapers, magazines, press releases, and academic scholarship, I argue that traditional interpretations that speculate as to how Brodkey might have *won* the debate through collaborative engagement practices are misplaced. When understood through the lens of public orientations, the discourse around the debate reveals instead that Brodkey's disruptive orientation confronted traditional narratives about writing and writing instruction. In other words, Brodkey's work that summer had more of an impact as a form of public engagement than has previously been given credit.

Specifically in this chapter I am using the *Battle of Texas* as an historical case study of public arguments about writing, which I define as a specific body of discourse that emerged around a particular rhetorical occasion related to writing and/or the teaching of writing. The primary texts from this case, which include the UT student newspaper, the *Daily Texan*, and other newspapers covering the controversy at that time including the *Austin American Statesman, Houston Chronicle, and New York Times,* in addition to other popular

publications, magazines, media accounts, and academic scholarship,[2] reveal three main claims: 1) Brodkey's curricular redesign was a distinct form of public engagement. While UT students debated E306 through the UT student newspaper *The Daily Texan*, and many UT faculty members took advantage of a range of mechanisms to engage the public, from scholarly journals to local and national newspapers and other media, Brodkey instead adopted a disruptive stance through her position as a program developer and professor. Bringing her disruptive orientation to bear on her duties as director of composition, Brodkey contributed to the public debate in a unique way, not through publishing about the work of composition to nonacademics but through her ethical and defiant stance toward writing, a stance communicated by her refusal to compromise and insistence on pushing the course through. And this kind of defiance, I argue, should be characterized as publicly engaged; 2) The journalistic archive of responses to E306 in the press indicates a moral panic, which highlights just how deeply disruptive E306 at UT at that time; 3) Disruption is culturally and historically contingent. The historical context of E306, represented by the changing relationship between literature and composition in the university; the debates within composition at the time about politicization and radicalism in the writing classroom; and the local and national debate about multiculturalism in higher education—all contributed to and allowed for the disruption to occur.

Approaching *Writing about Difference* as a form of public engagement called disruption necessitates the field reinterpret some long-held assumptions about the discipline as unengaged and irrelevant. The fact alone that Brodkey's course redesign came to signify for many what was wrong with higher education in America shows how composition as a

[2] All citations from the *Daily Texan* came from archival research at the *Daily Texan* archives held at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin.

field has always been high-stakes and deeply engaged in public arguments about writing. This analysis also reveals how curricular revolutions like the one at UT in 1990 are distinct forms of public engagement and pushes the concept of engagement beyond the deployment of outdated images of the traditional (and masculine) Public Intellectual, opening up a space for scholars with a range of vested interests, backgrounds, and subject-positions to call their work publicly engaged. Before I elucidate my claims in more depth, however, it is important first to situate them in some historical context.

The Troubles at Texas: Some Context

The trouble at Texas began in the fall of 1989, when Linda Brodkey was hired as Director of Lower-Division English at the University of Texas at Austin. Brodkey immediately went to work that winter, constructing plans for a common syllabus for all graduate students teaching E306, who, she notes, were mostly PhD students in literary studies. The five-member faculty LDEPC, comprised of Brodkey, the director, English department chair Joseph Kruppa and faculty members John Ruszkiewicz, James Duban, and Allan Gribben, began recruiting graduate students to join the policy committee. In April of 1990, the LDEPC voted 4-0 with one abstention to adopt Paula Rothenberg's *Racism and Sexism* as a supplementary reader for the course. While several LDEPC committee members expressed reservations about both the course and the Rothenberg text, by May the course had garnered what Brodkey determined to be "overwhelming support" ("Synopsis" 8-9 qtd in Skinnell 150). In mid-May Brodkey and a group of graduate students formed what became known as the Ad Hoc Syllabus Writing Group and got to work crafting E306, to be taught in September of 1990.

Brodkey's efforts to revise E306 were inherently collaborative. Brodkey writes that the Ad Hoc Syllabus Writing Group and the LDEPC met weekly and sometimes bi-weekly to craft the syllabus into a course on argument taught through the lens of Supreme Court opinions on antidiscrimination cases (*Writing Permitted* 230). E306 originally relied on two supplementary readers: Paula Rothenberg's *Racism and Sexism* as well as Maxine Hairston and John Ruszkiewicz's *Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers* (*Writing Permitted* 212). Rothenberg's book, however, was scrapped by the syllabus committee in June (Driver). Brodkey writes that the reasons were mostly pedagogical: "Rothenberg's *Racism and Sexism* was a problem for us," she writes. "We couldn't figure out how to use enough of it to justify asking students to buy the book. We reasoned that we would have to drop either the book or the court opinions. We decided to drop the book because we believed the legal opinions to be more critical to learning how to analyze, evaluate, and write arguments" (*Writing Permitted* 186). However, Rothenberg's book also proved to be more controversial than Brodkey had anticipated. In the coming months, primarily due to the efforts of UT English faculty members, Rothenberg's *Racism and Sexism* was central to critiques that E306 was evidence of indoctrination and political bias, even after the textbook had been dropped. LDEPC and English faculty member Alan Gribben, the most vocal opponent of Brodkey's course, told the UT student newspaper the *Daily Texan* that Rothenberg's text was an extremist "sociology textbook" that did not "meet the standards of the University" because of its "Marxist line of questioning" that presupposed "America has failed its mission." This point of view, Gribben said, is not within the purview of English and moreover, "I just happen to believe that freshman shouldn't have to subscribe themselves to this very jaundiced point of view" (Driver). Brodkey notes in her reflective essay on the experiences at UT "Making a

Federal Case out of Difference," that even after Rothenberg's *Racism and Sexism* was taken off the syllabus, journalists and pundits continued to critique the course as if the book still remained. "Journalists not only kept discussing the book but also simply took the position that if the committee voted to adopt the reader, the book reflected our politics," she writes.

> And since [the media] focused on the Rothenberg text and ignored the course's writing assignments, when we eventually dropped the book, no amount of explanation could convince those on the scent of a 'good' story that our reasons were pedagogical, once opponents had publicly declared the book radical and our motives political." (244)

As far as Brodkey was concerned, the inherently collaborative nature of the process of designing the syllabus in addition to the bilateral approval of its contents were evidence enough that that the charges of bias were baseless. Moreover, her disdain of the media-coverage for sensationalizing the story and her contempt for E306's *opponents* who "publicly declared the book radical" are early evidence of her disruptive orientation (244). In other words, Brodkey's remarks here reflect an orientation toward the debate that eschewed the importance of participating in public arguments through traditional media outlets, as well as disregard for collaborating with her detractors toward a compromise (a stance that I would call interventional).

At the core of E306 was a focus on writing and close rhetorical analysis, which resembles a traditional composition syllabus with conventional writing and argument-based assignments. For example, the syllabus asked students to work in peer groups to dissect court opinions, write responses to supplementary readings, and conduct individual and group presentations about them. Each student was to read two court opinions and five essays. Four

of the essays were assigned to the entire class, and the fifth essay was attached to a court opinion and assigned to individual writing groups. There were also course packets assigned to each group which contained all the reading materials. The *Scott Foresman Handbook for Writers* covered style, usage, syntax, fallacies, peer review tips, and other rhetorical strategies. Two of the essays, "Making a Difference" and "Sources of Difference" were from Martha Minow's then unpublished manuscript *Making All the Difference: Inclusion, Exclusion, and American Law*. The third essay on the reading list was "White Privilege and Male Privilege" by Peggy McIntosh, and the fourth was Richard Klugar's "The Spurs of Texas are Upon You," from his book *Simple Justice: the History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality*, which analyzed the 1950 Supreme Court case *Sweatt v. Painter*, the decision that ended legal segregation at the University of Texas. As stated above, in addition to the four essays and court opinion that every student in the course read in common, each writing group (there were 5 groups) would be assigned a unique court opinion and essay (*Writing Permitted* 211).[3] The syllabus also required significant student writing. In addition to in-class writing, each student was to write ten brief "scripts" that responded to and summarized the arguments in their readings. The scripts relied on simple prompts that asked students to summarize the claims, warrants, and grounds for the plaintiffs in the cases or the arguments made in the supplementary readings. There were also six longer essays, which asked students to analyze assumptions of the readings, unpack and complicate stereotypes, and summarize and evaluate both the majority and dissenting opinions, as well as the cases of the defendants and plaintiffs (*Writing Permitted*

[3] Devon Christina Holmes's dissertation *What Composition Studies Can Learn from the Battle of Texas* goes into greater detail about the readings, court cases, and their significance to the theory of the course, and Brodkey's *Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only* prints the syllabus in its entirety in addition to the readings they had planned to use.

211). In other words, at a pedagogical level, the syllabus and the course were more a Toulmin-based method of analysis than what her detractors eventually labeled as a subversive attempt to indoctrinate hoards of freshman students into a Marxist ideology.

However, while working in writing groups, analyzing warrants of arguments and reading supplementary material that depicts the social and cultural context of those arguments might seem like a unremarkable approach to writing pedagogy, it is also important to note that the main difference here was that this was proposed for a *common syllabus* to be taught in *every* introductory writing course at UT, not to mention the fact that the cases, readings, and topics were prescribed for the student in advance. This narrow focus, many argued, opened up a space to unfairly politicize the writing classroom, which was endemic to the course's detractors of the political nature of higher education in general. For example, on July 24, 1990, John Ruszkiewicz, member of the LDEPC, wrote to the *Daily Texan* condemning E306, noting that it was devalued traditional rhetorical pedagogy, which he defined as the "art of writing, research, and thinking which will benefit students in both the long and short term." Ruszkiewicz objected to Brodkey's syllabus on the grounds that it limited the topics for students to write about, noting that "students are less likely to write significant and challenging pieces when they find themselves constrained by a subject matter that seems to hide a political agenda." A member of the LDEPC until July 11 that month (when he resigned), Ruszkiewicz objected to the course because it was unable to "preserve a rhetorical approach that I and many others have, in the past, employed successfully in teaching writing." American Literature professor James Duban echoed these sentiments in his letter to the *Daily Texan* in August 1990 when he wrote that "social, political, and legal topics" prescribed to students in a required freshman writing course "can interfere with the

teaching of basic writing skills." Two years later, in 1994's *Writing Theory and Critical Theory*, Mark Andrew Clark echoed Duban's sentiment and argued that Brodkey's prescription of topics in advance in E306 was a major inhibitor of its implementation at UT: "To take away a student's power to choose a topic that interests him or her, as well as a teacher's power to generate a topic, can be as oppressive as what Brodkey claims trade book publishers impose on students and teachers" (273-74). In her own writing on the matter, though, Brodkey argues that the main objection to E306 was not the prescribed topics for students, but a theoretical clash of values, with expressivist pedagogy on one side and a theoretical framework on the other that saw the personal *as* political. Brodkey notes that the whole point of the course was to demonstrate that argument means "every assertion is arguable (including those made by laws and by the courts, and those published in scholarly journals and handbooks, not to mention those expressed by their teachers and classmates)" (*Writing Permitted* 143). That Brodkey differed from her detractors in the discussion of whether or not writing pedagogy assesses form or content is another indicator of how disruptive the programmatic implementation of E306 actually was.

As more and more faculty began publicly attacking E306 in the press, it became clear that the major critiques had less to do with the pedagogy of the course and more with its theoretical assertion that writing is a field of study with content, not merely training for other content areas. Along with Duban, Gribben launched an aggressive attack against E306 on June 18th, 1990, in a letter to the editor in *The Daily Texan* arguing that the English Department, "without even pausing for a vote," is on the verge of implementing a policy of "explaining to presumably benighted UT students how they ought to feel about issues of ethnicity and feminism." This focus on difference, Gribben warns, asks graduate students

who lack "any benefits of formal training or objective methodology" to "pose as political scientists, legal historians, statistical sociologists, cultural critics, political philosophers, and group psychologists." This assertion of writing as having its own subject matter, he writes, is an "arrogation of subject matter belonging to other fields." Gribben urged faculty and graduate students to "resist this presumptuous move to grade them on 'politically correct' thought in a required English course." On June 23rd Gribben published another letter in the *Austin American Statesman,* charging Brodkey's syllabus with falling prey to "the current mania for converting every academic subject into a politicized study of race, class and gender." To Gribben, the course was evidence of "the most massive effort at thought-control ever attempted on the campus." Gribben writes:

> As a UT English professor who has instructed 33 sections of courses emphasizing writing skills, I hope that alumni and other taxpaying Texas citizens will remind [the LDEPC] that if so fundamental a course as English 306 can be blatantly politicized, then the state Legislature and the UT faculty, administration and board of regents have a right to consider abolishing required English courses.

The next day, June 24, the *New York Times* took the story to a national public. And that week Gribben also appeared on several radio shows to continue publicizing his dissent (Ackerman). Duban, Ruszkiewicz, and Gribben's media blitz embodies some of the major clashes with Brodkey's version of E306: the understanding of composition and composition pedagogy as the teaching and perfecting of *form* on the one hand and composition as the

study, creation, and assessment of *content* on the other—a divide that immediately cuts to the core of Brodkey's disruptive orientation because it transgresses disciplinary boundaries.[4]

The clash between form and content in the writing classroom at UT Austin came to a head in Gribben's July 18th letter published in the *Daily Texan* entitled "Statement of Academic Concern," which was signed by 56 professors across campus. "We regret the action of the English Department of the University of Texas at Austin," the letter read, "that transformed English 306: Rhetoric and Composition into a course on "Difference—Racism and Sexism."[5] Their main concern was that Brodkey's focus on difference "distorts the fundamental purpose of a composition class" which is to "enhance a student's ability to write." Brodkey's new curriculum subordinates "instruction in writing to the discussion of social issues and, potentially, to the advancement of specific political positions." Moreover, the letter contends, the instructional materials that supplement the course are insufficient because they "may not include materials on logic and argumentation," which leaves students in the dark about "what standards their papers are being judged or to what extent an instructor's political opinions might be influencing the evaluation of written work." The course, they write, is "biased in its examination of controversial political questions" by implementing "a single hegemonic view" in favor of "a full spectrum of cogently argued positions." This advertisement, Brodkey notes, indicates the point when "local frenzy over the syllabus seemed to come to a head" (*Writing Permitted* 184). Five days later, the Dean of Liberal Arts Standish Meacham postponed the course indefinitely. Within those five days, the president of the university, the dean, and the department chair met privately and "without

[4] For Instance, Brodkey notes that when composition instructors eschew the notion that writing pedagogy is merely transmitting lessons on grammar and style and instead assert an authority over assessing the "quality of assertions writers make," they in turn "transgress disciplinary boundaries" (*Writing Permitted* 230).
[5] The phrase "racism and sexism" was not the name of the course, and seems instead to have been taken from the Rothenberg textbook, which was officially scrapped from the syllabus nearly a month before (Driver).

providing the policy committee or the department any formal procedure for revising," they voted to postpone the course. Brodkey writes that "no terms were given in the first instance, nor later, because the president of the university refused even to meet and discuss the syllabus with the committee" (*Writing Permitted* 147).

While the language surrounding the cancelation indicated merely postponement, it was clear that Brodkey's version of E306 had no future at the University of Texas. Dean Meacham wrote in a memo that the postponement was necessary in order to "address concerns and misunderstandings about the course expressed within the university community." Meacham's intention, he told the department, was to work out the kinks, allow time for more planning, and to "ensure the best course possible." In her book about the events, however, Brodkey writes that Meacham, in his statement, "aligns himself with neither the administration nor those of us who developed the syllabus, but stands alone, thus disclaiming any responsibility *he* might have to defend the committee and the department" (*Writing Permitted* 181). The postponement, Brodkey writes, in effect "condemned the dean, the chair, and me to a relentless and fruitless round of fall meetings—with department chairs, deans, and wealthy alumni and donors, many of whom seemed impressed by our plans; some of whom wished we would teach grammar, spelling, and punctuation instead" (*Writing Permitted* 182). While Meacham was in favor of the "imaginative and exciting" syllabus, and while he claimed that he postponed the course "to enhance the chances of the course's success rather than postpone it into oblivion," the effect was just the opposite (Friedman 8).

Writing about Difference quickly became a lightning rod for some of the many theoretical tensions underlying the administering of composition in the university. Ruszkiewicz, Duban, and Gribben, in their objections (despite what Brodkey described as

general consensus around the course's initial approval), reveal more poignantly some of the fundamental clashes between Brodkey's postmodern approach to writing pedagogy on the one hand, which understood language as its own content, and the others' current-traditional approach to language on the other, which understood writing pedagogy as the perfection of form in preparation for more *legitimate* content-area courses in the university. Brodkey's frustration with the way her detractors went to the local and student newspapers to publicize their discontent, in addition to her postmodern approach to writing, also support the case that Brodkey's orientation toward administering E306 was fundamentally *disruptive*, especially when E306, in a matter of months, emerged as a political battleground where the nature and meaning of writing and writing instruction served as a metaphor for larger social and political debates about the changing theoretical landscape of composition studies.

Existing Academic Scholarship on the Battle of Texas

Most treatments of the *Battle of Texas* seek to find alternative strategies Brodkey could have implemented to *win* the battle or to offer particular theoretical frameworks that would have helped her engage the issue more effectively (Holmes). Or, scholars argue that the forces Brodkey faced that summer were all but insurmountable and the results were unfortunately inevitable (McClelland, Anderson). Brodkey herself was incensed that the newfound publicity surrounding E306 shifted the terms of the debate to a kind of "political agonism" where disagreements could no longer be hashed out intellectually but were instead "transmogrified" into conspiracy theories, scandals, and cover-ups. Increasing the scope of the debate, in other words, "drained of all intellectual content what properly would have been a field-based disagreement about writing pedagogy" (Brodkey, "Making a Federal Case" 259). However, when scholars offer alternative strategies they necessarily imply that the

strategy Brodkey used was ineffective. Brodkey's orientation in this debate, though, did not prioritize collaboration with detractors or what I describe in Chapter 1 as intervention, a kind of rhetorical collaboration in which groups at a power deficit partner with establishment groups while simultaneously arguing for and positioning themselves to benefit in some way. Brodkey indeed collaborated with her various committees, but that collaboration was only within the purview of her position as Director of Lower-Division English. She was not necessarily interested in collaborating *across* groups. Her orientation, in other words, was about meaningful change that first and foremost aligned with her theoretical disposition toward postmodern writing pedagogy, *not* making concessions to establishment groups. This is why, for Brodkey, changing the venue of argumentation signaled an unfair shift that focused less on theoretical rigor or intellectual dissent and more on the perilous cult of public opinion: "Faculty members who publicize their intellectual disagreements in the popular press," she writes, "not only valorize received opinion, as translated by journalists, over scholarly opinion but also shift the terms of argumentation from reason to ethos" ("Making a Federal Case" 243). Brodkey's disruptive orientation explains why she was not interested in debating E306 in any other venues.

Moreover, overlooking the nature of Brodkey's public orientation in the E306 debate leads to misunderstandings of her goals as a WPA and her impact on the field. Ben W. McClelland, for example, in Clifford and Schilb's 1994 *Writing Theory and Critical Theory* writes that Brodkey had ignored the warning signs of a coming storm and failed to navigate the testy "political rivers" by staying "informed and [knowing] when to secure the vessel against potentially damaging wind and water." Where Brodkey failed, McClelland argues, was in not understanding and seeking out the "local weather conditions carefully enough."

By not seeking out her opponents, or taking into consideration the historical context of the English department at the University of Texas, McClelland argues that Brodkey failed to see that "the university's policy waters were extremely turbulent and that the flood watch announcements were continually being broadcast" ("A Writing Program Administrator's Response" 268-269). But this viewpoint fails to see E306 as a revolt against the status quo, or what Patricia Harkin called a "*non serviam*" against political detractors who saw writing pedagogy as the teaching of correctness. Harkin argues that Brodkey "took language itself" as the object of study through her assertion that "language produces knowledge and power and selves." The controversy, in Harkin's mind, centered on that fact that Brodkey, in essence, "trespassed on the academy's orderly arrangement by disciplines and usurped the places that heretofore belonged to philosophy…or law…" (284). Harkin's use of the word "usurp" and "trespass" are more aligned with my argument that Brodkey's own scholarship and actions reveal a stance aligned less with a desire to *test the waters* and more with using her theoretical and ethical disposition to "trespass" the boundaries of the academy.

But few scholars go much further into the exploration of Brodkey's *non-serviam* as a kind of public engagement. Virginia Anderson does takes up this concept ten years after the incident in her article "Property Rights: Exclusion as Moral Action in 'The Battle of Texas,'" but she argues that Brodkey was unsuccessful *because* of her efforts to maintain strict boundaries over the venue of debate about E306. According to Anderson, Brodkey's unwillingness to compromise and her obstinate refusal to address her detractors in the press unfairly constructed a "managed public" of academic experts who had assumed the right to debate the pedagogical merits of E306 (448). But when the venue changed, Brodkey was unable to contain and manage this public, Anderson writes, which compromised her ability to

"operate *in* the public" once she was "forced to address it" (456). By assuming that others would share her claim of ownership over the role of composition, Anderson continues, Brodkey neglected to listen to all the voices that "[shape] our space" and failed to make a significant impact within those spaces (469). However, Anderson's argument here is predicated on the assumption that a) Brodkey did not make an impact and that b) the input of her detractors was valuable to her in the first place. But just because the course was canceled, I argue, does not mean that it was an unsuccessful form of public engagement, and just because Gribben et al. aired their grievances in the press and Brodkey chose not to does not mean that Brodkey was disengaged. In other words, Brodkey's orientation toward the E306 debate privileged a usurpation of the status quo, a trespassing of disciplinary boundaries, and a tacit acceptance of the consequences that entailed (which *is* I argue, a form of engagement). Brodkey's orientation did not signify an openness to collaborating with Gribben et al (what I call intervention). David Bleich, responding to Anderson in a 2001 issue of *College English*, argued that "Brodkey was censored, in the tradition of dictators censoring those who speak out. I don't think I want to stop and listen patiently to the dictator's 'narrative'" (370). In other words, Brodkey was at a distinct power deficit in the E306 debate and preferred to orient herself toward the problem by harnessing her power as WPA and her theoretical/ethical framework as a postmodern feminist writing theorist. She was not interested in addressing the larger public created by the journalistic circulation of discourse because her public orientation privileged large-scale social change through usurping traditional boundaries, not collaborating across them.

Anderson's main point, though, that the notion of an academic/public divide is a myth, is well taken. Ryan Skinnell, for example, rightly argues that the *Battle of Texas* shows

how "the kinds of writing and pedagogy compositionists take as their intellectual domain are always already part of public conversations" (144). But like Anderson, Skinnell ultimately argues that the E306 ordeal shows how "scholars in composition studies need to actively foster a productive ethos for talking about writing and pedagogy in the public sphere" (144). I want to posit in this chapter that just because Brodkey did not publish in the press as widely as her detractors does not mean that she did not have a public ethos. Her disruptive orientation toward E306 in which she utilized her abilities as WPA to programmatically implement a freshman writing course centered on difference *was* a form of public engagement that *did* contribute significantly to public discourse (as I will outline below). Moreover, her effort to stake her claim as an administrator is not necessarily evidence of maintaining a mythic binary between public and academic as much as it is merely holding her ground.

Brodkey's Disruptive Orientation

Through a discussion of the historical context and the existing academic scholarship on the *Battle of Texas,* so far I have been scaffolding a claim that Brodkey's disruptive orientation, which appears not to have been open to collaboration and partnership in its rejection of the change in venue from committee meetings to local and national newspapers, was indeed a form of public engagement constituted through a disruptive orientation. The first claim I make from the discourse around the E306 debate, moreover, is that Brodkey's curricular work that summer can and should be called publicly engaged in its disruption of dominant narratives about writing and writing instruction at that time. David Bleich's use of the word "censorship" and "dictator" in his 2001 description of the relationship between those who wanted to implement E306 and those who opposed and eventually squashed their

plans might sound hyperbolic. However, particularly important to my claim that Brodkey's orientation toward E306 harnessed a disruptive orientation is my definition of the term disruption as a range of strategies that advocates for widespread social change in a context marked by an inherent power-differential between counterpublic academics interested in disrupting the status quo and establishment groups interested in maintaining it. In other words, establishment groups, as Bower et al. mention, wield significant power over counterpublics who wish to disrupt the normative social order. So when Bleich described what happened that summer as dictatorial, he may not have been exaggerating the importance of this debate as he interpreted it.

Moreover, Brodkey's orientation toward the E306 debate is clearly disruptive as opposed to agitational or interventional. The clearest elucidation of this disruptive orientation is in her larger monograph on the topic, which was published several years after she left the University of Texas. In *Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only*, Brodkey describes her experiences working with the detractors to E306 as initially a collaborative effort to implement a meaningful freshman writing curriculum, an endeavor that slowly became volatile and unproductive. This shift, Brodkey argues, transformed the characteristics of the discourse from *problems* to *troubles.* "Unlike problems," Brodkey writes, "troubles are not solved by talking things over or sitting down at bargaining tables. Compromises are unthinkable because opponents see their interests as mutually exclusive" (188). As soon as the public talk surrounding E306 transformed into *troubles*, in other words, interventional orientations became ineffectual. Troubles, Brodkey describes, "are the insurmountable problems that result when local problems are appropriated by a group that is not interested in resolving local problems but is interested, instead, in exploiting local problems for its own

purposes" (188). Here, I argue, is the clearest evidence that Brodkey's orientation toward the E306 debate was fundamentally disruptive: sitting down at some kind of "bargaining table," according to Brodkey, makes no difference when those with whom you are arguing have no mutual interest in the problems as you see them. What would be the point of a kind of interventional orientation, Brodkey asks:

> I find it difficult to imagine, moreover, what resolutions the campus would have debated. "Resolved: Extremism in the defense of academic privilege is no vice"? What would have been the point of these debates? To confirm that professors who know nothing about the theory, research, and practice of teaching composition are entitled to 'their opinions?' To educate voters? Alumni? Donors? Students? To stage forensic spectacles, on the order of televised presidential debates, for the amusement of journalists? (*Writing Permitted* 186).

As far as Brodkey was concerned, the main opposition to E306 came from "extremists" who "know nothing" about teaching writing, and moreover, who are interested merely in the spectacle of debate and not meaningful change to the status quo. Brodkey's orientation can be read here as privileging the latter, which might explain some of the decisions she made regarding her approach to implementing E306, like not getting involved in the heated editorial battles.

Academically, Brodkey also situated her work as disruptive. In the preface of *Writing Permitted*, for example, Brodkey describes her professional agenda in terms of an *interruption*. Invoking Michel Foucault's definition of polemics as that which makes "a mockery of discussion," Brodkey writes that her work seeks to "interrupt" the polemical

forces that pit "theory against practice, research against practice, form against content, process against product, poetry against prose, and argument against narrative" (xii). In the composition classroom, for example, Brodkey seeks specifically to interrupt the commonsense warrant invoked by those who proclaim a "desire to preserve the authority of disciplinary boundaries" and to reify narratives that say "composition teachers are not paid to teach writing but to patrol the borders of language and literature" (xii). Traditionally, composition practitioners are seen as grammar police who cannot comment on content:

> For it follows, apparently as naturally as the night the day, that if the grammar police are not surveiling language they will police thought, which is the legitimate domain of historians, scientists, and so on. Composition teachers who look on "content" as part of writing, and hence part of writing instruction, run the risk of being seen as illegally crossing the line and singled out as rogue cops. The rogues of one theory are another's teachers, however, and I count myself among the composition teachers whose refusal to police students—in the name of something called tradition, standards, excellence, discipline, or language—is theoretically as well as practically warranted by poststructural/postmodern accounts of language and reality. (*Writing Permitted* xiii)

Brodkey's work is primarily interested in harnessing her professional position and postmodern disposition to *interrupt* traditionally defined borders that outline the discipline of composition. Describing her work as "rogue" and a "refusal," Brodkey here reveals how her orientation toward E306 can be accurately described as disruptive.

Another characteristic of disruption, as I mention above, is the power-differential between counterpublic academics interested in disrupting traditional narratives about writing and establishment groups who benefit from the reinforcement of such narratives. Brodkey was very clear about her views of composition's relationship at that time as one between colonizers and colonized, which aligns with Bleich's use of the word "dictator" above. Going back to her delineation of *troubles* and *problems,* Brodkey writes that "cynical escalation of local problems into troubles is one of the strategies routinely employed by colonizers, who need to obscure self-interested actions that would otherwise be immediately recognized as the unwarrantable denial of human rights they are" (188). In this case, the colonizers are the UT administrators who canceled E306 and "abrogated the academic freedom along with the authority of the faculty members responsible for lower-division courses in the English department" (186). The other layer to the power-differential in the E306 debate is the split between literature and composition, which I will describe in more detail below. But for now, it is important to note that according to Brodkey, the more traditional, established literature contingent in the English faculty at UT at that time felt they had grounds to colonize the English department and understood progressive composition instructors at UT as "the enemy within" (Curtis 5, qtd in Brodkey 188). These two characteristics—Brodkey's theoretical and professional predilection toward institutional change at the expense of making concessions and the power-differentials between compositionists and establishment groups—build a case for Brodkey's orientation as distinctly disruptive.

What Gets Disrupted? The Moral Panic in Response to E306

The first claim I made about the public talk that emerged from the E306 discourse was that Brodkey's disruptive orientation at UT in 1990 was a kind of public engagement.

The second claim stems from the first: Brodkey's disruptive orientation allowed her to make significant contributions to the debate in the form of a mounting a moral panic which resulted in her resignation and the eventual realignment of the English Department at UT several years later. The moral panic around E306 reveals how Brodkey's disruptive orientation distinctly contributed to the social world of the English Department at UT Austin as well as the varied ways that disruption can be delayed, prolonged, and/or unanticipated. Below I outline discursive exchanges between UT faculty members and students in the local and national press to showcase how the ensuing moral panic about E306 impacted public debate by confronting traditional narratives of the role of writing instruction, race, and difference in higher education.

The discourse circulating about E306 between April and September of 1990 resembles a kind of "moral panic," which indicates just how uniquely disruptive E306 really was. A moral panic, as Marc Bousquet writes, emerged first in the 1960s in response to "irrational mass anxiety" toward supposed ills of society, but has now risen to become what Kenneth Thompson calls a "defining feature" of the 21st century. Thompson writes that moral panics have five distinct characteristics:

> 1) Something or someone is defined as a threat to values or interests
>
> 2) This threat is depicted in an easily recognizable form by the media
>
> 3) There is a rapid build-up of public concern
>
> 4) There is a response from authorities or opinion-makers
>
> 5) The panic recedes or results in social changes (8).

A moral panic, in other words, is a public clash of values that results in some kind of significant social change. Thompson argues that moral panics are fundamentally "symptoms

or signs of struggle over rival discourses and regulatory practices" (30). Applied to a debate on the relationship between literary studies and rhetoric and composition (a debate that was significantly impacting narratives of E306 in 1990, which I address later in this chapter), Bousquet writes that "panic discourse involves real or perceived threats to a group identified with some aspect of the dominant social order (such as literature faculty members facing the declining cultural capital of their work)." Establishment groups harness the rhetoric of panic through what Bousquet calls "scapegoats and fake solutions" designed to "maintain [their] power and influence in the status quo." Thus, I argue that *Writing about Difference*, as evidenced through the exchanges between faculty and students through various kinds of texts (newspaper stories, letters to the editor, scholarly essays, advertisements, etc), resembles a distinct moral panic, a panic that establishment groups used in an effort to maintain and reinforce their power and status in the university. The moral panic that ensued, moreover, is further evidence of what actually gets disrupted through disruptive orientations—the dominant social order in charge of administering what Thompson called "regulatory practices" (30).

Gribben, Duban, and Ruszkiewicz's efforts throughout the summer months of 1990 outlined the scope of the panic discourse through persistent campaigns in local and regional media outlets. Gribben, then a professor of American Literature and Mark Twain scholar in the English department at UT Austin, led the moral panic against *Writing about Difference*.[6] Much of Gribben's panic discourse came through the *Daily Texan*, UT's student newspaper, but also through other local and national publications. While the students who participated in the E306 debate almost exclusively published in the *Daily Texan,* Gribben published widely in publications such as *The Daily Texan, Houston Chronicle, Austin American Statesman,*

[6] Gribben is now Professor of English at Auburn University at Montgomery.

and even academic journals.[7] Brodkey herself wrote several conference papers and one book-length manuscript that directly responded to the E306 debate, as well as one essay geared toward the public called "Political Suspects" which was published in the *Village Voice*—all of which, though, came after she left the University of Texas. By contrast, Allan Gribben wrote to the *Daily Texan* at least 5 times between May 1990 and January 1991. Later, in response to Peter Collier's article about him in the alternative magazine *Heterodoxy*, Gribben published another article in 1993 in the conservative journal *Measure*, in which he documented how he felt "ostracized in such a systematic and cruel manner that I was eventually compelled to leave a tenured full professorship" ("The Education of Alan Gribben").[8] During the public exchange, according to *Daily Texan* editor Kevin McHargue, Gribben "sent letters—and, for some reason, copies of his resume—to The *Daily Texan*, *Austin American-Statesman* and presumably anyone else with a printing press and a post office box" (McHargue). The *Houston Chronicle* also noted that Gribben spoke against Brodkey's course on at least two radio talk shows and defended his publicity campaign since, "failing to convince people in the English department [that E306] was utterly inappropriate, [he had turned] to the Texas public to see what they think" (Ackerman). In response to McHargue, Gribben wrote another letter to the *Daily Texan* on July 23rd, 1990 where he defended his publicity campaign, noting that "Texans have a right to know how their monies

[7] At this point it is worth mentioning that the student newspaper at the University of Texas, *The Daily Texan* is an important institution in the public culture at UT. According to the Texas State Historical Association, *The Daily Texan*, formed in 1900, is the largest college publication in the country, having boasted in the 1990s a circulation of 32,000 in the fall and spring terms and 21,000 in the summer terms. And, according to a non-profit alumni organization called Friends of the Daily Texan, the newspaper also boasts from among its former writers 10 Pulitzer Prize winners and a host of other notable alumni, including Walter Cronkite and Lady Bird Johnson. For a more detailed history of the *Daily Texan*, see Copp and Rogers *The Daily Texan: The First 100 Years* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1999).

[8] Measure was the monthly publication of the group University Centers for Rational Alternatives, an organization formed in response to student radicalism in the 1960s whose main goal is to "defend academic freedom against extremism" (Public Interest Investigations).

for instruction are being spent" and that "As for enclosing my CV with my letters to the editors, I made this gesture to show that I have instructed 33 sections of courses emphasizing writing skills, 15 of them at the lower division level since arriving at the university." Gribben's panic discourse relied upon a variety of ways to enter the public debate: from the student newspaper to radio, television, and other national publications. Gribben also harnessed his own ethos as an English professor to influence the debate about what should and should not be taught in the department. UT students, however, did not have the clout or access to those mediums, and stuck largely to the limited circulation of the *Daily Texan* and other campus activities.

Duban, Ruszkiewicz, and Gribben's persistent media campaigns also wielded their access and clout to overshadow a vocal and receptive UT student body that, as Brodkey later noted, already were discussing issues of difference on campus anyway (*Writing Permitted* 233). In fact, between April and September, 1990, undergraduate students composed 91 pieces in the *Daily Texan* regarding race and difference, 25 of which addressed Brodkey and E306 specifically. Students exclusively entered the debate through the student newspaper. In 125 *Daily Texan* newspaper articles from April to September, 1990, coded specifically for issues of Racism, Diversity, Multiculturalism, or English 306, undergraduate students published 31 editorials, 6 letters-to-the-editor, and 54 news stories. University of Texas faculty, on the other hand, wrote 12 editorials and 13 letters-to-the-editor about these topics. While clearly not a surprise that the undergraduates outnumbered the faculty in publications in the student newspaper, what is surprising is the number of times faculty actually engaged with students about Brodkey specifically. Undergraduates composed 8 editorials, 2 letters, and 15 news stories about E306, and faculty contributed 7 editorials and 9 letters, which is

fairly even (alumni and Austin residents also contributed 2 letters-to-the-editor regarding E306). Moreover, while faculty matched the undergraduates in the *Daily Texan* responses, they also used scholarly publications, more national newspapers, other media, or the clout of professional organizations. This discursive advantage, I argue, overshadowed a clearly vocal UT student body that might have otherwise welcomed or at least valued Brodkey's course differently. For example, while E306 was certainly a hot topic that summer, an even more popular topic at this time were broader issues of racism, diversity, and multiculturalism, which make up for 80 of the articles I found in the archives at UT Austin, or about 64% of the total articles coded. It is clear that the moral panic, which led to the cancelation of E306, overshadowed a vocal and engaged student body.

Another aspect of the panic discourse initiated by Gribben and taken on by other teachers and students was that it defined both Brodkey's course and the multicultural movement that course evoked as threats to the institution of the university. For example, UT undergraduate Scott Lewis's June 26 *Daily Texan* column "Courses Should Stick to Plain English" chastises Brodkey's syllabus for fixating too heavily on race, class, and gender, which relegates "talent, objectivity, profundity, and beauty to the academic dustbin." Moreover, E306 unfairly scrutinizes the "evil white male" and utilizes texts that teach that "the only people capable of being racists are whites, and the only people capable of being sexists are males." Challenging the values of white students, Lewis argues, unfairly targets white people, politicizing the writing classroom by scapegoating mainly "students from European cultures" in an effort to "raise the self-esteem of minorities." Similarly, Alan Gribben's June 23rd letter to the *Austin American-Statesman* suggests that freshman composition has "fallen prey" to identity politics in a large-scale effort at "thought-control."

Gribben also characterized his quest against E306 as an effort at protecting the academic freedom of graduate students who may not want to teach that specific material ("Politicizing English 306").

In other words, many of the claims circulating against E306 focused on the threat of political indoctrination in the writing classroom and an affront on individual student sensibilities. The panic discourse circulating in the *Battle of Texas* debate claimed that E306 unfairly targeted white people as the arbiters of racism, and that E306, in its efforts to analyze arguments about difference, limited the individual freedom of all students to talk about "other" topics—implicitly suggesting that race is not a social issue but relegated instead to isolated, individual instances of racist thoughts or actions.[9]

Many UT students also came out against Gribben's media campaign. For example, On June 27th, *Daily Texan* columnist Scott Stanford wrote that Gribben's opposition to E306, including his public outreach efforts to expose alleged indoctrination "seem like little more than ideologically motivated whines and complaints," attributing his dissent to the fact that English professors, "don't want decisions shoved down their throats any more than we want Eurocentric overkill shoved down ours." On July 19th, 1990, Randy Kennedy, *Daily Texan* columnist, argued that Gribben and company have never really been interested in compromise. "Whether the debate had occurred within departmental channels or not," Kennedy writes, "they would never have been satisfied with anything less than maintaining

[9] This kind of evasion of discussions about race, or resituating racism as individual and isolated incidents, perpetuate a dangerous form of hyper individualism. Haivan V. Hoang, for instance, notes that arguments about reverse discrimination or institutional racism position minorities as either inflicting injury or as those being injured (W399). Carrie Leverenz notes that in classroom settings this individualistic logic promotes a "rhetoric of evasion" that merely "avoids conflict by constructing a rhetoric that allowed [students] to maintain some semblance of engagement without risking face-to-face disclosure" (301). And Candice Spigelman has even noted that this form of radical individualism that exalts the autonomous self is a pervasive cultural symbol of American identity that suggests "solutions to social problems depend on the independence and ingenuity of individuals and local committees," which inhibits any kind of collective action (103).

the status quo for E306." And Kevin McHargue's July 20 1990 column "Recomposition: Confusion Reigns in the World According to Gribben" argues that the E306 detractors "are not concerned with academic excellence. If they were, they would recognize that challenging students to think and rethink questions of difference is a valid and essential part of any academic enterprise." E306, in other words, was not engaging in *thought control*, but rather trying to "take an issue in which there is already heated interest and make it into an occasion for intellectual inquiry rather than forensic spectacle" (*Writing Permitted* 233). [10] These exchanges represent some of the discursive variety in responses to E306 and a unique effort to combat the growing public perception of the panic initiated by Gribben et al.

Another important aspect of the panic discourse around E306 was its perceived threat to the ideological purity of the writing classroom, or rather, claims that the writing classroom was not the proper *place* to discuss race and difference. For example, William Murchison's July 7, 1990 editorial in the *Dallas Morning News* urges college instructors to "lay off the politics, the sociology, the economics—and simply teach." Murchison comments that E306 is "academic propaganda" in which higher education is forcing students to think "correct thoughts" instead of producing and teaching more "straightforward scholarship." On campus, James Duban's August 8, 1990 essay to the *Daily Texan* "A Modest Proposal: Teach Writing in Writing Courses" similarly invokes this logic to suggest that studying and critiquing arguments about difference are not in the purview of a required writing course. The only goal of freshman writing, Duban notes, is instruction in the "perfecting of basic writing" and

[10] This is not to suggest that undergraduates did not critique E306 in the *Daily Texan*. Scott Lewis's June 26 "Courses Should Stick to Plain English," Scott Stanford's June 27th piece "No Thanks," and several letters to the editor clearly critique both the pedagogy and the timing of E306. Nevertheless, it is clear from the *Daily Texan* archive that there was a large and vocal community of students who were in either in support of or open to the idea of having a course about difference. If anything, it could at least be said that the topic of difference itself was a high priority on campus, which highlights what Brodkey later described as "a deep, layered, and conflicted consciousness on the issue" (*Writing Permitted* 233).

giving students "a good foundation for success in other courses and in life beyond the university." In other words, the freshman writing classroom is not the proper jurisdiction for unpacking race, class, or gender, while correcting the "serious deficiencies in the writing of our freshman" by offering extensive feedback about "grammar, style, tone, form, agency, organization, and audience" is. Duban does not suggest that race and difference are off limits in the college classroom. On the contrary, Duban notes that in *his* upper division *literature* courses where the material "logically invites such inquiry," students are better equipped to embrace issues of difference, like for instance, "the sexist legacy of Puritanism," or a particular work of literature that "requires us to confront serious issues of race gender, and multiculturalism" ("A Modest Proposal"). Whether stemming from backlash of students anxious about being *told what to think* in an English course, or outrage that an apolitical service-oriented course in composition is teaching content better suited for sociologists and economists—the discourse circulating around E306 is evidence of a moral panic. Through various media, it defined Brodkey and multiculturalism as a threat to the social order, rapidly building up public concern until the establishment at UT canceled E306 and the panic receded. This moral panic, I argue, is evidence of disruption.

Disruption as Historically and Culturally Contingent

The first claim about the public talk from E306: that Brodkey's disruptive orientation that summer was indeed a form of public engagement; and the second: that evidence of disruption manifested as a moral panic on campus that overshadowed a more nuanced and complicated view of the student body—necessarily leads to the third claim of this chapter: Disruption is historically and culturally contingent. Or rather, much of how the narratives were framed and eventually disrupted by Brodkey's orientation is situated in a specific

cultural and historical context. For example, Duban's letter to the editor, which asserts literature as the main engine for studying cultural difference and composition as the purview of discerning and policing *correct* writing, comes from a distinct context in which the emerging discipline of composition sought to co-exist in a complicated relationship with literature, politics, and multiculturalism.

One of the reasons E306 was disruptive was because it intruded onto terrain traditionally reserved for other academic fields. John Ruszkiewicz, another founding member of the LDEPC warned *Daily Texan* readers on July 24th, 1990, shortly after the course was canceled, that the E306 debate was evidence of a declining focus on the teaching of basic rhetorical skills in favor of identity politics in higher education. Rhetoric, he writes, "identifies the subject matter to be taught and learned—an art of writing, research, and thinking." Injecting social issues into the rhetoric classroom, Ruszkiewicz warns, neglects what rhetoric is *supposed* to teach, and makes students "less likely to write significant and challenging pieces." Ultimately, Ruszkiewicz here is seeking to define the disciplinary parameters of rhetoric and composition as apolitical, a move that at that time was contested by compositionists like Brodkey who (as I argued above), had broader epistemological expectations for writing and writing instruction. Below I outline three contextual factors that undergird the E306 debate: 1) the changing relationship between literature and composition in the university; 2) the debates within composition about politicization and radicalism in the writing classroom; 3) the local and national debate about multiculturalism in higher education. These insights help us understand why the historically situated cultural context of Brodkey's disruptive orientation was so disruptive at that time.

Literature and Composition

Like today, as multimodal rhetoric, digital literacy, and new media studies predominate over scholarship on rhetoric and writing, such that we are seeing seismic shifts in disciplinary identities that lead to heated debates about the relationship between literature and rhetoric, the field of English studies was similarly going through complex disciplinary and ideological shifts in the 1980s and 90s.[11] Winifred Bryan Horner's 1983 collection *Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap* deftly characterizes this debate. *Composition and Literature* aimed to unpack the growing divide between literature and writing studies in the academy at the time. The reason for the gap, Horner notes, is partly due to the perceived illegitimacy of composition as an academic field. The study and teaching of literature, on the one hand, are "supported by research funds and salaries and rewarded by promotion and tenure," while the "study and teaching of composition, on the other hand, are often considered peripheral," Horner writes (1). In that same collection, Wayne Booth extends that claim and asserts that bridging the divide between literature and composition is tied up in the relative powerlessness of composition faculty to determine course loads, pay, or even in the textbooks they use (57). To remedy this, Booth argues that the field needs to figure out how to "defend to our various publics what is implied by our present arrangements, the notion that it is far more important for someone to do another book on Skelton, say, than to teach beginning students how to read and write, and the twin notion that the latter is flunky work, best done by those who have least training." Further, Booth wonders how compositionists

[11] Bousquet's piece on moral panics, which I referenced earlier, especially reflects this "seismic shift." In his essay, Bousquet notes that literature is the only discipline to actually lose tenure-track positions over the last 20 years, and argues that "combined with evidence of lowered public interest in reading traditional literature and plummeting enrollment in traditional English majors, many faculty members in traditional literary studies have engaged in a backlash discourse against the new or renascent fields, a "moral panic" in defense of traditional literary studies." This panic discourse, he argues, is a response to faculty facing the "declining cultural capital" of their work and responding in turn with "hostility and resentment."

can convince scholars of literature that writing is a worthy scholarly endeavor, suggesting that perhaps the answer is stressing to the academy and the public writ large that composition teaches not only necessary skills but also reading, thinking, and writing in educated ways, or rather, training "B.A.s whose critical capacities will not shame us" (60). But talking to the public in this way is difficult, Booth notes, for the larger public is less scrupulous in its assessment of academic disciplines. "It is appalling," Booth writes, "to see what books about "good English" the public makes into best-sellers: effective writing reduced to questions of style, style reduced to questions of spelling and grammar and correct idiom, grammar reduced to the listing of pet peeves like 'hopefully' and 'different than'" (60). To Booth, the problem is how to find ways of legitimizing the work of composition to others in the academy in ways that complicate prevailing perceptions of the field as disciplining grammar instruction.

Horner's collection is also important for drawing attention to the power dynamics inherent in the rise of composition studies in departments of English, and shows why Brodkey's course threatened literature's place as content-area of the discipline.[12] In 1984, for example, Sharon Crowley reviewed Horner's collection as a wake-up call to the "possibility that the gap between literature and composition is a reflection of social realities, a sort of class system in miniature which is designed to separate the unwashed from the cultured." The reason for the intensity of debates between literature and composition at this time, Crowley notes, is because literature, the "traditional elite class, [sees] their historic domains of power

[12] In *Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only,* Brodkey details the "long and bitter history of conflict between composition and literary studies" in the Department of English at UT. For example, in the mid-80s, Brodkey writes, the department fired its lecturers and relegated the teaching of composition to graduate students, most of whom were in Literature and resented teaching writing. When Brodkey came to campus as Director of Lower Division English, one of her goals was to remedy this by introducing a syllabus based on theories of composition "that have supported virtually all scholarship on composition and literature for the past forty-some years" (142).

and prestige being eroded by the culture's renewed appreciation for the skills imparted by compositionists and others of that ilk" (107-108). Crowley's language aligns with many of Brodkey's views on the balkanization of composition at that time, particularly in her imagery of departments of English as a relationship between colonized and colonizers. This complicated professional relationship between literature and composition partially explains why many of the faculty at UT resisted E306 in what Holmes called a "defining moment for composition studies" (17). Lester Faigley, another faculty member at UT-Austin since 1979, likewise notes that the beginning of the 1990s saw composition studies as a "major subfield" in English departments, even while simultaneously being "at odds with conceptions of literacy education held by much of the public and many in the academy" (22). This tumultuous relationship between literature and composition explains much of the resistance to E306 and showcases just how disruptive Brodkey's postmodern composition pedagogy was in her own department.

The Politicized Writing Classroom

The rift between literature and composition is partially due to Brodkey's theoretical and pedagogical positions, which emerge out of poststructuralist, postmodern, and social-epistemic turns in rhetoric and composition, and, especially in the 80s and 90s, functioned as a site of intense political debates over the role of writing in the academy. The various origin stories in the field (North, Harris, Connors, Crowley, Berlin) portray composition studies coming into its own, at various moments, through a theoretical revolt against what Berlin has called "current-traditional rhetoric." Current-traditional epistemologies, Berlin writes, understand language as a "transparent device that captures the original experience so that it might be reproduced in the faculties of one's audience" (8). In the face of changing student

demographics in the 1960s and open admissions policies, a new guard of writing instructors set out to teach writing as a process, not a product derived from unlocking a *true self* through writing. Composition's rejection of these epistemologies in the 1960s, and its efforts to legitimate the teaching of writing separate from literature, culminated in the 1974 position statement *Students Right to their Own Language* (SRTOL) and met intense political and economic opposition for the remainder of the 70s and 80s.[13] For example, Merrill Sheils's infamous *Newsweek* article in 1975 called "Why Johnny Can't Write," promoted the idea of a literacy crisis in American higher education. Citing declining test scores and the SRTOL resolution as what's ailing higher education, Sheils argues that "if your children are attending college, the chances are that when they graduate, they will be unable to write ordinary, expository English with any real degree of structure and lucidity" (58). Lester Faigley situates the *Newsweek* article among the 1970s cultural anxiety to argue that the remainder of the 1970s included a middle class "ready to believe that American education had veered off course and that a 'golden age' of education had existed in the not-too-distant past" (62-63). Sheils's article continues to be a symbol of the public's current-traditional perceptions of writing and writing instruction and the perceived irrelevance of writing pedagogy—a claim I will complicate further at the conclusion of this chapter.

The 1980s in composition are marked by the rise of social constructionism and postmodernism, which Brodkey argues are the "friendliest of language theories to writing and writing pedagogy" (*Writing Permitted* 142). Rejecting expressive writing pedagogy, the

[13] *Students Right to Their Own Language* in 1974 was a resolution that grew from a 1969 CCCC session on student language and social issues and affirmed "students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style" (2). Lester Faigley notes that the SRTOL reflects the changing student body nationally and blamed much of poor writing pedagogy on outdated handbook pedagogy that appealed to antiquated class and race assumptions instead of "dynamic and creative mechanisms which are a part of our language" (10 qtd in Faigley 61).

postmodern turn in composition questioned the neutrality and objectivity of the self, writer, and teacher. Influenced by such philosophers as Fredric Jameson and Jean-Francois Lyotard, who sought to critique master narratives and destabilize objective measurements of truth and reality, postmodern compositionists emphasized the social dimensions of language and writing, particularly in their critique of the work of early expressivists, cognitivists, and modernists like James Britton, James Moffett, Janet Emig, and Linda Flower. David Bartholomae, in his infamous debate with Peter Elbow, described these outdated epistemological leanings as a "celebration of the individual as fundamentally (or ideally) congruent with culture and history" because it locates "both the process and the mechanism [of change] within an individual psychology, equating the learner with that which must be learned (68). James Berlin calls the postmodern revolt against process theory "social-epistemic," and asserts the role of language as paramount in the experience of composing. "All experiences, even the scientific and logical," Berlin writes, "are grounded in language, and language determines their content and structure…Rhetoric thus becomes implicated in all human behavior" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 16). Brodkey's theoretical and pedagogical positions emerge specifically out of this conversation.[14]

In response to the postmodern movement in American higher education, the concurrent rise of the conservative right chastised postmodern academics for unfairly politicizing the classroom and prioritizing identity politics over a purer version of education that ignored politics in order to focus on format, style, and correctness. John Simon's 1980

[14] Obviously this conversation is much more complex and nuanced. Susan Miller, Lester Faigley, John Schilb, James Berlin and others, look much more in-depth look at the history of composition studies with regard to postmodernism and the postmodern turn. Berlin's 1992 *Rhetoric Review* essay "Poststructuralism, Cultural Studies, and the Composition Classroom: Postmodern Theory in Practice" is perhaps the most thorough outline of these issues. And, it should also be noted that many scholars critique the field itself for rendering these theories into simplistic binaries that unfairly condemn and obfuscate the complexity of other, older approaches to writing theory. For instance, see Elizabeth A. Flynn's 1997 *CCC* essay "Rescuing Postmodernism."

Paradigms Lost, Harold Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*, and with E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy,* both in 1987, set the tone for political backlash against writing and writing instruction in the 1980s and 1990s. Specifically, this backlash resulted in narratives of writing and writing instruction as the acquisition of functional literacy—a process threatened by an overly politicized writing classroom. Holmes notes that in the 1980s, the media capitalized on these fears by "positing literacy as one of the tools needed to achieve success in a competitive and rapidly-changing world" (52). The conservative backlash created, according to Holmes, a backdrop to composition's disciplinary history, a public that by and large maintained a "current-traditional ideal of literacy instruction that conflicted with compositionists' views about the teaching of writing," which is to this day tied to grammar instruction and the study of canonical texts (53). Brodkey notes that postmodern theories in the late 1970s and early 1980s experienced "unpredictable aftershocks" in the confrontation with "a virulent species of anti-intellectualism in the academy" (*Writing Permitted* xi). This tense relationship between public perceptions of writing and disciplinary shifts in composition scholarship is a distinct historical context that preceded Brodkey's arrival at UT and helps explain the disruptive orientation she adopted in the administering of E306.

But it wasn't just the general public that objected to postmodern writing pedagogy. Several English Studies scholars at UT in particular objected to Brodkey's approach to E306. University of Texas English faculty member Maxine Hairston's 1992 *CCC* essay "Diversity, Ideology, and the Teaching of Writing" is perhaps the most famous admonishment of politics in writing classrooms, labeling the postmodern pedagogy of Brodkey's ilk a "disturbing" model of teaching writing that "puts dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the

student" (180). Hairston only briefly mentions E306 directly in her piece, noting that the "freshman course on racism and sexism proposed at the University of Texas at Austin in the spring of 1990" would have simply "enforced conformity in both directions," and that the course stood in direct contradiction to Brodkey's "professional judgment and often…personal feelings" (189). Hairston calls out Brodkey specifically, outlining what can only be described as a most wanted list of renegade scholars representing the "disturbing" trend in the academy. "James Berlin, John Trimbur, Lester Faigley, Richard Ohmann, and Linda Brodkey," Hairston notes, echo the "popular" opinion among composition studies that "envisions required writing courses as vehicles for social reform rather than as student-centered workshops designed to build students' confidence and competence as writers" (180). In "Responses to Maxine Hairston," John Trimbur addressed Hairston and E306 specifically. "Anyone who reviews the course syllabus will see," Trimbur writes, "despite Maxine's description, that it is not devoted to racism and sexism per se but rather to how arguments—forensic and deliberative—are framed to adjudicate problematical situations of social and cultural discrimination." E306, he writes, is not outside the purview of composition studies, but "resolutely rhetorical" in its analysis of "how people argue public issues of central importance to our society." As for Hairston's admonishment of dogmatic, radical, and unprofessional writing teachers, Trimbur remarks that Hairston's pedagogy resembles a "retreat from rhetoric" and instead "appears to celebrate diversity in the classroom but refuses to ask students where their differences come from, what consequences their differences might have, and whether they can imagine ways to live and work together with these differences" (248). This clash of values in the academic scholarship of

composition studies reveals how disruptive E306 was to establishment groups, even though the LDEPC had departmental authority to institute policy changes.

Writing and Multiculturalism

The multiculturalist movement in higher education also reflects many disciplinary debates and conversations mentioned above, and contributed significantly to the tenor of the debate about E306 in the summer of 1990. In the vein of Edward Said, Paulo Freire, and others who offered liberatory pedagogies, multiculturalism signaled a shift in higher education to the academic study and focus on a diverse range of ethnicities and pluralism as reflected in the changing demographics and cultural landscape of American society. Stuart Hall describes multiculturalism as "strategies and policies adopted to govern or manage the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multi-cultural societies throw up. It is usually used in the singular, signifying the distinctive philosophy or doctrine which underpins multi-cultural strategies" (209). Ramon Gutierrez offers a must-have list in order for a pedagogy to be multiculturalist: a primary focus on "the histories of different ethnic and racial groups, particularly on intragroup stratification;" drawing from theoretical conversations on the "comparisons among these groups;" a praxis of generating "general principles that shaped racial and ethnic relations presently and historically;" and an exploration of "how ethnic identity was constructed over time, internally and externally" (165 qtd in Reid, "Revisiting Multiculturalism in First-Year Composition" 69). Even though Brodkey did not use the term *multiculturalism* in her syllabus, she explicitly describes her work as multicultural. In fact, Brodkey argues that multiculturalism is "largely a *curricular* rather than a pedagogical reform" (*Writing Permitted* 193). The historical context of the multiculturalist movement was, for Brodkey, a much more disruptive force than merely a component of a syllabus: "A

curricular reform of the magnitude suggested by multiculturalism," she writes, "requires a pedagogical reform of equal magnitude. Multiculturalism, in other words, implies a programmatic shift in *how* students read and *what* students write" (194). [15]

Multiculturalism's inherently inclusive nature also represents an intrusion into previously demarcated academic boundaries (which are defined necessarily by exclusion), and as a term, multiculturalism was often used as an epithet by those who accused academics of indoctrination. In a speech to a group of donors, for example, UT president at that time William Cunningham described multiculturalism as a "code term for some people, signaling efforts to politicize the curriculum by promoting a particular ideology. We must not, and we will not permit such developments" (Brodkey, *Writing Permitted* 183). The inclusive nature of multiculturalism is an ideological push, Cunningham fears, toward political indoctrination. In 1992, Hazel Carby, African American and American Studies scholar wrote in "The Multiculturalist Wars" that multiculturalism was the institutional "inclusion of peoples from a variety of ethnic, national and class backgrounds" (246). The controversy about implementing multicultural curricula, Carby argues, is ever-present "at all levels of the national education system," and considering the barrage of journalistic attacks on multiculturalist curricula that have grown particularly pointed since "the fall of 1990" (which one can only assume is in reference to Brodkey's course at UT-Austin), the multiculturalist wars signal the need for "educational politics that would reveal the structures of power relations that are at work in the racialization of our social order" (250). What Carby is saying, moreover, is that multiculturalism as a movement meant more than merely inclusion but a

[15] See Goldberg, D.T., ed. *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*. Wiley, 1994. Blackwell Critical Reader; Lu, Min-Zhan. "Professing Multiculturalism: The Politics of Style in the Contact Zone." 2011. 467-483. Print; or Shelly Reid, "Starting Somewhere Better: Revisiting Multiculturalism in First-Year Composition." *Pedagogy* 4.1 (2004): 65-92. Print.

disruptive shift of power-relations in the academy, a shift establishment groups at UT Austin as well as across the country fought hard to prevent.

One of the main groups in opposition to multiculturalism was the National Association of Scholars (NAS), a conservative group of academics that routinely conducted, Carby argues, "media campaign[s] against curricular reform" that has had "significant effects in turning the general climate in the universities with money against educational reform and affirmative action" (252). For instance, Carby notes that the NAS donated $20 million to Yale (Carby's home institution) to establish a scholarship in Western civilization. The fact that "there is no equivalent donation that has ever been made to institute courses in non-Western cavitations" (252) is evidence of a prevailing social order that perpetuates a white masculine discourse—something multicultural curricula seek to disrupt. It comes as no surprise then that the NAS financed Gribben's July 18 full-page "Statement of Academic Concern" in the *Daily Texan* admonishing Brodkey's multicultural course on the teaching and study of difference.[16]

The disciplinary divides between literature and composition, the theoretical pushback against postmodernism, and the curricular disputes about the role of multiculturalism are most evident in the journalistic archive from the *Daily Texan*. From April to September of 1990, the *Daily Texan* published 125 different stories on racism, diversity, multiculturalism,

[16] In the August 1990 issue of the *Austin Chronicle*, Scott Henson and Tom Philpott write that the main opposition to the E306 syllabus actually came from the Texas Association of Scholars (TAS), the local chapter of the NAS, which receives a majority of its funding from the John M. Olin and Sarah Scaife foundations, which, according to the authors, "subsidize New Right groups, including the Heritage Foundation, Freedom House, [and] the Committee on the Present Danger and Accuracy in Media." Henson and Philpot also note that the TAS was responsible for collecting the 56 faculty signatures on the "Statement of Academic Concern" in addition to writing the check to pay for the advertisement. "When contacted later," they write, "the majority of the faculty we talked to who signed the ad weren't associated with TAS, and non-members weren't told that TAS had coordinated the effort." That Carby mentions the "barrage" of media assaults against multiculturalism since the "Fall of 1990" and the NAS's coordinated efforts to counter multiculturalist curricula in light of Henson and Philpot's article is no coincidence.

or Linda Brodkey, including 47 editorials, 23 letters-to-the-editor, and 55 pieces of news. Undergraduates authored 91 of the 125 artifacts, with faculty representing only 25 articles, columns, or letters. An important part of my archival analysis, however, is the broader conversation about race and difference on campus beyond Linda Brodkey. For example, undergraduates authored 23 pieces on the topic of "multiculturalism" on campus, while faculty authored only 1. On issues of diversity and racism, undergraduates authored 43 pieces, while faculty and others authored only 13. This is in contrast with pieces addressing Brodkey specifically, about which 25 pieces were written by undergraduates, and 20 by faculty and others.

During the *Battle of Texas,* UT faculty and undergraduates were indeed debating about E306, but a vast majority of the pieces that summer, especially among undergraduates, addressed broader topics of race, diversity, and multiculturalism on campus, like the push to hire more diverse faculty (Solomon), mandatory diversity education for incoming freshman (Driver), and both abstract and policy-driven discussions on multiculturalism as a concept

(Hranitzky , Stanford). This signals a broader, more complex conversation going on at this time and a broader role played by the multicultural movement in higher education.[17]

Conclusion

The results of disruptive orientations, while directly responsive to institutional and public culture, are often unanticipated and unheeded. After E306 was postponed on July 23rd, the LDEPC continued to work to revise the course. In a September meeting after the postponement, the LDEPC met with the English department and sought a vote of confidence for their efforts. In a secret ballot, the department voted by a vote of 46-11 with 3 abstentions to affirm its confidence in the LDEPC. This symbolic vote, Brodkey writes, no longer affirmed the syllabus (as they had the authority to revise the common syllabus all along), but rather expressed "commitment to academic freedom, which includes the right of faculty to develop a syllabus to meet curricular goals" (*Writing Permitted* 190). By spring 1991, however, Brodkey had left the University of Texas. Under new leadership, the English faculty voted unanimously to adopt a new E306 syllabus developed by its new chair James

[17] For example, on June 5, while the debate about E306 was just getting started, philosophy professor Robert Solomon published "Recruiting Diverse Faculty Requires Long-Term Commitment," which argued that required diversity courses are not the answer, unless the university develops a "long term program to develop, not just find, minority faculty who can join the University, not as token or second class citizens but as fully competent and competitive teachers and scholars." Three days later, the paper reported on a required diversity education course for incoming freshman (Driver, "Orientation includes Racism 101"). Later that week, the paper reported on other departments' multicultural activities (Huang, "Schools' Multicultural Plans Vary"). And on June 20th, the UT System Board of regents had awarded an endowed professorship to John Butler, a sociology professor, to become the interim director of the Afro-American Studies Center. Butler wrote that part of his job would be to increase the number of courses available in Black Studies (Petrek, "2 endowed professorships approved" June 20). Students and faculty also debated the merits and pitfalls of multicultural initiatives: On June 7, undergraduate Dennis Hranitzky published "Multiculturalism Divided and Conquered," which urged the administration to foreground multiculturalist curricula in a more streamlined and coordinated effort. On June 22, undergraduate Scott Stanford wrote "Multiculturalism has a long way to go" in response to the appointment of the endowed professorship in African American Studies. Undergraduate Kevin McHargue published "Students must lead diversity fight" on June 28th, and professor of educational psychology and African American Studies at UT told the *Daily Texan* on July 2 that the methods of recruiting minority professors is the most important part in the struggle for diversity (Driver, "Professor: Faculty Hiring Key to Minority Retention"). All this to say that during the time debates about Brodkey's proposed syllabus were coming to a head, the university community was already in the middle of several overlapping discussions on race and difference.

Kinneavy with zero votes against it. Brodkey writes that this move exposes the department's safeguarding against "an onslaught of negative publicity" in light of the *Battle of Texas.* And despite how Brodkey's efforts the previous year created a remarkable level of political solidarity among many in the department, the "politics of publicity and postponement effectively colonized the intellectual life along with the administrative autonomy of the department" (*Writing Permitted* 191). Just two years later, the English department at UT Austin split into the Department of Rhetoric and Writing and the Department of English. In the new freestanding department of Rhetoric and Writing at UT, *English 306*: *Writing about Difference* still stands as *Rhetoric 306: Rhetoric and Writing*, which is "grounded in the rhetorical analysis of 'controversies,' broadly defined" (RHE 306 FAQ). The result of Brodkey's disruptive orientation, in other words, was not just the cancelation of the course, but a contribution to the splintering of the department of English at UT. In the collection *Field of Dreams: Independent Writing Programs and the Future of Composition Studies*, Larry M. Maid writes: "I'm not sure what it was about the spring semester of 1993, but that term saw the creation of three independent writing units," beginning with the split of the University of Texas at Austin and ending with San Diego State and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (132). Moreover, the Independent Writing Departments and Programs Affiliate (IWDPA) of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) lists 31 member organizations as of 2015 ("IWDPA"). It is safe to say that without Linda Brodkey's disruptive orientation in her multiculturalist, postmodern curricular reform of freshman English in the summer of 1990, the history of both the English Department at UT and that of freestanding writing departments across the country may have been vastly different.

After analyzing the discourse from newspapers, journals, magazines, and essays from the *Battle of Texas,* this chapter made three distinct claims regarding disruption in public arguments about writing: 1) Brodkey's curricular reform effort in the summer of 1990 was a form of public engagement, despite the fact that the course was canceled and that she didn't *win* the debate; 2) Evidence of this disruption manifested itself in the form of a moral panic, as depicted in the circulation of discourse from magazines, essays, newspaper articles, and academic publications; 3) The public talk from the *Battle of Texas* is historically and culturally situated in a unique disciplinary moment of contestation—between the growing subfield of composition studies and the traditional academic discipline of literary studies at that time; of mounting public debates about the role of politics in writing instruction; and the pervading culture of multiculturalism in higher education that establishment groups fought—and still fight—to resist. As an orientation, Brodkey utilized disruption to implement a curricular vision for change at the University of Texas. And while her efforts at the time were thwarted, her impact is still felt, both at UT and among those in the field who still champion her goals.

One lesson that several have taken away from the *Battle of Texas* is that the legacy of legitimation still haunts the field and that compositionists need to do a better job engaging in public discussions of writing. Skinnell, for instance, writes that part of the solution to what Brodkey has described as "having our jobs explained to us by those who do not [teach and study writing]" (252) is to "actively foster a productive ethos for talking about writing and pedagogy in the public sphere" (144). However, it is clear to me that even in 1990 when composition studies was still negotiating its disciplinary identity, scholars and teachers were already adept at engaging in public debates about writing. From the scholars who contributed

to the journalistic discourse, to Brodkey who engaged the public through disruptive curricular reformations—and even to the student body who vigorously debated both E306 and broader issues of the relationship of writing to race and difference in the *Daily Texan*—composition studies is clearly relevant to public problems and its practitioners have long and actively been on the forefront of public discussions about writing. Skinnell's larger point, however, is that composition research and teaching have always been in complex relationships with different publics, and in addition to cultivating a more viable public ethos, compositionists must also "discuss more directly the various ways that they can 'go public' to develop the necessary ethos to address issues" like the ones in Austin (144). My aim in this chapter was to take up Skinnell's call and suggest that engagement functions across a range of potential stances or orientations, and that disruption in particular manifests itself in different kinds of work that might not traditionally be understood as publicly engaged. By resituating what counts as public engagement and recasting what public engagement encompasses beyond the building of ethos through the publication of texts for nonacademic audiences, I hope to situate Brodkey in a history of public engagement in the field of composition, and also to consider the role of orientations in engaging in future public arguments about writing.

Chapter 3

Interventional Orientations: The NCTE and the Common Core

Introduction

In the last chapter I identified disruption as a form of public engagement by analyzing the public discourse surrounding an important moment in composition's past, when Linda Brodkey attempted to implement a common syllabus in a first year writing course centered on the concept of "difference" through the teaching of Supreme Court cases. While traditional interpretations of the exchanges that summer focus on what Brodkey *should* have done differently, or that her efforts reveal a need to, as Skinnell writes, "actively foster a productive ethos for talking about writing and pedagogy in the public sphere" (144)—I argue that Brodkey *was* publicly engaged through a public orientation that prioritized not collaboration or publicity but disruption. By leveraging her professional relationships and her position as Director of Lower Division English, Brodkey reflected an orientation focused on upending the status quo and disrupting the very narrative of what writing *does* and how to teach it. Even though she did not publish in the local newspapers as widely as UT students and faculty, by attempting to initiate change at her institution through curricular transformation, she was nevertheless directly engaged in a public issue related to writing. In other words, the discourse surrounding the *Battle of Texas* showcases the different *kinds of public stances* available to compositionists wishing to engage in public arguments about writing, and the kinds of risks and rewards associated with those orientations.

This chapter turns toward a moment when experts in the field of writing studies *do* make more concerted efforts at cooperation, collaboration, and compromise. Whereas Brodkey's orientation saw compromise as "unthinkable" since her "opponents" saw "their

interests as mutually exclusive" (*Writing Permitted* 188), an *interventional* orientation, on the other hand, prioritizes collaboration, partnership, and communicating values to establishment groups in an attempt to enact meaningful change through mutual understanding. Specifically, in this chapter I situate intervention as a public orientation by analyzing the discourse surrounding a partnership in 2009 between the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the authors of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) in the drafting of English Language Arts standards (ELA) that many states are currently adopting into their public school curricula. The standards, written in large part by business leaders and policymakers in conjunction with federal grant programs, have come under fire from K-12 teachers and college professors. Detractors from the field of composition like Doug Hesse charge that the standards do not take into account current research on writing, that the drafting of the standards did not utilize the expertise of teachers, and moreover, that the standards benefit only the interests of businesses rather than students. These charges also point to a significant power differential between those opposed to the standards (generally speaking, K-12 teachers and college professors) and those responsible for implementing and assessing them in their districts (federal grant programs, education testing companies, and powerful philanthropic organizations). This kind of power differential is the very reason, Bruce Herzberg notes, that "academic knowledge and public policy are at odds—or in an odd relation" (394). How academics and the organizations that represent them negotiate these *odd relations* through interventional orientations is the focus of the current chapter.

As with each case in this project, I approach the following moment from the field as an explicit body of written discourse that emerged around a particular rhetorical occasion related to writing and/or the teaching of writing. Specifically, I analyze two primary texts: 1)

A critique of an early draft of the Common Core ELA standards published by NCTE and 2) The revised draft of the ELA standards published by CCSSI several months later. I also analyze unofficial discourse surrounding this partnership, including academic scholarship, newspaper articles, essays, blogs, and Listservs. From this discourse I make several claims about NCTE's public orientation: 1) NCTE engaged with establishment groups that represented the Common Core primarily through an interventional orientation that attempted to form a partnership by communicating its values through frequent appeals to academic evidence in the formation of language standards. As a strategy of intervention, sole use of these appeals obscured a wider range of rhetorical strategies available to communicate values in a way that could have been heard and understood and from which action and/or social could have emerged through the partnership; 2) Intervention is most fruitful through *sustained partnerships* in which each group's values can be communicated, heard, and shared. In the case of the NCTE and Common Core, the gap between their values about writing was widened by a lack of sustained engagement between the two groups; 3) The results of the partnership between NCTE and the Common Core are seen as a failure to some, but, I argue, are nevertheless encouraging for future engagement with education policy, particularly in the renewed connection in the field to assessment and K-12 education, exemplified specifically in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing,* an ambitious set of college-readiness standards co-authored by the NCTE, Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), and the National Writing Project (NWP) a year after the partnership ended. But first, it is important to situate these claims in the context of the Common Core State Standards Initiative and the English Language Arts standards in particular.

Composing the Common Core: Some Context

Developed in 2009, the Common Core State Standards are a "set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA)," which outline specific goals of "what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade" ("About the Standards"). The official website of the Common Core asserts that the purpose of the standards is to equip students who graduate from high school with the necessary skills to succeed in college and their future careers. Developed and maintained by two organizations, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA), the standards were created in response to what they call the stagnation of academic progress in the U.S. and the "uneven patchwork of academic standards that vary from state to state and do not agree on what students should know and be able to do at each grade level" ("About the Standards").[1] In 2009, the state school chiefs and state governors from both organizations developed the standards and in 2010 states began voluntarily adopting them, voting either through the state school boards or having the standards ratified by state superintendents, legislatures, or governors ("Development Process"). As of the writing of this chapter, 43 states have adopted the Common Core, and seven states: Alaska, Indiana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia, are non-members and have formally withdrawn, and/or voted to repeal the standards after formally adopting them. Many other states have voted to delay the implementation of the

[1] The CCSSO describes itself as a "nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education" in the United States" ("Who We Are"). Between 2009-2013, the Gates Foundation awarded the CCSSO over $14.6 million to develop the Common Core standards ("Awarded Grants"). The NGA, according to its mission statement, is a "bipartisan organization of the nation's governors. Through the NGA, governors share best practices, speak with a collective voice on national policy and develop innovative solutions that improve state government and support the principles of federalism" ("About"). The NGA received $2.1million from the Gates Foundation to develop the Common Core standards between 2009-2013 ("Awarded Grants").

standards and/or have legislation pending that delays, repeals, or otherwise defunds the standards, though technically according to the CCSSI authors they are still counted among the states having formally adopted the Common Core.

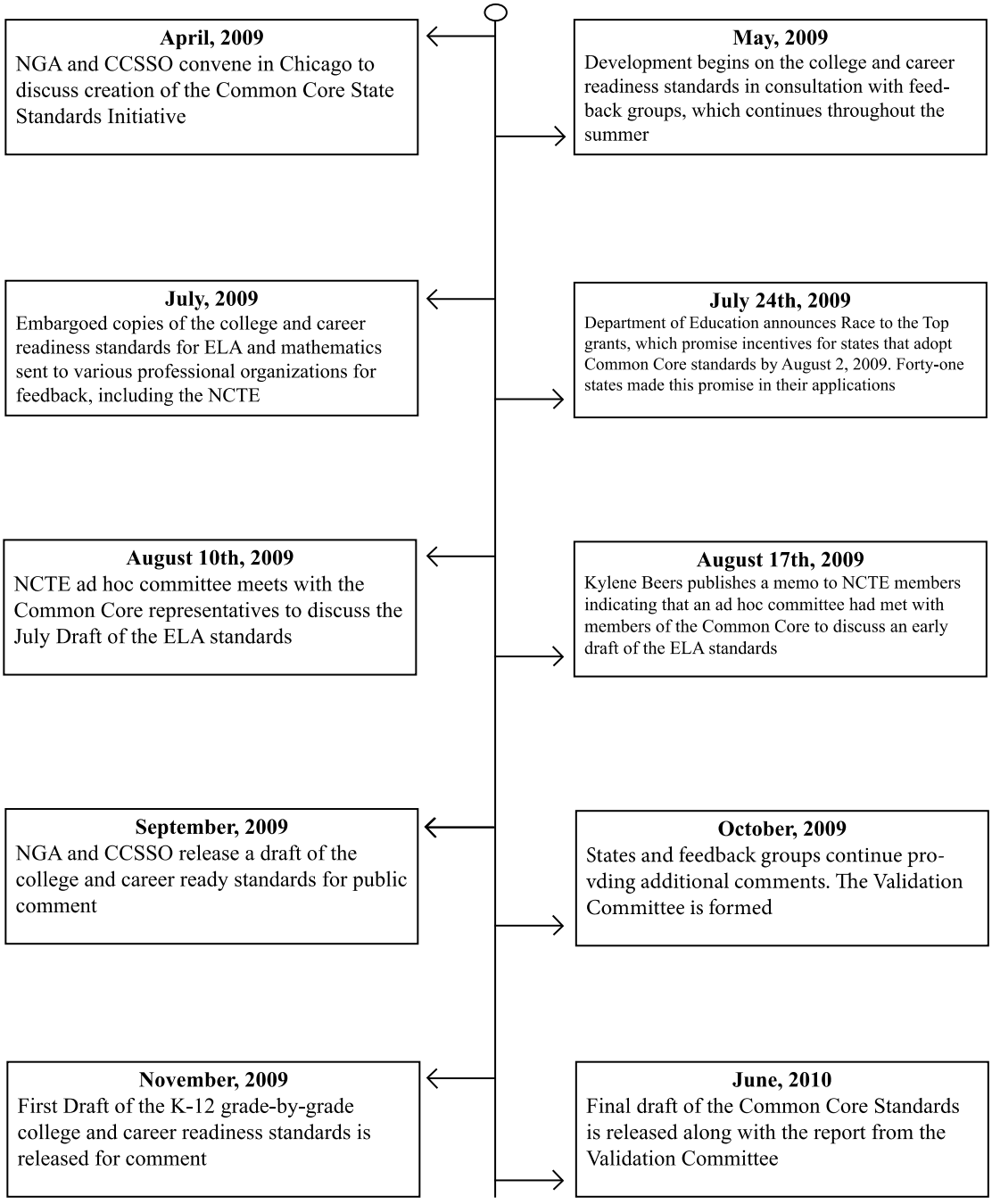
The writing of the Common Core took place in several complicated and intricate layers that involved many people, most of whom were not teachers, and in deliberations which were kept behind closed doors. The initial team that developed the college- and career-readiness standards shows a membership comprised of "content experts from Achieve, Inc., ACT, and the College Board." A press release late in the summer of 2009 notes that the workgroup's "deliberations will be confidential throughout this process" ("CCSS Development Work Group and Feedback Group Announced").[2] In May 2009, these secret work groups drafted the College-and Career-Readiness Standards, a broad description of what students in high school should know before they graduate. Following the completion of that draft, feedback groups provided comments and suggestions. In June of 2009, more specific grade-by-grade standards were developed based on the College-and Career-Readiness Standards, in accordance with feedback from feedback groups ("Complete Timeline"). In July and August 2009, embargoed copies of the college and career readiness standards for ELA and mathematics were sent to various professional organizations for feedback (including the NCTE, which I discuss in more detail below), after which feedback groups revised the standards again. The standards were then made available for a "public

[2] Achieve, Inc. describes itself as "an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit education reform organization dedicated to working with states to raise academic standards and graduation requirements, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability" ("About Us"). The Gates Foundation has given a total of $23 million to Achieve since its inception in 1996 ("Foundation Fact Sheet"). The chairs of Achieve, a handful of CEOs and governors, also served on several Common Core feedback groups in addition to serving as project manager for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), one of two assessment firms in charge of administering assessment of the Common Core standards ("Project Management Partner"). For more information, *Truthout* recently published an illuminating article and infographic detailing the Common Core's myriad corporate connections (Bernd).

review" in September of 2009, during which the CCSSO fielded nearly 1,000 comments ("Summary of Public Feedback"). Finally, a third phase of drafting commenced with a 29-person "Validation Committee" in October of 2009 (see the timeline below for a more detailed timeline).

The Validation Committee's job was to review and verify the standards, recommend improvements, and then "validate the sufficiency of the evidence supporting each College- and Career-Readiness Standards" ("CCSI Validation Committee Announced"). Not one person on the validation committee was a professor of English or an English Language Arts teacher. Journalist Anthony Cody writes that of the 27 people on the initial Work Groups, only three were from outside the ACT, College Board, Achieve, Student Achievement Partners, and America's Choice, and only one was a classroom teacher (from the mathematics work group). Moreover, Cody writes, "The process to write the standards remained secret, with few opportunities for input from parents, students, and educators. No experts in language acquisition or special education were involved, and no effort was made to see how the standards worked in practice, whether they were realistic and attainable" (Cody, "Common Core Standards: Ten Colossal Errors"). The Validation Committee's 2010 report *Reaching Higher* concluded that they were "for the most part" happy with the standards, finding that, among other things, the standards were "appropriate in terms of their level of clarity and specificity," and "informed by available research or evidence" (2). Of the 29 members of the Validation Committee, 24 signed off on the 2010 report. Five people refused to sign off. Later that month, the final draft of the Common Core standards was released, and by the next year, in 2011, states began formally adopting, ratifying, and implementing the

The Common Core and the NCTE: A Timeline



standards into their curricula (Texas and Virginia are the two states who never signed off or considered adopting the standards).[3]

Major critiques of the Common Core

The *official* portrayal of the intricate and formal processes by which the Common Core was composed, revised, and distributed belies some of the more significant critiques of the standards by scholars and teachers from across the country, which fall among three categories: the lack of teachers in the crafting of the standards; the secretive nature in which the standards were composed, validated, and distributed to the states; and the tying of federal funding to implementation of the standards. For example, according to the CCSSI official webpage, teachers were involved in the composition of the Common Core in four ways: 1) individual teachers served on both work groups and feedback groups for the ELA and math standards; 2) national organizations, which included the National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), offered "constructive feedback on the standards" ("Development Process"); 3) teachers were on state-convened teams that provided more feedback on the standards; and 4) teachers participated in the "public review" of the standards ("Summary of Public Feedback"). However, despite multiple occasions throughout the official discourse, comprised of press

[3] Actually, 41 states promised to align their curricula to the Common Core State Standards as early as August, 2nd, 2009, when applications for federal Race to the Top grants were due (Department of Education). These promises came *before* the final drafts of the standards were finally released ten months later in June of 2010. From 2011 to today, states and territories have undergone their own processes for revising, adopting, or rescinding their commitment to adopt the Common Core standards. "Standards in your State" from the Common Core website (http://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/) details which states have and have not adopted the standards, and the Common Core Wikipedia page provides additional details about the adoption and implementation of the standards, such as the status of implementation, each state's relationship to the consortia of assessment companies handling assessment of the standards, and other details that the official Common Core website (conveniently) fails to provide (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Core_State_Standards_Initiative).

releases, timelines, and overviews touting the involvement of teachers in the creation of the Common Core, there seems to be little evidence that teachers played any significant role in the creation, review, and validation of the standards. For example, Anthony Cody at *Education Week* notes that

> of the 25 individuals on the two teams (four people are on both) six are associated with the testmakers…and four are with Achieve. Zero teachers are on either Work Group. The Feedback Groups have 35 participants, almost all of whom are university professors. There appears to be only one classroom teacher involved in the entire process." (Cody, "The Secret Sixty Prepare to Write Standards for 50 Million")

The lack of teachers, Cody writes, is counter to any other process of composing standards: "Would standards for the practice of medicine be written without the participation of doctors," he asks. "Standards for the practice of law without lawyers? It is not only insulting, it is undemocratic and counterproductive in the extreme." In addition to providing some context for understanding the history of the Common Core and the major critiques of the Standards, this discourse also demonstrates the ways official and unofficial discourse paint a complex picture of how different groups orient themselves to public problems. Journalists and bloggers like Cody, for instance, cultivate agitational orientations to critique the dominant narrative of *accountability,* while organizations like the NCTE instead cultivated an *interventional* orientation in the hopes of collaborating with them in the drafting process.

Another major critique of the Common Core is of the secretive methods by which the standards were composed. In her 2014 speech to the MLA, outspoken Common Core critic Diane Ravitch argued that the Core Standards were written "behind closed doors" by a small

writing group that included "a significant number of representatives of the testing industry," in a process that was "marked by the absence of public participation, transparency, or educator participation." The five missing signatures of the Validation Committee on the 2010 report also indicate significant unrest among some of its authors: One of the five people who refused to sign off on the Validation Committee report, Sandra Stotsky, retired education professor from the University of Arkansas, details her experiences on the committee in a paper given at the "Consequences of the Common Core" conference at Notre Dame in 2013 called "The Common Core's Invalid Validation Committee." "The VC contained almost no experts on ELA standards," Stotsky writes. "I was the only nationally recognized expert on English language arts standards." Stotsky continues, "It quickly became clear that the VC existed as window-dressing—to rubber-stamp, not improve, whatever standards were declared as college-and career-readiness and grade-level standards." After detailing her written critiques of the standards while serving on the committee, Stotsky writes that "At no time did I receive queries, never mind replies to my comments from the CCSSI staff, the standards writers, or Commissioner Chester and fellow board members." Stotsky concludes that states need to "reconsider their hasty decisions" to implement the CCSSI for several reasons. The first is that "there has been no validation of the Common Core's standards by a legitimate public process." Second, "boards of education generally have no statutory authority to decide on college-readiness levels for credit-bearing post-secondary courses." And third, "there is nothing in the history and membership of the VC to suggest that the public should place confidence in the CCSSI or the U.S. Department of Education to convene committees of experts from the relevant disciplines in higher education in this country and elsewhere to validate Common Core's college-readiness level." The critiques issued here by

both Ravitch and Stotsky point to an element of distrust of the standards from those in academic circles (Stotsky, a retired professor, and Ravitch, a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education and current professor at NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development).

The last major critique of the Common Core comes from those skeptical of the way the initiative is tied to federal funds. For example, In 2009 the Department of Education announced the Race to the Top program (RTTT), which granted states access to a share of $4.35 billion reserved for states promising to meet certain performance-based standards. Schools were required to develop and adopt "a common set of K-12 standards…that are supported by evidence that they are internationally benchmarked and build toward college and career readiness by the time of high school graduation" ("Executive Summary" 5). All of the states that applied, except for Virginia, received RTTT grants by aligning state curricula to the Common Core ("RTTT Awards"). States that aligned their curricula to the Common Core also qualified for certain waivers "from adequate yearly progress quotas set under the new NCLB law, [which saves] many schools from being categorized as "failing"" (Perez-Pena 2012 qtd in Shannon 6). Rick Hess, columnist and scholar for the conservative think-tank the American Enterprise Institute described the relationship between the Common Core and RTTT as a "monument to paper promises, bureaucratic ineptitude, and federal overreach." Ravitch also opined that the Department of Education unethically promoted the Common Core through the RTTT funds:

> It was well understood by states that they would not be eligible for Race to the Top funding ($4.35 billion) unless they adopted the Common Core standards. Federal law prohibits the U.S. Department of Education from prescribing any

> curriculum, but in this case the Department figured out a clever way to evade the letter of the law. (Ravitch, "Why I Cannot Support the Common Core Standards")

Liberal reform group Rethinking Schools similarly writes that the Common Core was

> designed, in part, to circumvent federal restrictions on the adoption of a national curriculum, hence the insertion of the word "state" in the brand name. States were coerced into adopting the Common Core by requirements attached to the federal Race to the Top grants and, later, the No Child Left Behind waivers.

In other words, the connection between federal funding and the Common Core signals to many critics from both sides of the political aisle a set of *de facto* national standards implemented by the Department of Education, especially in its designation of two agencies, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), to assess schools aligned with the CCSSI (Shannon 6).

As I alluded to above, critiques of the Common Core are increasingly coming from both sides of the political aisle (Westervelt). Liberal critics frequently fault the Common Core as part of a neoliberal agenda of "government through the market, wherein education is viewed as a consumer-driven commodity that ought to be efficient and profitable (e.g., privatized)" (Larson ix). A liberal critique of the Common Core holds that the standards embody a form of economic neoliberalism that subjects every aspect of education to free market principles of competition and privatization. The edited collection *Closer Readings of the Common Core*, for example, includes nine chapters from public school teachers,

academics, and others who critique the CCSSI from liberal economic, historical, and educational perspectives. Niche publications like *Education Week* run stories that critique the Common Core on a regular basis from a variety of ideological perspectives. Even conservative Tea Party groups oppose the Common Core, deriding the initiative as the liberal indoctrination of "Obamacore" (Wallsten and Layton 2013) or a "thinly veiled attempt to circumvent the legally and constitutionally enshrined principle of state-level control over education" (Kurtz 2013). The fact that the Common Core is critiqued from several different ideological perspectives is important for my argument because at the very least, it indicates a salient public debate in which different groups from different perspectives with varying interests and motivations are adopting agitational orientations to critique and confront the problem, which provides a backdrop for the interventional orientation of the NCTE in 2009.

The NCTE's involvement in the Common Core was also predicated by a public debate in which school educators with classroom experience in writing, literacy, or language, felt ignored. And while the NGA and the CCSSO consistently touted the standards' collaborative and inclusive nature, the fact that practitioners of English Studies felt lost in the shuffle of consultants, business leaders, philanthropic organizations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other establishment groups, is important. It helps explain why the NCTE accepted an invitation (on short notice) to work with the CCSSI and provide feedback when they were contacted in August of 2009. Moreover, the distinct power differential between the policymakers and business people in charge of crafting the documents and those *outside* of power, the teachers and writing experts who felt their particular range of expertise was not being consulted, is also important, because it situates their engagement as an intervention, which I have defined as a relationship in which a group at a power-deficit

collaborates with an establishment group to create some kind of change or action on a shared public issue.

The Interventional Orientation of the NCTE

The NCTE's short relationship with the Common Core is not a perfect model of meaningful and transformative interventional orientations. Rather, their partnership highlights the challenges, pitfalls, and ethical risks involved when engaging with establishment groups on matters of education policy. Kylene Beers, president of the NCTE at the time, points to these risks in an August 17th, 2009 memo to the NCTE membership, where she confirmed that an NCTE committee had met with the NGA and the CCSSO that month to review an early draft of the Common Core ELA standards (from this point forward referred to as "The July Draft"). The committee, she writes, found that the ELA standards were "against existing NCTE policies and practices." The review panel crafted their own response and met with CCSSI representatives August 10th and "brought to the table many years of classroom experience both in secondary education and higher education." After a "frank" conversation, Beers notes that the "90-minute meeting was, at times, blunt and by the end of the meeting, it was obvious that all were very impressed by the thoroughness of the NCTE review." Moreover, Beers writes,

> Though I do not know how influential the NCTE review of the document will prove to be, I do know that of the 300 or so groups or individuals who have offered response to the [CCSSO], only six groups were invited to a face-to-face meeting regarding the draft document. NCTE was one of those six. The Executive Committee is appreciative of the meeting.

Finally, Beers notes that the committee now waits with "cautious optimism" for the release of the final documents. Beers's description of the meeting with the CCSSI organizers reveals the risks of interventional orientations. Despite being a landmark moment in English studies when a professional organization of teachers directly collaborated with powerful policymakers, Beers was cautious about NCTE's impact because powerful groups in charge of crafting policies do not *have* to listen if they do not want to. Thus Beers waits with "cautious optimism" because, as mentioned in Chapter 1, intervening in a mutual public problem with an establishment group that has considerably more power to wield can prove unproductive or even futile.

The risks of interventional engagement are expressed most pointedly in Doug Hesse's account of his frustrating experience working with the CCSSI groups in his essay from the 2012 collection *Who Speaks for Writing: Stewardship in Writing Studies in the 21st Century*. Hesse notes that NCTE's partnership with the authors of the Common Core ELA standards was futile from the very beginning, as "input from experts in writing was missing in the development stages, sought during the end game and pretty much after the fact, then ignored" (11). Hesse writes that the NCTE's 21-page response excoriated the July Draft for its shortsightedness in digital studies, multimodality, and the social/civic aspects of writing (12). Moreover, NCTE challenged the Common Core's persistent claims that the standards were "evidence-based," noting that "none of the evidence has been drawn from peer-reviewed research journals or similar sources" (12). Two months later, however, Hesse writes that at a day-long meeting on DuPont Circle where CCSSI representatives from Achieve, the NGA, and the CCSSO discussed the NCTE's feedback, "not only had there been no revisions in

major components of the document that had most troubled the NCTE review group," but also,

> to everyone's surprise…the governors' group had gone the next step of "backmapping." Confident in their graduation standards for reading and writing, the governors and chiefs had set up a process to establish specific grade-level standards from kindergarten on, thus dictating at the finest grain what out to be taught when. We were stunned, and while we generated six objections to the draft standards, we realized that this matter was far down the road, pulled substantially by the horse of Race to the Top (12).

In other words, while NCTE crafted detailed objections to the Common Core in their report, it was clear to Hesse that their role was merely to rubber stamp a set of standards that had already been tied to RTTT funding and had already been "backmapped" from college-readiness to learning outcomes at the Kindergarten level. As far as Hesse was concerned, NCTE's suggestions were unheeded, unpersuasive, and unimportant to the authors of the Common Core.

Below, I try to account for the disconnect Hesse points out by analyzing two documents: NCTE's 21-page response to the July Draft of the ELA standards and the final draft of the ELA standards published in October of 2009. Specifically, I highlight how NCTE made distinct appeals to academic, peer-reviewed research as the *more valuable* form of evidence, evidence aimed to prove the inadequacy of the ELA standards. The NCTE's appeals to evidence, I argue, show how evidence functions not as an objective path toward persuasion by merely plugging gaps with new knowledge, but as a discursive framing of values, or ways of seeing the world. The values asserted through evidence in this discursive

exchange, moreover, reveal a key ingredient of engagement: a heightened need in interventional orientations, as Carolyn Miller writes, to rely on more than just "decision science" to facilitate dialogue. Decision science is a narrowly defined approach to policy deliberations that "encourages submission to technical, knowledge-based solutions for what are social, value-based problems" (46). In the discourse surrounding the partnership between the Common Core and NCTE, the appeals to traditionally authoritative grounds for persuasion (at least in academic contexts) reveal less about the futility of this specific partnership and more about the importance of fostering sustained collaborations and long-term relationships for meaningful engagement.

Appeals to academic evidence in the NCTE's critique of the July Draft

In interventional orientations, a clash of values is expected, but the task is to leverage the partnership to communicate those values in a way that can be both heard and acted upon by the establishment group. Appealing mostly to academic citations, the NCTE hindered that process and missed an opportunity to rely upon other kinds relationship-building rhetorical practices. For example, a closer look at the NCTE's critique of the July Draft shows an over-reliance on appeals to academic evidence. The NCTE's critique is separated into two parts, a general introduction and a detailed list of objections categorized by scope, omissions, and language-use.[4] The introduction notes how new patterns of language and literacy, which include new kinds of texts, composing practices, and the impact of globalization, reflect a literacy environment that "demands innovation, creativity, and adaptability." The ELA

[4] The NCTE's critique of the July draft of the Common Core ELA standards was actually published in September of 2009 due to an embargo on the early drafts of the ELA standards. This means that all I have to analyze is NCTE's critique of the July Draft and final version of the ELA standards which came out in the fall of 2009. So, while I cannot actually look at the early draft itself, I can compare the critique of that draft to the version that was eventually sent to the states, in order to understand more about how NCTE made rhetorical interventions into the Common Core debate, and how the Common Core subsequently responded (or didn't).

standards, they argue, do not embody the accelerating rate of change in American public education, and applies more to "the schools of 1950 as to the schools of this decade" (3). And while the apparent goal of the Common Core is to create standards that are "higher, clearer, and fewer," NCTE charges that the ELA standards are "articulated as individual, testable actions rather than as authentic performances in college classrooms or workplaces." Particularly, NCTE fears that those from underprivileged groups, those who are more likely to underperform on assessment, are at a distinct disadvantage in the implementation of the narrowly defined ELA standards. Teachers of these students, they argue, "will be forced to attend narrowly to the standards." To back up this claim, NCTE notes how "research demonstrates that narrow and high-stake assessments reduce the scope of curriculum and decrease student engagement." Left dangling in parentheses are six separate academic citations (3).[5] Next, NCTE notes how a decrease in student engagement disproportionately impacts those from underserved communities. This statement is similarly followed by three more citations from academic sources (4).[6] And, while the Common Core claims that the ELA standards are evidence-based, the NCTE finds that "none of the evidence has been drawn from peer-reviewed research journals or similar sources." Rather, the evidence offered in the July Draft, NCTE charges, "consists of surveys conducted by the testing companies that stand most immediately to gain from the testing of these standards" (4). This statement is followed by two more academic citations that show how peer-reviewed research into

[5] The sources cited here come from prestigious scholarly journals like *Education Policy Analysis Archives* (Amrein and Berliner); *Research in the Teaching of English* (Anagnostopoulos; Ketter and Pool); *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (Valli and Chambliss); George Hillocks's 2002 influential monograph the *Testing Trap: How State Writing Assessments Control Learning*; and Linda McNeil's 2000 monograph *Contradictions of School Reform: Educational Costs of Standardized Testing*.

[6] Here, academic evidence came from the *American Educational Research Journal* (Booher-Jennings); *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* (Roderick, Jacob, & Bryk); and Angela Valenzuela's scholarly monograph *Leaving Children Behind: How"Texas-Style" Accountability Fails Latino Youth*.

different literacy practices has been overlooked in the ELA standards.[7] To mitigate these discrepancies, NCTE recommends that "those who are familiar with the relevant research and important practices" should be "invited to contribute their insights to the standards," and NCTE even goes as far as to suggest the authors of the Common Core get rid of *any* "claims that these standards are based in valid evidence, since such claims will only invite skepticism and criticism that cannot be answered" (4). By using eleven citations in the first few paragraphs of their critique, the NCTE frames *their* evidence—that of peer-reviewed research journals produced by scholars who are *more familiar* with writing and language—as the *more truthful* form of evidence to use in the formation of education policy. And moreover, NCTE attempts to bolster this claim by denouncing the CCSSI's very use of the word *evidence* at all, since what they cite is not a *valid* form of support. While there are obvious upsides to this as a rhetorical approach, the downside is that over-reliance on citations might be read as aggressive, inaccessible, or even patronizing.

The subsequent two parts of the NCTE's critique of the ELA standards continue to reiterate the value of academic research by implicitly showing how the ELA standards are not based on *current* research. Barring some of the "few" things the standards do well, NCTE indicates important areas the standards did not address, such as the multiple purposes of writing, which go beyond merely college and career (5-6); writing as a process, which would underscore the range of repertoires and practices writers could harness in particular literacy situations (6); diversity, which would help 21st century communicators understand cultural difference and "organized knowledge about cultural differences" (6); the social dimensions of learning, which would better highlight the "role of others in individuals' developments of

[7] Here the academic evidence comes from Kathleen Blake Yancey's "Literacy Demands of Entering the University" and Ann Beaufort's "Preparing Adolescents for the Literacy Demands of the 21st-Century Workplace," both from the *Handbook of Adolescent Literacy*.

[writing] skills (6); the varieties of writing quality, which would help students understand that "what counts as an effective text varies immensely in terms of audience and purpose" (7); and 21st century literacies, which would help students deal with the "real, substantive, and high-stakes" demands of a 21st-century information society (7). The ELA standards, NCTE writes, omitted the kinds of writing practices outlined by academic research and focused instead on the "ease of assessing" which has unfortunately "given rise to distortions in the drafted standards for teaching and learning" (6). Moreover, NCTE argues that these distortions "misrepresent the nature of composition" and falsely advertise themselves as "standards for learning" instead of what they really are: "standards for assessment," a move that is "extremely costly for the nation" (6). NCTE's dire denouncement of the ELA positions the organization in stark opposition to the Common Core, a move that undoubtedly served to increase, rather than bridge, the gulf between them.

The third part of the NCTE's critique of the July Draft continues to widen this gap through line-by-line suggestions for revision. These revisions, the NCTE writes, are "grounded in NCTE policy, the peer-reviewed research base that underlies those policies, and the real-world experience of schools, districts, and states who have encountered unforeseen frustrations when the standards-based reforms they pursued didn't square with rapid changes in the practice of literacy and the conditions of schooling" (7). NCTE's list of suggested ELA language changes also reflect their views on how academic research should be valued and incorporated into the standards themselves. For example, In S*ection 1. B: Required Range and Contexts, Complexity, Sentence*, the original language read:

> In college and careers, students will need to *extract knowledge* and information from reference materials, technical manuals, literature, and other

> texts (print and online) that are characterized by demanding and context-dependent vocabulary, subtle relationships among ideas and characters, a nuanced rhetorical style and tone, and often elaborate structures or formats. (10, my emphasis)

NCTE proposed to change the text to the following:

> In college and careers, students will need to *construct understandings* with reference materials, technical manuals, literature, and other texts (print and online) that are characterized by demanding and context-dependent vocabulary, subtle relationships among ideas and characters, a nuanced rhetorical style and tone, and often elaborate structures or formats. (10, my emphasis)

The phrase in the draft, "extracting knowledge and information," NCTE argues, is "outdated in reading in psychology (since the 1970s)" and needs to rely on more recent perspectives of a "constructive model of reading" as opposed to the "simple extraction of information." Following the language change, NCTE offers six more parenthetical citations to support their claims.[8]

Another suggested change comes in the section 1. B, *Required Range and Contexts, Quality*. NCTE proposed an entirely new paragraph to be added at the end of the section entitled "Required Range and Contexts, Quality."

[8] The citations in this section come from prestigious journals like the *Reading Research Quarterly* (Lee); *Scientific Studies of Reading* (Schraw & Bruning); a chapter from Alvermann, Unrau, and Ruddell's edited collection *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading* (Rumelhart); and monographs like Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo's *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*; Louise M. Rosenblatt's *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*; and Teun A. van Dijk & Walker Kintsch's *Strategies of Discourse Comprehension*.

> Students also build reading strength and engagement through highly motivated experience with a range of texts, and they must be provided with opportunities to develop independent reading agendas, favorite authors and topics, and habits that sustain a literate life. They must learn as well to discuss features of textual quality in reference to the everyday texts in their lives, such as songs, websites, and advertisements. Such transfer of notions of quality is essential to the practicalities of the workplace and to lifelong literacy. (12)

The proposed language here, NCTE argues, reflects research on the importance of "engagement and motivation" to develop habits of "lifelong literacy." Appealing to nine more citations, NCTE argues that adding this section reflects how engagement and motivation are "of intrinsic value to a literate life, almost by definition" (12).[9] These language revisions and substantial numbers of academic citations are specific examples of NCTE's strategies of engagement in their partnership with the authors of the Common Core, in which they made appeals to academic evidence in their assertions of the value of multimodal and context-specific literacies.

Appeals to Academic Evidence in the Final Draft of the ELA Standards

It is important to reiterate that NCTE's critique of the July Draft of the ELA standards is a clear, focused, and bold evaluation. NCTE's suggestions and the research they cite are informative, enlightening, and important for any group attempting to compose standards for American public schools, and NCTE was right to invoke the literature of their field in their engagement with the organizations that wrote the Common Core. But when juxtaposed with

[9] The NCTE's critiques continue line-by-line, and range from rejecting reading as a dichotomy of "informational" and "literary" texts, offering to change the phrase "determine the main idea" to "interpret for main ideas" (8), to critiquing the standards' fiction/nonfiction divides (8); definitions of writing as solitary (9); or the lack of attention to multiple modalities and genres (14).

the actual ELA standards that were published after the NCTE composed their critique and met with CCSSI representatives in person, which turned out to be a document that applied very little if any of the NCTE's suggestions, it is easy to see via the different groups' appeals to academic research how their differing value systems were merely pushed further apart during this engagement experience. For instance, the introduction to the final draft of the ELA standards reads that each standard is informed by only the "best available research" that indicates whether or not a particular skill is "essential for college and career readiness in the twenty-first century" (3). Indeed, the appendix to the ELA standards contains 104 citations from the field of writing, language, literacy, and speech that support the Common Core ELA standards.

In fact, while the standards do indeed cite "surveys conducted by the testing companies," as NCTE had charged, they also cite a range of evidence in the field of literacy that describes the increasing complexity of texts that students face in the 21st century.[10] The ELA standards cite this research as a way of bolstering the CCSSI's quantitative method of labeling text complexity according to specific scales and attaching them to standards for each grade level (5). In the section on writing, the ELA cites literacy scholars like Gerald Graff as evidence for the need for increased proficiency in the "ability to write sound arguments on substantive topics and issues" (24), or rhetoricians like Richard Fulkerson to back up claims about the social and public value of being able to argue well (25). In other words, each group appealed to academic evidence in some way or another to bolster their claims, which reveals

[10] For example, the ELA standards cite Marilyn Jager Adams's "The Challenge of Advanced Texts" from the edited collection *Reading More, Reading Better: Are American Students Reading Enough of the Right Stuff?*; and a study on the decline of SAT-Verbal scores from the *American Educational Research Journal* (Hayes, Wolfer, and Wolfe).

less about what research is *correct* and more about how each group's use of research reinforces separate sets of values.

The authors of the ELA standards value ease of assessment, standardized writing curricula throughout all grades, and the gradual displacement of the teaching of "literary" texts in favor of more *real world* or "informational" texts. This is seen more clearly through the analysis of the ELA standards' different appeals to evidence that show up throughout the document. The ELA document as a whole is separated into three sections: K-5 ELA standards; 6-12 ELA standards; and finally standards for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. At the beginning of each section, College- and Career-Readiness Standards "anchor the document" and lay out the expectations in an explanatory note of what students must meet to be prepared to enter both college and the workforce. After the anchors come grade-specific standards that correspond to the numbered anchors and outline what students should know by the end of each grade year. These standards unfold in a "cumulative progression" that details standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. The important thing to consider in this example here from the ELA standards and the anchor statements is that there is no incorporation of NCTE's suggested language revisions like focusing on *constructing* understandings and cultivating *habits of mind* that provide opportunities to sustain engagement with literacy. For example, the anchor-statements for the writing standards in grades 6-12, quoted in their entirety below, are separated into four categories: Text Types and Purposes; Production and Distribution of Writing; Research to Build and Present Knowledge; and Range of Writing:

Text Types and Purposes

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Production and Distribution of Writing

4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Range of Writing

10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. (41)

As I mentioned above, after the anchor statements come grade specific standards. So for example, for grades 11-12, the ninth anchor statement (to "draw evidence from literary or informational texts") is achieved by having students a) "Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics" and b) Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning [e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court Case majority opinions and dissents] and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy [e.g., *The Federalist*, presidential addresses]" (47).

The 11-12 grade anchor statements and outcomes correspond to the ELA's definitions of *literary* and *informational* texts (which come from a completely different study: more on that below). The ELA standards define literature as stories, dramas, and poetry; and informational texts as literary nonfiction and its subgenres of "exposition, argument, and functional text in the form of personal essays, speeches, opinion pieces, essays about art or literature, biographies, memoirs, journalism, and historical, scientific, technical, or economic accounts (including digital sources) written for a broad audience" (57). This distinction between literary and informational texts is one of the most important elements of the ELA standards that clearly diverges from the NCTE's feedback. "Most of the required reading in college and workforce training programs," the standards read, "is informational in structure

and challenging in content." Thus, since college and universities generally assign more informational texts than what K-12 institutions are used to assigning, the new standards integrate more informational texts into their expectations. The ELA standards cite the 2009 reading framework of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) which requires a "high and increasing proportion of informational text on its assessment as students advance through the grades" (4). According to the ELA standards, informational texts are texts in history/social studies, science, technical subjects, and literary nonfiction, while literary texts include stories, dramas, poetry and myths. The standards suggest ratios of informational and literary texts per grade: In grade 4, the ratio of literary to informational texts is suggested to be at 50%; in grade 8, 45% to 55%; and in grade 12: 30% to 70% (Table 1). Thus, as the ratio between literary and informational texts assigned declines as students advance grades, so too does the distribution of students' "communicative purposes": writing to persuade, to explain, or to convey real or imagined experiences (5). In grade 4, writing to persuade is suggested for 30% of all assignments; writing to explain at 35%, and writing to convey experiences at 35%. In grade 8, writing to persuade increases to 35%, while writing to explain stays at 35%, and conveying personal experience decreases to 30%. By grade 12, the standards dictate that writing to persuade should be assigned 40% of the time, writing to explain 40% of the time;

Table 1: Distribution of Literary and Informational Passages by Grade in the 2009 NAEP Reading Framework

Grade	Literary	Informational
4	50%	50%
8	45%	55%
12	30%	70%

National Assessment Governing Board. *Reading Framework for the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress.* Washington, DC. Government Printing Office, 2008.

and writing to convey personal experience only 20% of the time (Table 2).

The above minutia of the English Language Arts Standards demonstrates that the CCSS conceptualized the purpose of literacy education in terms of economic success. The standards reveal a call for well-trained workers who read "real world texts" and college students who don't need to convey their experiences to others, while NCTE, as revealed in their response, understands literacy education for social justice and to prepare students from all races and classes for democratic citizenship. Clearly, the research of NCTE was not consulted, the language offered by NCTE went unheeded, and some of the essential differences in values are still reflected, if not heightened, by the ELA standards' seemingly arbitrary focus on the separation between literary and informational texts in terms of ratios and percentages. "The dichotomy of literature/informational creates too restricted a set of purposes," NCTE had warned:

Table 2: Distribution of Communicative Purposes by Grade in the 2011 NAEP Writing Framework

Grade	To Persuade	To Explain	To Convey Experience
4	30%	35%	35%
8	35%	35%	30%
12	40%	40%	20%

National Assessment Governing Board. *Writing Framework for the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress, Pre-Publication Edition.* Iowa City, IA: ACT, Inc, 2007.

> The assertions about the nature of literary reading are not supported in research. The claim that literary reading has a causal relationship to success in other reading purposes has no basis in reading research beyond elementary school, and so it misstates the purposes of literary study in secondary and tertiary education. (13)

NCTE's critique also states that even though a significant amount of reading in college *is* "informational," an equally important amount is "persuasive" or "argumentative." In other words, there are several different kinds of methods rhetors use to argue, and as such, "much reading in the workplace occurs not simply to extract information but to evaluate recommendations or courses of action" (7). But despite NCTE's thorough appeals to scholarship in their field, the split between informational and literary texts remained in the final draft of the ELA standards. In fact, many of the original citations and NCTE's suggestions for revision are unrecognizable in the final draft of the ELA standards, making cross-referencing difficult. But by and large, from my analysis above, and from Hesse's testimonial, the final draft of the Common Core ELA standards does not incorporate any significant changes that the NCTE report had recommended. As an orientation, intervention in this case, seems to have helped NCTE position themselves on a seat at the table, but without a sustained, ongoing dialogue, the groups were unable to cultivate meaningful exchange.

In addition to valuing different skills, like correctness and economic success, the research cited by the Common Core for the division between informational and literary texts also expresses a particular value system that places emphasis on tools for assessment. Diane Ravitch has argued that the ratios suggested by the ELA standards, such as the 70-30 split in grade 12 in favor of informational texts, is based on spurious percentages which were meant more as "instructions to test developers" and not for teachers. In fact, she writes, the "NAEP never intended that these numbers would be converted into instructional mandates for teachers." These arbitrary numbers, she writes, are hard to police, inaccurate representations of how knowledge is distributed in college and the workplace, and unfair to teachers.

"Frankly," she writes, "I think that teachers are quite capable of making that decision for themselves. If they choose to teach a course devoted only to fiction or devoted only to non-fiction, that should be their choice, not a mandate imposed by a committee in 2009" (Ravitch, "Everything you Need to Know about the Common Core"). Nevertheless, the Common Core's ELA standards suggest divisions between informational and literary texts based on "*extensive research* establishing the need for college and career ready students to be proficient in reading complex informational text independently in a variety of content areas" (4, my emphasis). In a sense, though, it is not the research cited on both sides that matters but the growing gulf in values exacerbated by frequent appeals to evidence without any presumption of shared values or common ground between the two groups. The CCSSI uses research from the field of writing and literacy to suggest that students' abilities to decipher texts are declining and that a new set of rigorous, quantitative evaluations are necessary to remedy this deficiency. NCTE, on the other hand, uses research to suggest that narrowly defined and easily assessed standards do not take into account the broader, multimodal nature of writing and will disproportionally impact at-risk communities. But at no point did any group have a chance to cultivate meaningful relationships, sustained partnerships, and genuine intellectual exchange through their interventional orientations.

NCTE's and the Common Core's appeals to the value of academic research represent competing values: on the side of the Common Core, the value of data, populist appeals to equality and the need for school accountability, and a corporatist doctrine of competition and the ethics of a global marketplace. On the other, NCTE emphasizes the idiosyncrasies of the local, like classroom-based assessments, protecting "at-risk" communities, and a distinct

emphasis on the complexity of multiple literate environments.[11] NCTE's efforts to broadcast their value-system to the authors of the ELA through appeals to academic research, while laudable, actually exposed how important it is to also foster sustained collaboration in interventional engagement practices. As Hesse mentions, the Common Core authors did not incorporate any of the NCTE's critiques into their final document, which left him wondering why, how, or whether or not the NCTE's feedback made any difference in the deliberative process. I argue here that the role of relationship-building is incredibly important in making sure values are heard and exchanged through interventional orientations.

Building Sustained Relationships through Interventional Orientations

Research in public health and political science has been looking at the role of evidenced-based policy-making since the 1970s, and by and large scholars in these fields have been making the case that evidence-based research has little impact in actual policy decisions—or rather, that evidence-based research is only one of many available strategies in the formation of public policy.[12] For example, Public Health researcher Nick Black writes that evidence-based policymaking often assumes a linear relationship between research and policy, or rather, that "research is used to fill an identified gap in knowledge" (275). And despite rising trends to connect policy decisions with evidence in areas of public life from police to defense to health care, "research has only a limited role because government policies are driven by ideology, value judgments, financial stringency, economic theory, political expediency, and intellectual fashion" (276). For example, public health experts Greenhalgh and Russell describe evidence as serving a rhetorical function:

[11] This is seen specifically in many NCTE position statements, namely The "NCTE Definition of 21st Century Literacies," which defines literacy as "multiple, dynamic, and malleable."
[12] Particularly Carol Weiss's work in public policy: See "Research for Policy's Sake: The Enlightenment Function of Social Research in *Policy Analysis*; or "The Many Meanings of Research Utilization" in *Public Administration Review*.

> Evidence for policy making is not sitting in journals ready to be harvested by assiduous systematic reviewers. Rather, it is dynamically created through the human interaction around the policy making table – and, probably more significantly, the lobbying, campaigning and interpersonal influencing going on in the back rooms and corridors leading up to official policy making meetings (36).

Greenhalgh and Russell's emphasis on the "human interaction" of evidence is reinforced in Wood et al.'s empirical study of behavioral patterns in medical patients in the U.K. Wood et al. found that

> Scientific evidence is not a clear, accepted and bounded source. There is no such entity as *'the* body of evidence." There are simply (more or less competing) (re)constructions of evidence able to support almost any position. Much of what is called evidence is, in fact, a contested domain, constituted in the debates and controversies of opposing viewpoints in search of ever more compelling arguments (1735)

Wood et al. continue, arguing that evidence functions not as a way to *win* a debate but to *widen* it:

> The nature of evidence is ambivalent. It is constructed into debates and controversies, which are often equally supportive of opposing viewpoints. Such issues appear recursive and intractable *not* linear and incremental, so that a final resolution remains unlikely in many cases. The "progress" of science serves only to widen the debate. (1737)

In other words, making appeals to the value of academic evidence alone does not lead to policy decisions. Moreover, securing a place at the table, or establishing influence in the "back rooms and corridors" of policy making meetings is another, often overlooked tool that carries persuasive weight.

Many public policy and political science researchers suggest approaches to policymaking similar to my own spectrum of public orientations I introduced in Chapter 1. For example, rather than the more linear problem-solving understandings of policy in which research functions as a way to plug a hole in a perceived knowledge gap, Elliott and Popay suggest several different approaches to using research in policymaking: there is the interactive model, which relies on research as "one of several knowledge sources on which policy makers draw in an iterative process of decision making" (462); or the dialogic model, proposed by Giddens, which holds that social knowledge is created through the process of interaction, or rather, "the influence that research has on policy makers is most likely to come about through an *extended process* of communication between researchers, policy makers, and lay actors" (463, my italics). Through case studies, Elliott and Popay found that other factors like budget or time constraints are just as likely to influence policy and that "sustained dialogue between researchers and the users of research increases the use of research-based evidence in policy" (465). Moreover, Elliott and Popay argue that research is often "shaped by the personal and professional values of the interpreter and by the social contexts within which research findings are to be applied" (467). Elliott and Popay's analysis could be described in terms of my own argument in this dissertation: that dynamic repertories of different *stances*, or *orientations* help facilitate extended processes of communication, or relationship-building, among partners with mutual interests and varying power differentials.

Specifically, *interventional* stances, I argue, attempt to foster sustained engagement based on collaboration through shared discourse. But the key phrases here are, as Elliott and Popay argue, *extended process of communication* and *sustained dialogue*—two traits that research has shown can impact policy decisions, and two traits that NCTE was unable to negotiate in their relationship with the authors of the ELA standards.

Additionally, a key aspect of interventional orientations is the unpredictability of the partnerships different groups can cultivate. As in the case of NCTE and the Common Core, NCTE was almost entirely ignored. Black concludes that in the formation of public policy it is *usually* the case that researchers are ignored:

> researchers have to accept that their work may be ignored because policymakers have to take the full complexity of any situation into account. They need to consider that the other legitimate influences on policy (social, electoral, ethical, cultural, and economic) must be accommodated and that research is most likely to influence policymakers through an extended process of communication (277).

Black's suggestion here speaks to the *other* ways that academics might influence establishment groups beyond invoking their peer-reviewed publications. A key component of interventional orientations is what Black calls an "extended process of communication," which allows for research and expertise to be wielded in a way that can make meaningful inroads into the debates scholars value. In other words, making appeals to the relevant research in the field is just one of the many rhetorical tools for interventional orientations.

Public policy research is a good place to find arguments about the function of research in policy decisions, but rhetoricians have also made similar claims. In 1989, for

example, Carolyn Miller critiqued limits of "decision science" popular at the time in business, management, and economic journals. Decision Science, she wrote, is an instrumental approach to reason that postulates a normative and formal theory of complex decision problems that "presupposes a dichotomy between fact and value, between procedure (which alone can be rational) and substance (which is always arbitrary), and prefers, in each case, the former" (44). Miller argues that decision science "provides no room for audience, and treats rationality as wholly procedural" (45). Miller asserts that the rhetorical tradition formulates a better alternative. The rhetorical turn, Miller writes, "challenges the assumption that intellectual and social progress demand the certainty sought by the instrumental reason of scientism" (46). In other words, the role of research in public policy has always been a rhetorical problem of forming relationships rather than a *scientistic* statement of fact. Put another way, writing researchers do not even have to stray too far away from their field to find scholarship on the function of evidence in public debates.

It is clear from NCTE's critique of the July Draft and the final draft of the ELA standards that the NCTE's appeals to the value of academic research had little impact in the formation of the ELA standards. The value-systems that emerge from the critique and the final draft of the standards reveal not just that NCTE's role in the partnership was unpersuasive (which may or may not have been the case), but also that partnerships with establishment groups can be potentially futile without interventional orientations that privilege sustained relationship-building and collaboration. Moreover, research shows that successful interventional engagement requires more interpersonal and sustained interactions with establishment groups in order for the value-systems supported by research to be taken seriously. In the next section, I argue that part of the problem with gaining a seat at the table

has to do with recent pushes in the last 30 years of official education policy on accountability. The accountability movement prioritizes the standardization of curricula and quantifiable data, and contrasts considerably with the field of writing studies' own relationship with writing assessment (which is part of the reason why the two value systems seem so divided). Writing assessment scholarship generally expresses lingering unease with large-scale assessment initiatives like the Common Core. This context places organizations like NCTE at a distinct disadvantage in their efforts to gain the ethos to make meaningful interventions into the standards debate.

Intervening in the Age of Accountability

One potential way scholars in writing studies can find common ground with groups with differing values and agendas regarding literacy education is in conversations on accountability. The CCSSI's call to increase standards in the face of a so-called decline in academic achievement has historical antecedents in over 40 years of American education policies that appeal to models of accountability. Accountability, Adler-Kassner writes, is a "common sense" frame through which public discussions about higher education happen. These frames stress a heightened need for educational reform in the face of declining skills, literacy rates, and relevancy in the global marketplace (75). In 1999, Richard Ohmann's "Historical Reflections on Accountability" found that between 1970 and 1999 there were 585 titles that linked "accountability" and "education." In 2009, Linda Adler-Kassner recreated the search and found 750 publications (76). In *Reclaiming Assessment: A Better Alternative to the Accountability Movement*, Chris W. Gallagher writes that the accountability movement in public education emerged from several overlapping claims of "literacy crises" in the 1970s that bemoaned declining literacy rates and called for more academic rigor in public schools.

These crises fed public sentiment and ultimately resulted in public policy aimed at remedying the crises through the strengthening of academic expectations. Gallagher cites President Ronald Reagan's Commission on Excellence in Education's report *Nation at Risk*, written by CEOs, politicians, and administrators in higher education, which charged the U.S. with failing in its educative mission. This report, Gallagher writes, casts "a long shadow over educational reform during the past two decades." For example, efforts to make public schools "accountable" to the public materialized in a 1989 summit of the nation's governors that developed a set of incentives and disincentives for school performances based on standardized tests. These policies made their way into President Bill Clinton's 1994 Educate America Act, which tied school performance to federal aid for the first time, and into President George W. Bush's education policy, which culminated in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Moreover, while education policies in the 1980s and 90s were bipartisan, Gallagher notes that they were also "heavily influenced by the nation's business community and its commitment to improving America's competitiveness in the global marketplace" (20-21). This model of accountability, Gallagher notes, while making common sense appeals and expressing democratic platitudes like "leveling the playing field" or leaving "no child behind," nevertheless espouses a narrowly defined concern for "getting one's money's worth in a competitive 'free market' of goods and services" (23). These cultural antecedents might explain why the suggestions of NCTE might have sounded to the authors of the ELA standards (who were themselves leaders in government, think tanks, and educational entrepreneurs) unlike anything they have ever encountered in their time drafting and implementing education policies.

The NCLB is an explicit example of the business-centric accountability movement and the culmination of high stakes testing that set a precedent for American public education policy that led to the Common Core. A reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the NCLB dramatically redefined the ESEA's "Title One" provision which distributes funds to school districts in need.[13]According to the NCLB, all schools are to be held "accountable," which means public schools are required to test students in grades 3-8 every year so that by 2014, every child would be "proficient" or risk punitive sanctions, which can include anything from the firing of staff and/or the closing of the school. According to the NCLB, the purpose of the law is to "ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (sec 1001). Drawing from the literacy crises of decades-past (mentioned above), the NCLB appeals to calls for more academic rigor in the face of the perpetually declining efficacy of the American public school system.[14]

But the argument that increased academic standards lead to higher achievement in public education is not supported by research in education or in writing studies, which finds that standards and performance are *not* causal. Audrey Amrein and David Berliner's research project using four independent achievement measures reported that "the evidence shows that [high stakes tests] actually decrease student motivation and increase the proportion of students who leave school early" (32). Moreover, Douglas Reeves argues that the very idea

[13] According to the US Department of Education, to qualify for Title I funding, schools must contain low-income families that make up at least 40% of enrollment (see http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html).

[14] For more detailed critiques of NCLB and the accountability movement, see David Marshak, "No Child Left Behind: A Foolish Race to the Past." *Phi Delta Kappan* November 2003, 85 229-31 or Pedro Noguera, "Standards for What? Accountability for Whom? Rethinking Standards-Based Reform in Education." In *Holding Accountability Accountable: What Ought to Matter in Public Education*, ed. Kenneth Sirotnik. New York: Teachers College Press, 2004.

behind the NCLB that the threat of punitive sanctions can increase student achievement is a "hypothesis based on folklore rather than fact," and acceptance of this myth relies on the belief that "school leaders and educators are inherently malicious, seeking to do harm and actively avoiding good results for students" (9-10). Moreover, research like Berliner and Biddle's *The Manufactured Crisis*, Bracey's *The War against America's Public Schools*, and Kohn's *The Case against Standardized Testing,* all bolster support for the position that educational achievement in America is *not*, in fact, declining. Increased use of standardized tests, which include high-stakes testing in compliance with NCLB, Gallagher writes, falsely conflates low expectations with low achievement and supports instead a pernicious public mistrust of teachers. All this in the face of evidence that, as Gallagher writes, shows overwhelmingly how "formative, classroom-based assessments improve learning" (24). Unfortunately, this public mistrust of teachers, bolstered by the accountability movement, clashes significantly with the kind of assessment Gallagher and other experts in the field of education and writing studies recommend.

Despite the academic community's near consensus on the inadequacy of high stakes testing or the scant evidence of the value of attaching negative consequences to school performance, the accountability movement is the norm in American education policy. For example, the 2004 report *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts* produced by Achieve (a nonprofit formed in 1996 by representatives of the NGA, philanthropic foundations, and various multinational corporations) asserts that a high school diploma today is a "broken promise" with insufficient curricula to train students in the "standards of the real world" (1). In partnership with The Education Trust and the Thomas B Fordham Foundation, Achieve launched the American Diploma Project (ADP), which

outlined a new set of benchmarks for English language arts and mathematics that students should master if they want to succeed in the workforce. *Ready or Not*, which urged states to implement real world benchmarks, was the culmination of those efforts. These benchmarks, a later report by Achieve reads, make sure "all students are held to the same English and mathematics standards, using the same measures, regardless of whether students are in traditional schools, charter schools, small theme-based schools or alternative programs" ("College- and Work-Ready Graduation Requirements" 2). The CCSSI was actually a realization of the benchmarks suggested by the *Ready or Not* report. In other words, the value system of the authors of the Common Core is based on this long lineage of accountability.

Research on Writing Assessment is Diametrically Opposed to Accountability Logic

Writing assessment researchers by and large conclude that what Gallagher has called the "accountability agenda" is an inadequate framework for assessing learning in educational institutions. These historical meanings of accountability, Adler-Kassner writes, "don't allow for the kind of flexibility implied in the idea of 'standards, not standardization' or outcomes-focused efforts implied in teacher-driven, bottom-up work that takes into account students, teachers, and programs" (84). Accountability, she argues, is applied to a far-too-broad range of assessment strategies for institutions and teachers that speak to a range of different internal and external audiences. Adopting corporate frameworks that emphasize practices in business and industry and streamlining "products," the accountability movement argues that "*all* institutions should 'be accountable' by proving that their students are achieving something (and that 'something' is not always clear) at some level" (84). These values are at odds with the field of writing studies' emphasis on local, site-based assessment.

As the establishment moves further toward a corporate model of education, research in the field of assessment continues to move more and more toward local, site-based models of assessment. In *What we Really Value: Beyond Rubrics in Teaching and Assessing Writing*, Bob Broad goes so far as to make a case against the technology of the rubric. To Broad, modern theories of writing are dramatically at odds with the very technology we use to assess writing. Rubrics, Broad writes, "the most visible and ubiquitous tool of *writing assessment*—arguably the aspect of rhetoric/composition that impinges most powerfully and memorably on our students' lives—teach our students an exactly opposite view of knowledge, judgment, and value" (4). Broad offers an alternative model called "Dynamic Criteria Mapping," which utilizes a dataset of classroom-contingent student work to determine what the instructor values in student writing. In brief, instructors use feedback from student papers in collaboration with students to determine as a class what is valuable in their writing. These criteria are then compiled onto a map or other visual representation that demonstrate qualities of value. This assessment method, Broad argues, is an empirically grounded way to make arguments about the validity of writing assessment that is local, site-based, and most importantly, empirical.

Brian Huot, another prominent writing assessment researcher, also eschews efforts of standardization in favor of local, site-based assessment methods, which is indicative of the larger disciplinary position against the approach to language policy advocated by the Common Core. However, Huot's work also points toward strategies of communicating these values in ways that establishment groups can understand and potentially value. For example, Huot makes two important claims in his book *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment*: one, that writing assessment is undertheorized and should be considered as a field of research, and

two, that "validity" in any assessment is a kind of rhetoric—an argument. Thinking of writing assessment as a kind of research, Huot argues, has significant implications for the authority of writing teachers in the context of testing companies, government agencies, and the whole enterprise of the accountability movement in general. Conceptualizing validity as an argument rather than a simple positivistic and statistical model of *reliability* allows writing practitioners, Huot argues, to make more compelling validity arguments for "site-based, locally controlled assessments" (58). Huot's call to the field to develop more meaningful ways of arguing for the validity of locally controlled assessments offers one potential model for cultivating the kinds of partnerships and using the kinds of arguments that are persuasive to establishment groups, which is one way interventional orientations can lead to sustained dialogue and ongoing processes of communication that make for more meaningful engagements.

Finding a common language with which to interact with establishment groups is an important part of cultivating transformative interventional orientations, and one potential way the field of English studies can engage with establishment groups that have the power to create language policy. Achieve, for example, in their 2008 report *Making College and Career Readiness the Mission for High Schools: A Guide for State Policymakers*, extols the value of information: "at the core of a good accountability system is information—the right information at the right time" (34, qtd in Adler-Kassner 82). Writing research does not often produce narratives that extol *information* in the same way. For example, the ever-growing accountability movement that prioritizes information and *standardization* instead of standards, creates a narrative that Adler-Kassner describes as "educators must be accountable because they are not doing what they should." And this narrative receives more attention in

public venues than the alternative frame offered by academics that says "educators are preparing students to become engaged citizens in complex ways" (74). Thus, when invited to critique the July Draft of the Common Core ELA standards, NCTE evoked these antithetical value systems (without acknowledging the values of the opposition) and appealed to the value of the research in their fields in an effort to establish their ethos—an ethos that made little to no impact since what they valued about writing differed so dramatically from the Common Core. If NCTE could offer "the right information at the right time," or a more pointed argument about the *validity* of the research they value—which is a different kind of rhetorical move than simply asserting the *value* of that research *a priori* (and a rhetorical move establishment groups are more likely to find persuasive)— NCTE might find ways of cultivating more sustained relationships with establishment groups in the future.

Being able to articulate *why* certain kinds of writing (and writing research) are valued over others is crucial to interventional orientations. Huot argues that the better claims researchers can make about validity in writing assessment, the better possibilities writing researchers have to engage more meaningfully with those in other disciplines or in educational measurement with different views. "If we can promote the regular use of validity arguments that attempt to be compelling for all of those who work in writing assessment," Huot argues, "then it might be possible to ease the current climate of isolation" (56). Interventional orientations, as I have argued, prioritize partnership with and the clear communication of values to establishment groups over time in the hopes of bringing disciplinary expertise to bear on public issues involving writing. Practitioners and professional organizations in the field of English Studies would do well to explore, as Huot suggests, *different kinds* of arguments that appeal to the narrative frameworks supported by

the groups that composed the Common Core. What would have happened, for example, if NCTE had made validity arguments about writing standards, as opposed to merely critiquing the Common Core's claims of being *research-based*? Huot argues that by understanding writing assessment as a field of research in which practitioners have the authority to make their own arguments about validity, the field can better collaborate with those in education measurement and government to foster more meaningful and sustained engagement experiences.

Of course, it is entirely possible that even if NCTE had crafted a response to the July Draft that asserted their objections in a framework that stressed validity instead of evidence, it still would have made little difference in the outcomes. Moreover, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the gulf between values, in this case, was too wide to bridge through cooperation and partnership. Brodkey herself adopted a disruptive orientation when she realized that her detractors did not share the same goals for composition courses (*Writing Permitted* 188). And in the case of the Common Core, where the stakes are seemingly higher, it is entirely reasonable to consider other possible public orientations that professional organizations can use when considering how to impact this debate. Disruptive orientations, as I have argued, prioritize intrusions into dominant narratives; a disruptive orientation might have led to a formalized rejection of the ELA standards entirely in the form of a joint statement condemning the Common Core and standing in solidarity with NCTE members across the country who similarly objected to the standards. Such a move might make waves in public discourse about education policy. The repercussions of this would have been unpredictable, too, and the risks involved in such an act would be tremendous. But the risks involved in disruptive orientations toward public issues do not necessarily preclude a group

from weighing the options of taking radical stances. Perhaps a disruptive stance would have helped teachers unwilling to comply with standards to which they morally objected. Perhaps such a formal declaration would have better caught the attention of policy-makers who were on the fence about whether or not to align their state's curricula to Common Core standards. Either way, entertaining the possibility of taking disruptive stances is among the repertoire of available public stances for individuals or groups are engaging in public debates about writing. And in this case specifically, NCTE's interventional orientation lacked sustained engagement, an essential characteristic of transformative and mutually beneficial partnerships.

The Future of Writing Policy

Some may look at the event I have analyzed above and come to the conclusion that NCTE's partnership with the authors of the Common Core in drafting the ELA standards was a failure. Hesse himself writes that despite the detailed objections made by the ad hoc NCTE group, and despite even more widespread discontent expressed by writing teachers and researchers across the field, the "standards project rolled onward, with enthusiastic support from the White House" (13). One unanticipated outcome of NCTE's engagement, however, was the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*, jointly written by CWPA, NCTE, and NWP in 2011, which lays out a new set of standards and learning outcomes expected of all incoming freshman writing students. Based primarily on the CWPA Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition and "adopted (or adapted) by hundreds of two-and four-year institutions nationwide" (2-3), the *Framework* describes two traits of college readiness: habits of mind, and experiences with writing, reading, and critical analysis. These skills, they argue, are essential characteristics of writing at the college-level. Here the *Framework*

diverges from the ELA standards in its emphasis not just on the acquisition of skills but on learning as an active process that helps students succeed in areas other than just writing instruction. Another key way the *Frameworks* document sets itself apart from the ELA standards is its broad conception of the writing process. The ELA standards, for instance, describe writing as three "communicative purposes": writing to persuade, writing to explain, and writing to share experience (5). These argumentative, informational, and narrative qualities of writing increase in complexity in later grades. However, the *Framework* taskforce notes that this "narrow band" of writing standards inadequately captures the robust process of writing and the teaching of writing in American schools. Thus the *Framework* outlines eight "habits of mind" for literacy education: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition (1). Then, they outline five ways teachers can cultivate those habits of mind through fostering different experiences with writing: developing students' rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, writing processes, knowledge of conventions, and composing in multiple environments (6-7). This broad conceptualization of what "college readiness entails," represents one of the first attempts at an open, flexible, and rigorous set of standards that sets itself apart from the ELA standards in its emphasis on cultivating "flexibility and rhetorical versatility" (8) as opposed to a rigid and narrowly defined set of skills as outlined in the Common Core. Moreover, unlike the ELA standards, the *Framework* document was also a collaborative effort that involved K-12 teachers, college writing teachers, and researchers from colleges and universities throughout the country.

The *Framework* document is an example of a renewed conversation in the field about the broader standards debate and is one positive culmination of the so-called failed

interventional engagement in 2009. Peggy O'Neill, Linda Adler-Kassner, Cathy Fleischer, and Ann-Marrie Hall, members of the *Frameworks* taskforce, for example, note in a 2012 issue of *College English* that the document, largely in response to the Common Core, is having a positive impact on the standards debate: "anecdotally we have heard that the *Framework* is being invoked in various discussions and materials published at the state level" (524), they write. And, as of September 2011, the Partnership for Readiness in College and Career (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), the two consortia in charge of creating assessments for the CCSSI, cited the *Framework* in their August 2011 draft of SBAC's "Content Specifications with Content Mapping for the Summative Assessment of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Teaching Subjects." These two organizations, the taskforce notes, "will make recommendations to higher education policymakers on ways to use the assessment results," and hopefully they take into consideration the "experiences and habits of mind outlined in the *Framework*" (524). In other words, while the engagement between NCTE and the Common Core did not result in the kind of sustained partnership characteristic of an *ideal* intervention, one outcome of the engagement experience was a turn toward standards and expectations for incoming writing students in the field of composition, which showcases both the risks and the possibilities of interventional orientations.[15] While NCTE's interventional orientation did not result in the changes they sought, and despite the fact that the *Framework* document does not have the institutional clout of the Common

[15] I should mention also that, in my conception of engagement, there are no perfect interventions. There are ideals to strive toward, of course, but there is no such thing as the *perfect* interventional engagement. That is why I continually refer to interventional *orientations*, which are stances toward engagement that depend upon local and situated contexts rather than blueprints and formulas to be followed and from which one can generalize (I explore this more in the next chapter).

Core,[16] it is nevertheless indicative of a larger movement within the field: a movement to explore new ways to leverage the field's arguments to create and maintain a viable seat at the table in future engagement with public issues related to writing and writing instruction. In a general sense, the *Framework* document represents the varied and unpredictable outcomes of public engagement that entails partnerships with establishment groups, groups whose values we may disagree with but whose stake in writing are still aligned to some degree.

Conclusion

NCTE's interventional orientation, I have shown, involved mostly making appeals to the value of academic evidence, which, in an attempt to bolster an ethos from which to build a partnership, nevertheless evoked a narrative the authors of the Common Core authors did not subscribe to, and thus, did not care to listen to. Based mostly on what Miller has called "decision science," these kinds of evidentiary appeals assume that gaps in knowledge are merely plugged with research in order to aid in the formation of policy. Yet research in public policy and public health have shown that actually, as Wood et al. claim, "the nature of evidence is ambivalent," or rather, the way one employs evidence is contingent largely upon the values of the audience in the rhetorical situation (1737). Looking toward research in writing assessment, scholars like Linda Adler-Kassner, Bob Broad, and Brian Huot suggest that writing studies practitioners would be better off creating their own arguments for validity, which would better share in some of the values of establishment groups like the Common Core and aid in the creation of a mutual discourse—i.e., a more meaningful

[16] In "Bridging the Divide: The (Puzzling) *Framework* and the Transition from K-12 to College Writing Instruction," Bruce McComiskey writes that "the *Framework* will never have the institutional clout that the CCSS already has. No state boards of education have adopted the *Framework*, but forty-five states…have adopted the CCSS." McComiskey goes on to argue that if the *Framework* is a competing document, then it needs be less similar to the actual CCSS to make anyone wary of them. But if it is to be in support of the CCSS, then it needs to "have some impact on secondary education and the preparation of high school students for the rigors of college writing" (538). It is clear from McComiskey's nuanced critique that the *Framework* document and others like it still have a ways to go.

orientation from which action or change can emerge. Moreover, even while the research may get ignored, engaging in public problems related to writing through interventional orientations can still yield unintended and unanticipated results for future engagements, which the *Framework* document elucidates.

In Hesse's recollection of his involvement with the Common Core, he concludes that one of the lessons gleaned from the process is that writing studies practitioners need to start communicating "with publics external to the field" in ways that are less "reactive" and more responsive to audiences beyond other experts.[17] Hesse's suggestions are apt, I think, but conceptualizing engagement mainly as publishing academic research for wider audiences fails to take into consideration the function of relationship-building within the field as a method of public engagement. In other words, the larger argument of the dissertation, as evidenced in this chapter particularly through the partnership between the NCTE and the authors of the Common Core, is that public engagement is just as much about cultivating sustained relationships in which values can be communicated than it is about the act of communicating those values. In the next chapter, I turn toward a more recent moment where groups of practitioners in the field of English Studies adopted interventional orientations to engage in public issues that pertain to writing, namely, the intersection first-year writing courses and Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs. From an analysis of these more sustainable models of interventional orientations, I will offer some best practices for interventional engagement for other academics considering intervention as a method of collaborating with establishment groups to bring their disciplinary expertise to bear on public debates about writing.

[17] Hesse's other suggestion is that writing studies scholars should start publishing more empirical research (13), which aligns more with Huot's suggestion for better validity arguments, and my own conclusions that these kinds of arguments allow for more sustained engagement with establishment groups.

CHAPTER 4

Interventional Orientations: The Gates Foundation Grant Recipients and Coursera

Introduction

In the last chapter I analyzed the partnership between the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the authors of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) in the drafting the English Language Arts (ELA) standards in 2009 as a kind of public engagement. By that I mean the NCTE attempted to facilitate a partnership with the Common Core authors in order to bring the disciplinary knowledge of writing studies to bear on an important public problem related to writing: education language arts standards. As opposed to Chapter 2, which situated *disruptive orientations* as stances that eschew collaboration in favor of usurping the status quo, I argued in Chapter 3 that the NCTE cultivated an *interventional orientation* by partnering with the authors of the Common Core. Interventional orientations, I argue, are stances that prioritize the partnership between groups with significant power and influence on matters of public concern (in this case, the groups that represented the Common Core), and academics with disciplinary expertise in those areas (NCTE). Through an analysis of press releases, newspapers, and official discourse produced by both groups, I argued that the interventional orientation used to facilitate a partnership between NCTE and the Common Core was unproductive because NCTE's frequent appeals to academic research in their exchanges reflected values that clashed with those of the Common Core authors, a gap widened by the lack of *sustained* engagement that can lead to reciprocity and genuine intellectual exchange. In other words, since the NCTE did not have a sustained seat at the table, an ongoing collaborative exchange with the Common Core

authors, or viable rhetorical strategies other than appeals to academic evidence, the NCTE's critique of the ELA standards were heard and then forgotten.[1]

In this chapter, I make the case that interventional orientations that lead to more sustained partnerships are ones that prioritize careful and critical reflection on the situational aspects of the partnership. As I mentioned briefly in the last chapter, there are no perfect examples of public engagement. That is why I refer instead to interventional *orientations,* which are stances toward engagement that depend on local and situated contexts rather than blueprints and formulas to be followed and from which one can generalize. To further illustrate this point, this chapter analyzes discourse surrounding specific interventional orientations in 2009 between teams of writing studies practitioners and Coursera, a company that hosts Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs. The rise of the MOOC as it intersects with required composition courses represents a moment in the field when writing studies practitioners, to some extent, and in certain situations, *do* have sustained relationships with establishment groups and have developed interventional orientations that include rhetorical strategies beyond appeals to academic evidence (appeals that hindered the NCTE, as I argued in the last chapter). These strategies aim to take full advantage of those relationships in order to contribute to public arguments about the role of MOOCs in higher education. But this involvement is not without contention. To some in the field, participating in MOOCS is a necessary experiment in social justice, democratic engagement, or meaningful education reform. For others, the MOOC is a neoliberal tool to maximize profits at the expense of effective pedagogy (Lane and Kinser). And, at a time where journalists and pundits are championing the MOOC as a potential way to reform higher education, several writing

[1] But the engagement process was not a failure. The experience yielded for many in the field a renewed conversation about assessment, the accountability agenda, and the role of writing and language in the public sphere, results that were unanticipated but certainly valuable for scholars and teachers of writing and rhetoric.

studies practitioners have decided to contribute to this public issue by collaborating with MOOC companies through interventional orientations to see for themselves how transformational MOOCs really are.

This chapter analyzes the public discourse surrounding three specific composition MOOCs taught at institutions that were recipients of generous grants by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. I analyze discourse surrounding three partnerships with MOOC developers Coursera and teams of academics at Duke, Georgia Tech, and Ohio State University. Specifically, I analyze in each case digital and print coverage of the MOOCs in newspapers; press releases, scholarly research that emerged from the engagement, and the public responses to the MOOCs from other writing specialists on a variety of digital media, including listserv messages and blogs. Based on this discourse, I argue that interventional orientations not only benefit from sustained engagement, a claim I made in chapter 3, but are also predicated on four key situational factors: motivations, benefits, costs and contexts. By reflecting more on these characteristics, I argue, writing studies specialists can more productively engage in public issues related to writing through interventional orientations. But before I analyze each composition MOOC in terms of the motivations, benefits, costs, and contexts surrounding the engagement, it is important first to situate these claims in the context of the MOOC in higher education more broadly and the MOOCs in composition funded by the Gates Foundation Grants specifically.

A Brief History of MOOCs

Higher education is experiencing a tremendous shift toward more global, digital, and information-based landscapes where online instruction, access to knowledge and the advent

of digital educational technologies dominate discussions on the future of the university.[2] The MOOC is but one of the many trends in higher education, which, Glenna L. Decker writes, "may or may not radically alter higher education as we know it" (3). Decker's tongue-and-cheek description is in part a critique of the tendency to valorize and often uncritically embrace the newest and shiniest technological innovations in higher education—buzzwords like *"flipped classroom"* and *"gamification"* come to mind. These buzzwords, as Jordan Shapiro describes in *Forbes*, are potentially beneficial but only when "aligned with learning outcomes which prioritize human dignity rather than haste, consumption, and algorithmic metrics." However, the MOOC is especially captivating for many because of the massive promises it makes. A free online college-level course open to anybody with an Internet connection, the MOOC could potentially redefine the scope and focus of a college education. For example, a typical MOOC enrolls tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of participants.[3] The *open* aspect of the MOOC acronym also has radical potential.[4] As MOOCs are open to anybody with an Internet connection, for those who otherwise would not take a college course, the sheer availability of educational content in the MOOC reopens old conversations about the democratic imperative of the university as a cultural institution.[5]

[2] For example, see William G. Bowen's *Higher Education in the Digital Age* (2013)
[3] For example, in 2013 Udacity's Computer Science 101 course saw nearly 300,000 students enrolled to learn Python with instructor Dave Evans at the University of Virginia
[4] This is actually a little more complicated. While many people discuss MOOCs as a homogonous entity with large enrollments and traditional content delivery, the different kinds of technology that underpin MOOCs are also important. Audrey Watters writes that there are two kinds of MOOCs: xMOOCs and cMOOcs. cMOOCs rely on tools like gRSShopper, which are personalized web environments that allow users to curate their own online content. In other words, in a cMOOC users are generally *outside* rather than driven to a course website or learning platform. xMOOCs, on the other hand, are more traditional college courses in a MOOC format, and "look an awful lot like a LMS [Learning Management Software]". George Siemens, one of the first MOOC instructors, writes that "cMOOCs focus on knowledge creation and generation whereas xMOOCs focus on knowledge duplication" (Decker 4).
[5] And of course, one could see these aspects of the MOOC might especially appeal to writing studies practitioners influenced by work on the intersections of social justice and writing instruction.

Originating first in a 2008 course taught by Canadians George Siemens (Manitoba University) and Stephen Downes (the National Research Council), *Connectivism and Connective Knowledge* consisted of 25 tuition-paying students at the University of Manitoba in addition to over 2200 students online who took the course for free. This model was later adapted at universities in the United States, specifically Sebastian Thrun and Peter Norvig's *Introduction into Artificial Intelligence* at Stanford University in the fall of 2011, which had similarly high online enrollment.[6] Stanford faculty also formed Coursera and Udacity: for-profit companies that charge universities to host MOOCs on their servers. In 2011, Coursera partnered with the University of Pennsylvania, Princeton, Stanford, and the University of Michigan. EdX, a nonprofit founded by MIT faculty, also partnered with several prominent universities like California State University system, Harvard, Berkeley, and Georgetown in the spring of 2012 (Rivard, "Stanford Teams up with EdX"; Kolowich, "California State U. System will Expand MOOC Experiment"; Susman). Despite Downes's description of the MOOC's original intent as cultivating a "locus of learning activities and interaction," the recent commercialization of MOOCs evidenced specifically by university-MOOC partnerships represent new ways college campuses are collaborating with corporations to expand coursework, redesign classrooms, and potentially generate revenue for the university (Parr).[7]

In 2012, MOOC seemingly became the word *de jour* in American media, especially in higher education circles. The founders of Coursera, Stanford faculty members Andrew Ng

[6] There are also variations on MOOC pedagogy. Maha Bali writes that MOOC pedagogy generally relies on online video lectures, supplemented by texts, weekly quizzes, and discussion forums, which generally resemble "more widely known pedagogies used [for] face-to-face (F2F) and modified for online learning" (45).

[7] Some university systems, however, reject this approach to MOOCs. For example, Ry Rivard reported in *Inside Higher Ed* that the University of Amherst faculty voted not to work with leading MOOC platform edX after months of wooing and deliberation, citing concerns that MOOCs are not in line with the university's mission to provide "purposefully small" educational experiences, and also amid concerns that the university would not be able to "get as much form the collaboration as edX would get from Amherst" ("EdX Rejected").

and Daphne Koller, link interest in MOOCs to instability in the global economy, the rising costs of education, and unemployment rates of college grads. For example, for average people who cannot afford to go to Princeton, they told the Huffington Post, now "anyone in the world" can access an ivy-league education for free (Susman). The *New York Times*, moreover, labeled 2012 the "Year of the MOOC" (Pappano) and described the MOOC as "Instruction for the Masses" (Lewin). Cathy N. Davidson, history of technology scholar at the City University of New York and former Vice President for Interdisciplinary Studies at Duke, wrote in *Inside Higher Ed* that the MOOC is the start of a broader movement toward education reform. Thomas Friedman argued in the *New York Times* that MOOC platforms have the potential to completely remake higher education and bring people out of poverty. He writes:

> I can see a day soon where you'll create your own college degree by taking the best online courses from the best professors from around the world—some computing from Stanford, some entrepreneurship from Wharton, some ethics from Brandeis, some literature from Edinburgh— paying only the nominal fee for the certificates of completion. It will change teaching, learning and the pathway to employment.

MOOCs, in other words, have taken hold in higher education discourse as a potential solution to a variety of problems. [8] People with different vested interests in the MOOC see potential not just for enacting social justice but also as potential business models.[9]

[8] The critiques of MOOCs came at the same rate and with the same fervor as the praise. For instance, a University of Pennsylvania paper shows MOOCs are only taken by privileged learners (Kolowich, "MOOCs are Largely Reaching Privileged Learners"); Altback argues that MOOCs are another aspect of neocolonialism and merely "exacerbate the worldwide influence of Western academe."

But for all the praise MOOCs generated throughout 2012 and 2013, one of the most telling things about the MOOC is that presently, in 2015, the potential of the MOOC remains merely that: potential. For one, there is very little published about MOOCs except, as Decker writes, through a "myriad [of] news articles, blogs, and higher education RSS feeds" (7). Moreover, other than speculative, excited, reserved, or critical manifestos about the MOOC or the future of higher education, "there has been little evaluation into the actual design and delivery of most MOOCs to determine if they meet acceptable standards for online course delivery" (7). In her analysis of an English Composition MOOC at Ohio State University, for example, Kaitlin Clinnin notes that most of the circulating information about MOOCs is a "prolonged reactionary response" rather than sound academic research. These reactions, based primarily on "messianic prophecies from the corporate sponsors of MOOCs," or "doomsday predictions from critics," are unproductive and unresponsive to "the pressing issues that MOOCs raise about educational access and pedagogy" (141). And while business leaders like Anant Agarwal, president of MOOC platform edX, referred to 2012 as "the year of disruption" (Pappano), the actual research about what MOOCs are capable of is scant.

Whether or Not Writing can be Taught in a MOOC

The efficacy of MOOCs for the teaching of writing is a question of contention among many writing studies scholars. To Steven Krause, MOOCs represent merely a repackaging of traditional (and unsuccessful) models of education. Simply delivering content through video and offering the presence of a discussion board is not a novel model of education, Krause writes. In his final blog chronicling his experiences as a student in Denise Comer's

[9]For now, the main way MOOCs generate revenue is by charging a fee to MOOC students for a certificate of completion, which ranges from between $30 to $80. Many speculate, though, about other potential business models, from selling student data to headhunters, or selling additional course materials and support linked to specific MOOCs (Kolowich, "How Will MOOCs Make Money?).

"Achieving Expertise" composition MOOC (discussed in more detail below), Krause argues that MOOCs confront the American public with several fundamental questions:

> What are these things for? Are MOOCs *EDUCATIONAL* experiences that can provide affordable and transferable college credit to students for a variety of general education classes, including first year writing? Or are MOOCs *LEARNING* experiences that are valuable in and of themselves for self-enrichment and perhaps to other stakeholders outside of traditional higher education? Are they potentially useful learning supplements for more traditional college courses as textbooks and learning communities? Are they useful as "alternative"/life experience credit of some sort?)

Krause goes on to argue that as educational experiences serving as viable alternatives to first year writing courses, or as a way to sell transferrable credit to universities, the MOOC is unquestionably a failure, since most MOOCs are at best a watered down version of face-to-face instruction. As a learning experience valuable in and of itself, Krause says that Comer's writing MOOC specifically was "modestly successful" ("The End of the Duke Composition MOOC"). Jeff Rice argues that the "Year of the MOOC" conversations are "not new, not innovative, and not something we have not already encountered…the conversation is repetitive" (94). Contrary to the hyperbole circulating in the larger public sphere (referenced above), Rice argues, "if there is anything unsettling for me to date regarding MOOCs it is how I have yet to find the discussion or experience that demonstrates 'disruption' (as another conversation regarding MOOCs promises)" (95). For both Rice and Krause, the writing MOOC is at its best a repackaging of face-to-face writing instruction, and at its worst an ineffective model of online education, with minimal ability to dramatically change the nature

of higher education. Nevertheless the cacophony permeating MOOC discourse provided for some writing studies scholars an opportunity to see for themselves whether or not writing can be taught in a MOOC. Specifically, these scholars harnessed interventional orientations to partner with MOOC companies through grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation to build composition MOOCs of their own.

A Brief Summary of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation MOOC Grants

In September of 2012 the Postsecondary Success Team at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation began circulating a request for proposals for the development of MOOCs in hopes of engaging "a broad range of students in successfully advancing their general and developmental education." The technology of the MOOC, the RFP reads, is quickly "demonstrating the possibility of making content and learning freely available at web scale." To that end, the RFP stipulated that proposed courses focus primarily on "high-enrollment, low-success introductory level" courses that are often "barrier[s] to success for many students, particularly low-income/first-generation students" (2). One of the criteria that would be "looked upon favorably" for the MOOC proposals was that the institution would offer the proposed MOOC for credit equivalency, a move that education journalist Paul Fain argued "could make the much-hyped courses a legitimate 'disrupter' of traditional higher education" (Fain, "Gates Foundation Solicits Remedial MOOCs").[10] Academia itself was in disagreement with one another about the role of MOOCs in higher education at this time (particularly in the discussion about course-equivalency on the Writing Program Administrators Listserv (WPA-L), the massive Listserv for writing program administrators),

[10] And note here, Paul Fain, journalist for *Inside Higher Ed,* invoking the word "disruption" to describe the potential for offering MOOCs for-credit at colleges and universities across the country. See also *Globe and Mail* journalist Margaret Wente's editorial "We're Ripe for a Great Disruption in Higher Education." These are yet more examples of journalists and nonacademics hyperbolizing about how MOOCs might usurp the status quo of college instruction, when in fact, there is actually scarce empirical evidence of that radical potential.

and the Gates Foundation grants thus represent a unique moment when public discourse about higher education intersected with academics who worked within those spheres.

The awarding of the MOOC Grants also represents a moment that required interventional orientations from the teams of writing studies specialists. In late October, 2012, the Gates Foundation announced it had awarded 12 grants totaling more than $3 million in MOOC investments to Duke University to develop an English Composition I MOOC, Mt. San Jacinto College to develop a developmental writing MOOC, The Ohio State University to develop an English Composition II MOOC, and Georgia Institute of Technology to develop an English Composition I MOOC—all in a partnership with the platform Coursera (Mckernan; Kolowich, "Assessing Campus MOOCs"; Fain, "Establishment Opens Door for MOOCs"; Moxley).[11] Duke, one of 12 institutions that had partnered with Coursera to build MOOCs at their institution in earlier that summer (Susman), was to develop a first-year writing MOOC under team-leader and Director of First-Year Writing, Denise K. Comer called *Achieving Expertise*. Rebecca Burnett, Director of the Writing and Communication Program and Karen Head, Director of the Communication Center at Georgia Institute of Technology, developed a writing MOOC called *First Year Composition 2.0*; Kay Halasek, Director of Second-Year Writing at The Ohio State

[11] Awards also went to Cuyahoga Community College to develop a Developmental Math MOOC (Blackboard), more departments at Georgia Institute of Technology to develop MOOCs in Psychology and Physics (Coursera), Michigan State University to develop a Foundations of Science MOOC (Desire2Learn), the University of Washington to develop a Political Science MOOC (Coursera), University of Wisconsin – La Crosse to develop an Algebra MOOC (Desire2Learn), and Wake Technical Community College to develop a MOOC in Developmental Math (Udacity).

University, along with Susan Delagrange, Scott DeWitt, Ben McCorkle, and Cynthia Selfe, led and designed the MOOC *Writing II: Rhetorical Composing.*[12]

Main Argument of the Chapter

In this chapter I discuss how the three teams referenced above harnessed interventional orientations in their partnerships with Coursera and the Gates Foundation. From an analysis of the discourse surrounding each team's orientation, which includes press releases, blogs, online messages, newspaper articles, and scholarly research, I identify four key terms for building strategic partnerships in order to engage in public issues that involve writing: motivations, benefits, costs, and contexts. Reflecting critically on these keywords is crucial for facilitating meaningful and mutually transformative partnerships with establishment groups. The rest of the chapter unfolds through an analysis of the orientations of each team of grant recipients as revealed in the discourse that emerged from each partnership, specifically in terms of the motivations, benefits, costs, and contexts in which they were embedded. I show how reflection on the situational characteristics can be integral to developing strong interventional orientations for sustained, meaningful, and potentially transformative relationships that allow academics to contribute to public issues that involve writing in new and thoughtful ways. While the interventional orientation of NCTE's partnership with the Common Core authors gained them a seat at the table, the lack of sustained engagement prevented NCTE from developing common ground. Throughout the chapter I also highlight how the grant recipients' public orientations were read by other

[12] Patricia James Hanz, Dean of Instruction at Mount San Jacinto College, was in charge of developing the MOOC: *Crafting an Effective Writer: Tools of the Trade*. I left out Mount San Jacinto college in my analysis of the MOOC grants, partly because Mount San Jacinto college is a community college, which would necessitate a broader literature review that included writing instruction in community colleges and also because the grant was to build a developmental writing course, a rhetorical situation that would also necessitate a different kind of analysis of developmental writing instruction as it intersects with technology. Including the community-college MOOC grants in this analysis would be a vital piece of the puzzle, I admit, but in terms of the space and scope of this project, I deliberately neglected the discourse surrounding this particular MOOC.

writing studies practitioners during this time through an analysis of the WPA-L, blogs, and articles by scholars who enrolled in the MOOCs as skeptics. This reading helps place interventional orientation along a spectrum of potential public stances and reveals some of the contextual factors that underpin productive and unproductive partnerships. I conclude the chapter by making several suggestions for building and sustaining better relationships in the form of key questions designed to help academics give careful attention to the ways they can make their public engagement *count*.

An Analysis of the Discourse Surrounding Duke's Partnership with Coursera

Background on *Achieving Expertise*

Denise Comer, Director of First-Year Writing and Assistant Professor of Practice in Writing Studies at Duke University, was in charge of designing and administering the MOOC *English Composition I: Achieving Expertise*, which ran from March 18, 2013 – June 10, 2013. [13] A press release described *Achieving Expertise* as "an introduction and foundation for academic writing that students can use in their subsequent courses in higher education" (Jarmul). The course was immediately popular. By January, two months before the course launched, *Achieving Expertise* saw an early enrollment of nearly 8,000 students, and later expanded to nearly 60,000 (Miller; Krause, "The End of the Duke Composition MOOC"). The layout of the course, as Krause noted, was more or less a traditional freshman composition course in which participants would write a series of essays and make use of other instructional content to supplement the writing and peer review.[14] Peer review in the

[13] This project was funded in part by the MOOC Research Initiative, another grant program sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which Comer described in 2010 as a multidisciplinary inquiry into how peer-to-peer interactions through writing might impact student learning in introductory level MOOCs, and whether or not peer-to-peer writing can be used to assess MOOC coursework (Final Report 2).

[14] I should mention here that a number of WPA-L participants collectively enrolled in *Achieving Expertise* with the purpose of critiquing it. I expand more on this later on in the chapter.

MOOC came through what Comer described in her chapter in *Invasion of the MOOCs* as a process in which students submit their drafts through a tool (developed by Coursera) that randomly distributes the draft to three peer responders. Then, "each of the three responders would have one week to provide formative feedback according to a specific rubric that Ed White and I developed. Then, the original writers would receive back the three sets of peer feedback, and would have one week to revise and then submit the final version" (143). In other words, *Achieving Expertise* was not necessarily unique in course design or content, but in the mechanism for peer review to accommodate the thousands of students enrolled in the course.

Motivation: Unprecedented Opportunities

One motivation for Comer to partner with Coursera was to use the partnership as a way to generate data from such a huge sample of students. Several days after *Achieving Expertise* began, Comer took to the WPA-L on March 21, 2013, to shed some light on her motivations for running the MOOC and what the MOOC might actually do for students and for the field of writing studies. One of her main priorities, she wrote, was to conduct research on MOOCs. Comer wrote to the group: "I have two IRB-approved protocols, one to research how the MOOC impacts writing pedagogy, and one to research how the MOOC impacts the learning of writing." Comer and her team, in other words, saw the grant award from the Gates Foundation as an unprecedented opportunity for a partnership that would shed light on how MOOCs impact writing and writing pedagogy and, as Comer wrote later in an article on the partnership, whether or not writing can be better integrated into other MOOCs across the disciplines ("MOOCs Offer Students Opportunity to Grow as Writers" 1). This is an example, I argue, of an interventional orientation: a deliberate cultivation of a partnership in

which academics bring their disciplinary expertise (in this case, writing pedagogy) to a group with considerably more power and influence (in this case, the partnership was with Coursera, which offered Comer a platform to reach thousands of writing students). The end goal, Comer said in her March WPA-L post, was that the research produced by her team would eventually "matter to policy makers and others in their ongoing conversations." In interventional orientations, academics *intervene* in a public problem by leveraging their partnership with establishment groups to create enough wiggle-room for their values to make an impact. Comer oriented her team toward MOOCs in this way in order to make a meaningful contribution to the public benefits of writing and research. Comer's orientation, in other words, was interventional because it was motivated by leveraging the collaborative relationship in order to potentially *be heard* and *be taken seriously* by establishment groups with the hopes of potentially influencing the formation of policy.

Another motivation for Comer to partner with Coursera was that connecting with and collecting data from such a large number of learners taking the same course at the same time was an unprecedented opportunity. Even though Comer admitted in an interview on the blog for Duke's *Center for Instructional Technology* that she was nervous "at the prospect of over 60,000 people sharing a course website," Comer said that she began to feel "privileged to have the opportunity to facilitate conversations about writing between so many learners across the world" and that her students are already beginning to teach her "about writing in various contexts, and it's helping broaden my perspectives on teaching and writing" (Mueller). In the edited collection *Invasion of the MOOCs,* Comer shares details from the teaching journal she kept during the development of *Achieving Expertise* that her intention was to "create a learning *experience* for writers centered on academic writing" ("Learning

How to Teach," 148, my italics). Comer expresses here a motivation for partnering with Coursera that was predicated upon what she saw as a unique opportunity to collect data from thousands of writing students while also potentially creating new knowledge from unique learning experiences of her students.

Perceived Benefits: Research on Writing

The motivations to enter the partnership with Coursera are directly tied to what Comer saw as perceived benefits for engaging with Coursera in the creation of *Achieving Expertise:* the publication of research. These efforts, along with winning the Gates Foundation grant, would almost certainly bolster Duke's stellar reputation for research on par with other elite institutions. This research was also geared toward creating new knowledge in the field of writing. In the article, "MOOCs Offer Students Opportunity to Grow as Writers," which emerged from data gathered from *Achieving Expertise*, for example, Comer writes that despite some challenges, like relying solely on student-led rather than instructor feedback, writing in MOOCs can be potentially democratizing: "Writers in MOOCs have at their hands an audience of thousands," she writes. "They are writing for publics, making their writing reach beyond the walled classroom. People from all over the world can give feedback and exchange and debate competing views" (4). Comer's final report from the MOOC Research Initiative was also optimistic, arguing based on collected data that peer-to-peer interaction on the discussion forums of *Achieving Expertise* was connected to course content, contributed positively to the learning environment, and even contributed to learning gains in the MOOC (Final Report 4). Comer and her team, in other words, intervened in a public discussion about MOOCs in higher education by working directly with a MOOC company while

simultaneously leveraging that relationship to produce artifacts that benefited both the individuals and the institutions involved in the partnership.

Comer's team maintained clear and deliberate goals as they adopted interventional orientations to partner with Coursera. For Comer, having so many different kinds of people learning together was unquestionably unique to the MOOC and in line with what she saw as the democratic mission of higher education. In her teaching journal published in the collection *Invasion of the MOOCs,* she articulates that the main impulse for conducting research on *Achieving Expertise* project was to generate "global conversations about writing so more people around the world can grow as writers and learn about writing from each other" ("Learning How to Teach" 131). She saw her partnership with Coursera, in other words, as an opportunity to harness their expertise to produce research on writing that might be read and understood by a more global audience. Moreover, Comer exhibited an unapologetic curiosity about MOOCs. She reflects in her teaching journal inquisitiveness about how "thousands of people are posting about why writing matters to them. I love reading through the many responses" (131). For Comer, the fact that MOOCs are necessarily *massive* and *open* is reason enough for pedagogues to intervene in the MOOC experiment and to create MOOCs of their own, despite the overwhelming critique by colleagues in the field, to see for themselves whether or not the MOOC provides viable models for research and teaching. Comer writes that "if MOOCs are intended to make education more accessible to larger numbers of people, writing is a methodology that will help people learn in greater strides and with deeper efficacy" ("MOOCs Offer Students Opportunity to Grow as Writers" 4).

Costs: Pushback from Allies in the Field

Despite, and perhaps because of, Comer's openness to partnering with Coursera, one significant consequence was disapprobation from members of the field in various blogs and listserv conversations, which demonstrates some of the difficulties embedded into cultivating interventional orientations. This pushback was likely magnified when several participants on the WPA-L chose to enroll in the course to experience it first-hand. Krause, for example, Professor of English at Eastern Michigan University, enrolled in Comer's MOOC in March of 2013 and blogged about his experiences. Krause's critiques were many: He described the discussion forums as "mostly white noise" since there were "so many posts that are so non responsive to each other." Krause describes the organization as "a little confusing," and calls Comer's videos "talking head lectures" and "boring." Also, Krause argues that the video format of Comer's lectures offered no give and take, which contributed to the staleness of the course. Krause wrote:

> Case in point: the first assignment asked students to write a brief essay (300 words, which in my view isn't an essay, but that's not worth quibbling over) "in which you introduce yourself as a writer to your classmates and instructor. How would you describe yourself as a writer? What are some of your most memorable experiences with writing?" Nothing wrong with that assignment– though nothing particularly innovative about that assignment either. I wrote about my experience failing handwriting in the fourth grade (that's my go-to story for such narratives), and I posted it to the discussion forum like we were supposed to. I received one comment from someone commenting on their bad handwriting too, and that was that. ("Week 1 in Duke's 'English 1' MOOC")

By blogging as a member of the MOOC, Krause cultivated an agitational orientation, which I defined in Chapter 1 as a public stance predicated on critique against the dominant interests of the status quo. For example, in response to dominant perceptions of MOOCs discussed above, which understand the MOOC as a monumental, paradigm-shifting technological innovation in higher education poised to turn the educational establishment on its head (articulated primarily by the mainstream media outlets and the business community), Krause agitated against these perceptions by describing Comer's MOOC as "boring" and not unlike any other kind of online instruction. Krause's blogs critiquing *Achieving Expertise* represent one potential consequence for cultivating interventional orientations.

Pushback to *Achieving Expertise* also manifested itself on the WPA-L, a listserv loosely associated with the Council of Writing Program Administrators. Many posters used the WPA-L as an agitational space to critique *Achieving Expertise,* which was a significant professional cost to Comer and a potential consequence to interventional orientations in general. One consequence of partnering with stakeholders with differing values, in other words, is potentially being perceived as *siding* with them. Between December 2012 (when the Gates Grants were announced) and March, 2013 (when *Achieving Expertise* was launched) there were 176 posts from three threads on WPA-L, 82 of which were exceptionally critical in some way of MOOCs or *Achieving Expertise* in particular, and 28 were reluctant, as opposed to 31 that were sympathetic and 35 that were other (neutral posts, posts asking for clarification, etc). Examples of exceptionally critical response came in the WPA-L conversation entitled "Composition MOOCs at Duke, Ohio State, Georgia Tech," which took place between December 4 and December 6, 2012. Doug Hesse posted that he was "startled" to learn of the Gates Foundation awards, and Beth Hewett responded that the

writing MOOCs were against the fundamental principles for best practices for online writing instruction. As a member of the CCCC Committee for Best Practices in Online Writing Instruction, Hewett wrote "we do not recommend them at all."[15] Krause, one of the most vocal critics of *Achieving Expertise,* noted that he too was skeptical of commercial MOOCs hosted by companies like Coursera, especially because of the dropout rates ("The drop-out rate is well over 90%, so every time you see a figure like '30,000 students are enrolled in this course,' subtract at least a zero"). Krause also noted that the mode of teaching in a MOOC was mostly a traditional "stand and deliver" style of lectures and videos. Krause argued that a MOOC can only be successful if it can "break out of the strangely traditional approaches to teaching" and "get away from the venture capital and Gates foundation money." With regard to instructor feedback, Brenda Glascott posted a critical post that characterized the *M* in the MOOC acronym, "massive," as meaning many "will not have the luxury of individual instructor engagement." Glascott also joked that "maybe students will write fan fiction in which they fantasize about getting feedback from their teacher." Other critical posters, like graduate student Trent M. Kays, wrote that "the moment we start offering them for credit (which is happening at some schools), we've sort of failed as teachers." Considering that critique, or agitation, is a default stance for many in composition studies, particularly critique of corporate interests and generalized public perceptions of writing, these kinds of responses to Comer's MOOC on WPA-L (which are, to be fair, off-the-cuff) represent a professional cost to aligning oneself with those very institutions. Many posters, in other words, saw

[15] The position statement of the Conference on College composition and Communication Committee for Best Practices in Online Writing Instruction came out three months later in March, 2013 and argues that the overarching goal for best practices is to "adhere to the need for inclusivity and accessibility at all levels of pedagogy, student satisfaction, faculty satisfaction, and administrative concerns" (8).

Comer as implicitly siding with corporate interests over the so-called 'best practices' of the field.

Perhaps the most significant scrutiny on the WPA-L came in the conversation called "Duke's English Composition I MOOC," which took place over 95 messages between March 20 through March 27, 2013. Posters in this thread also cultivated an agitational space in opposition to *Achieving Expertise* by questioning the broader political motivations for writing MOOCs and critiqued the lack of face-to-face instruction or individualized instructor-feedback. Critiquing an email message to *Achieving Expertise* participants from Comer, for example, Richard Haswell (who had enrolled in the MOOC as a student) wrote mockingly that the message students *really* get in a MOOC is: "Thanks for writing the essay even though I probably haven't read it and maybe nobody has." Especially troubling for Haswell was that all feedback in the MOOC was peer-to-peer without any meaningful and individualized response from the instructor. Chris Anson issued another alarmist response to the MOOC grants, arguing that if Comer's experiments are indeed successful, it could spell the end of the field as we know it. Anson wrote:

> As soon as the Powers That Be decide a 50,000-student MOOC is OK as long as there's some sort of official, paid writing test that follows, probably administered by a private agency and machine scored, and the accrediting agencies certify the experience (as has already happened with at least 5 MOOCs with more on the way), then the teaching of writing as we know it is over and the teachers are gone--along with scores of other courses and teachers. If the Powers That Be believe it works for something as student-focused, interactive, and labor-intensive as writing, think how quickly it will

> "work" for subjects delivered in more traditional lecture-test mode (an argument for reforming those courses and their delivery mode). This is exactly why the governors of states like Wisconsin, Florida, North Carolina, and Texas (see a pattern there?) are so passionate about MOOCs. Many politicians think that learning is about getting information--quickly and efficiently--so students can be done with the whole unpleasant mess and get into the work force to support corporate America.

For Anson, there is no need for interventional orientations, or to see, as Nick Carbone wrote in a more accepting March 21st post, "just what MOOCs might be good at." For Carbone, former faculty member at Colorado State University and current Director of Teaching and Learning at the publisher Bedford/St. Martin's, the field stands to benefit from "gaining experience in MOOCs as students, teachers, and designers while also questioning the promise of evangelicals." In response to Carbone, Haswell posted that while he "would like to be as hopeful as Nick [Carbone]," MOOCs are yet another way to "shunt the poor into defunded public educational institutions and uneducational teaching." For Haswell, MOOCs merely "build more gated educational communities for the wealthy," and "anybody who thinks that current efforts such as the Duke MOOC are not intended eventually to lead to credit accepted by higher-education institutions is living in lala land." For both Anson and Haswell, cooperating with MOOC platforms is tantamount to being complicit in the defunding of higher education: if students can take a MOOC for free and then pay a nominal fee for a test (likely machine-graded), then the only people who stand to benefit are the testing industries, while state legislatures "slash their universities' writing programs" (Anson). While Anson's and Haswell's agitational orientation pushed back against what they

saw as a nefarious MOOC agenda, Comer, (who had few supporters on the thread, one among them being Carbone, who is allied professionally with the academic publishing industry) adopted an interventional orientation, or rather, an approach to MOOCs that privileges sustained partnership and collaboration despite the potential and/or inevitable ethical repercussions of cooperating with for-profit companies.

Ultimately, the critical sentiments expressed in the different posts from the WPA listserv represent the ways interventional orientations are susceptible to critique, pushback, and, in this case, hostility from colleagues in the field. Comer, an untenured director of the Duke Writing Program who posted relatively infrequently on the list, was met with suspicion from many of her colleagues.[16] And while Comer defended the MOOC against criticism on March 21st, 2013, posting that the main reason she embarked on the MOOC partnership was to experiment with "the idea of cultivating conversations about writing with learners from all over the world" and finding ways to increase "educational access to students who otherwise might not have access"—WPA-L overwhelmingly critiqued the endeavor anyway. The pushback against *Achieving Expertise,* shown primarily in the form of critical academic blogs as well as resounding criticism on the WPA listserv, represents one potential consequence of interventional orientations that prioritize collaborative partnerships with establishment groups instead of critique.

Contexts: Systems of Reward

Part of the reason *Achieving Expertise* received so much scrutiny may be related to the context in which the collaboration between Duke and Coursera took place. Collaborating with the establishment to intervene in a public problem, in other words, is predicated on the

[16] Before Comer's post detailing the motivations behind *Achieving Expertise,* she had posted only 8 times since 2007.

systems in place that reward interventional work. Comer, whose infrequent posts to the WPA-L community and less-visible status and reputation as a researcher (at least in comparison to the team at Ohio State, for example), may not have offered her the security and safety needed for her interventional orientations to be read in a welcoming way by others in the field who typically position themselves in opposition to corporate interests. The defensive posturing on the WPA-L, moreover, showcases some of the professional costs of intervention for practitioners without the ethos of a "well-known" scholar: the vocalization of anxiety from others agitating against what they see as an unethical partnership with well-funded and well-connected businesses, which manifests itself in the form of unfiltered critique, pushback, and rejection from some in the field.

It is also important to note that the Ohio State MOOC, while it did not differ dramatically in content or design from Duke's, received little to no pushback from the WPA-L community. There are several possible reasons for this: it could very well be that Comer's MOOC was the first to launch of the three, when the intrigue was high and the debate was fresh; it could also be that Comer's research protocols were uncritical of MOOCs as a technology; but it could also be the case that Ohio State had a different context that enabled their partnership with Coursera to be read differently, or less critically, by others in the field. Kay Halasek, Cindy Selfe, Susan Delagrange, and Ben McCorkle are all tenured, well-respected, and well-known researchers in the field of composition studies. This is not to say that criticism of Comer was deserved, or that untenured and less visible writing studies practitioners cannot and/or should not adopt interventional orientations to address public problems, but only that intervention comes with significant professional risks, especially for those in the field without a strong cohort of supporters similarly invested in the intervention.

Moreover, as the analysis of each institution's interventional orientations demonstrates, interventional orientations are incredibly situational: the motivations, benefits, costs, and contexts of interventional engagement experiences matter because they ultimately determine what comes out of the intervention and how the intervention *gets read* by others in the field.

An Analysis of the Discourse Surrounding Georgia Tech's Partnership with Coursera

Background of *Composition 2.0*

The professional risks of interventional orientations are especially evident in the public discourse around the writing MOOC created and administered by Karen Head's team at Georgia Tech. These experiences are catalogued by Head herself in a series of essays in the *Chronicle of Higher Education,* which reveal a difficult, time-consuming, expensive, and ethically ambiguous experience collaborating with establishment groups like the Gates Foundation, Coursera, and others at her own institution. Head, Assistant Professor of English at Georgia Institute of Technology's School of Literature, Media, and Communication and leader of the team that developed the freshman composition MOOC *Composition 2.0*, led a group of 19 from May to July of 2013 who administered a traditional composition course over eight weeks with course goals designed to develop students' confidence in critical thinking, rhetoric, process, and proficiency in digital media (*Composition 2.0*). Her six essays in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* between January and September 2013 reflect a somber attitude toward the experience of partnering with a MOOC.

Through the analysis of Head's own essays, research that emerged out of the engagement, and academic blogs critiquing Georgia Tech's partnership with Coursera , I argue below that Head's public orientation, like Comer's at Duke, was also *interventional.* However, discourse from this particular partnership reveals how the engagement was fraught

with personal, ethical, and professional costs. These costs outweighed the potential benefits and reveal the significant pitfalls of interventional orientations, especially for those without a strong cohort of allies or a clear sense of what tangible benefits the partnership might yield for the stakeholders involved.

Motivation: To see "Whether it Works'

Like Comer, Karen Head articulated an interest in social justice that motivated her to intervene in the MOOC debate. For example, as someone who still makes a "monthly student loan payment," Head wrote in her chapter in *Invasion of the MOOCs*, she empathizes with "the idea of providing useful educational information in a free and open way" (45). But unlike Comer, Head's motivation for intervention, as demonstrated in the essays for the *Chronicle*, also reveals an emphasis on *producing discourse* for a larger public audience. This is not necessarily to say that Head did not prioritize Georgia Tech's partnership with Coursera, but merely to suggest that by publishing her experiences and personal reflections while working with Coursera, Head also reveals her motivation to create texts that *explain* the partnership to a public audience. The *Chronicle* essays showcase the ways Head sought simultaneously to build relationships with establishment groups while also maintaining the respect of a critical audience of colleagues in the field. For example, in her January, 2013 column "Here a MOOC, There a MOOC, but will it Work for Composition?" Head writes

> I am no Luddite. However, I will admit to some reservations about whether a MOOC is the ideal platform for teaching writing. I have argued passionately for keeping composition classes small. Ultimately, I decided to pilot this MOOC because I am open to the possibilities, but I prefer to discover firsthand whether it works.

Here Head acknowledges the critical gaze of her professional community by admitting her hesitance to get involved with a MOOC company, but ultimately orients herself toward partnership by suggesting that she is "open to the possibilities" and that her team will ultimately decide for themselves—and, presumably, the field of writing studies, "whether it works." This dual emphasis both on relationship-building (applying for a grant and partnering with Coursera) as well as generating discourse for a broader academic community to justify her actions, shows how difficult interventional orientations can be: one potentially has feet in two camps: a critical, often stubborn professional community (which Comer experienced first-hand) and that of big business, or rather, establishment groups that academic communities generally agitate against.

Benefits: Uncertain and Unknown

One of the ways Head expected to learn from the partnership and to serve the needs and goals of the field of writing studies was to assess whether composition MOOCs *work.* Head's essays in the *Chronicle* reveal not that writing MOOCs were unworkable but that Georgia Tech was unable to benefit from their partnership with a MOOC. For example, Head argues that if success means interpreting completion rates in MOOCs, then *Composition 2.0* was a failure. In "Lessons Learned from a Freshman-Composition MOOC," Head writes that out of 21,934 enrolled students, only 238 received a certificate of completion.[17] Also, the lack of empirical data might have impacted Head's perceptions of the partnership as a failure. Blogger Mark Guzdial writes that another Gates recipient at Georgia Tech, Mike Schatz, who

[17] This number compares to the 1298 out of 60,000 students who earned a Statement of Accomplishment for *Achieving Expertise* at Duke (Krause, "The End of the Duke Composition MOOC"), and the 444 out of 33,000 in Ohio State's *Rhetorical Composing* ("MOOC with a View"). However, it should also be clear that completion rates in a MOOC are not necessarily an indicator of success. For one, there are varied reasons why a student may elect to start and not finish a MOOC, and it may not be fair to compare academic, for-credit completion rates to free and open online courses—especially when it is yet unclear how *certificates of completion* stand to benefit students professionally.

developed a physics MOOC with his team, administered standardized tests for students before and after the course to get a sense of what students who completed the course might have learned (the research from this experiment at the time of this dissertation is forthcoming). This access to empirical knowledge, Guzdial writes, might be an advantage in studying MOOC efficacy that Head did not have. In terms of technology, Head also perceived the partnership as a failure. She argues that the infrastructure for teaching writing on a MOOC is lacking, especially for subjects like composition, "which have such strong qualitative evaluation requirements." In terms of pedagogy, Head was also reluctant to champion the MOOC. The biggest challenge for her was how to provide meaningful feedback. "All our team could do," she writes, "was to prepare students to be the best peer assessors they could be." Lacking the means to evaluate student writing more traditionally, Head reflects that while peer-assessment is indeed valuable, "it is not the same as substantive feedback provided by an expert" ("Hidden Costs of MOOCs" 52). Head's *Chronicle* essays, however, do not necessarily indicate inherent problems with writing MOOCs per se, since both Ohio State and Duke conducted empirical experiments with mixed results.

What the discourse around Head's MOOC intervention does show is that in this specific case, in terms of how the team defined success, it appears the Georgia Tech team was unable to leverage their relationship with Coursera to produce tangible benefits, or to outline beforehand what those benefits might be: either in the form of empirical research (as with Duke), rhetorical workarounds (as I will show with Ohio State), or other mechanisms of reward, save for an open-ended approach merely to discern whether or not MOOCs

"worked" for teaching writing, which may not have been enough to establish interventional orientations that produce strong, sustained, and transformative relationships.[18]

Costs: Time, Resources, and Privacy

The significant costs of *Composition 2.0* were resources, privacy, and time. For example, Head notes that the lack of resources for their instructors in addition to a lack of experienced instructional designers who could offer sophisticated support systems for both faculty and students inhibited the productivity of the MOOC and increased stress and anxiety for everyone on board ("Of MOOCs and Moustraps"). Head writes that even with a team of 19, they still needed more IT specialists, designers, and platform specialists just to stay afloat ("Sweating the Details of a MOOC in Progress"). Moreover, with all the different kinds of people working on the project, Head writes, it was hard to distinguish who was whom, which brought up sticky ethical situations in collaborating with establishment groups like Coursera. For example, after further investigation when an administrator asked Head for a high-resolution image of her signature for certificates of completion, Head found that "fifty-one people had administrative access to our course site." Head writes that when she probed deeper, she "had no idea who most of those people were. I soon discovered that thirty-eight worked for Coursera, twelve worked for various units at Georgia Tech, and then there was me" ("Hidden Costs of MOOCs" 51). For Head, their interventional orientation placed them in compromising ethical positions: the ramifications of which (increased bureaucratic

[18] Head did mention personal gratifications for the intervention, like "touching personal stories" from MOOC participants ("Lessons Learned from a Freshman Composition MOOC") or affirmation of the need for stronger pedagogical practices in MOOC discussions ("Hidden Costs of MOOCs" 55). Also, according to Head's CV, there are two forthcoming publications about *Composition 2.0:* "The Single Canon: MOOCs and Academic Colonization" from the edited collection *MOOCs and Open Education Around the World* and "Are MOOCs the Future of General Education?" from the *Journal of General Education*. However, at this time it seems unclear how Head materially benefited from the engagement. This reveals how important it is in interventional orientations to leverage the relationship with establishment groups in such a way that the faculty, institution, and/or the field partnering with establishment groups immediately stand to benefit.

negotiations) belied some of the more pedagogical motivations for entering into the partnership.

But the most distressing experience with the MOOC, Head writes, was the often under-acknowledged personal costs associated with interventional orientations. What if, she asked in her chapter from *Invasion of the MOOCs*, somebody in the course who was not a student at Georgia Tech tried to contact her? What email address should she use for the MOOC? Head details a "sobering, hour-long conversation" with campus police one day during the course in which she was advised to "move [her] office to a more secure location, in a different building on campus" in response to a barrage of phone calls from an "unknown person" who "refused to leave messages, saying only that the call was in reference to MOOCs, and he pressed [the MOOC staff] to give out [her] personal mobile number." This frightening experience led Head to speculate that "if universities ever require faculty members to teach MOOCs, they will also need to consider the possible implications of requiring someone to become a public figure" ("Massive Open Online Adventure"). This revelation by Head that administering MOOCs might give professors an unwelcome level of publicity contrasts with Decker, whose own chapter in *Invasion of the MOOCs* describes this exposure as a desirable kind of fame. For professors teaching a MOOC, Decker writes, they have the potential to become "famous beyond those in a specific discipline; in essence, they become academic rock stars" (7). Head's experience, on the other hand, details not a reputation that allowed her to influence public debate, but a level of publicity that potentially hindered her ability to teach effectively. One significant consequence for Georgia Tech's interventional orientation, then, was new and unanticipated levels of recognition that Head found undesirable. Head's experience here speaks to the ways interventional orientations can

potentially place academics in more visible positions, which can be a good thing, as Decker describes, but also have potential for disturbing ramifications, as the discourse from Head suggests. Part of cultivating deliberate and viable interventional orientations, then, involves assessing, negotiating, and planning for a range of potentially new and unwelcome positions one might find oneself in through partnerships with establishment groups that have a public presence.

Contexts: The Question of Tenure

Material conditions like funding, tenure, and research programs matter in cultivating interventional orientations. The contexts surrounding *Composition 2.0*, moreover, inhibited the quality of Head's interventional orientation. The rising costs were a strain on resources, planning, and institutional support offered to the team. As Head's *Chronicle* essays imply, the exorbitant expenses and the time commitment required to develop and sustain the MOOC at Georgia Tech arguably outweighed the potential benefits. For example, Head writes that in addition to hiring consultants and teams of editors, in order to prepare for only three lectures per week, her team spent "20 hours planning and developing content," and "an additional eight hours rehearsing my lectures. It took just under four hours to record the video for three formal lectures." And then there were the production costs, which cost Georgia Tech over $32,000 ("Massive Open Online Adventure"). Another condition crucial to the Georgia Tech MOOC, and interventional orientations in general, is the labor required to intervene. For example, while the Gates Foundation took care of a lot of the funding in general, Head writes, "one of the most important conclusions I've drawn from the experience is this: If you are an untenured faculty member, you really shouldn't attempt a MOOC. The planning process alone is overwhelming" ("Massive Open Online Adventure"). Head's admission here

about tenure is important because it helps explain why the costs of intervention for Head, as well as for Comer, were so high, which is to say that the kinds of institutional rewards and potential benefits built into faculty positions matter in cultivating interventional orientations. I do not mean to suggest that in order to intervene in public discussions about writing an academic must have tenure or must have a research agenda directly tied to the issue in which they are intervening. However, it is important for individuals to assess how structures like tenure or research agendas impact one's ability to engage with the public and what orientations one might choose. Head writes, "because I have a grant and because research about writing instruction is part of my accepted research portfolio, I will submit all MOOC-related work as part of my future tenure case." However, she says, this is specific to Georgia Tech, which "values this kind of inquiry." Other disciplines, or scholars with differing research agendas, she writes, would be hard-pressed to get MOOCs to "count as anything more than a line item in a teaching portfolio" ("Massive Open Online Adventure"). These concerns about tenure/academic reward structures are important considerations for interventional orientations because it showcases how important it is to tailor the impending relationship toward those rewards. This is not to say that in order to utilize interventional orientations to engage in a public issues related to writing an academic must find a way to profit, but it does imply that practitioners need to be critically reflective and honest about what a *successful* engagement experience might look like for them and whether the conditions in which they work are able to reward/support/value those kinds of efforts.

An Analysis of the Discourse Surrounding Ohio State's Partnership with Coursera

Background to *Rhetorical Composing*

Out of the three teams, Ohio State's interventional orientation toward their partnership with Coursera funded by the Gates Foundation is perhaps the best example of a productive and sustainable engagement. Led by Kay Halasek, Director of Second Year Writing at Ohio State, as well as Cindy Selfe, Susan Delagrange, Ben McCorkle, and graduate student Kaitlin Clinnin, the Ohio State team designed the MOOC *Writing II: Rhetorical Composing.* This MOOC, while not necessarily exceptional, differed significantly from Duke and Georgia Tech in that there was more discernible reciprocity between Ohio State and Coursera. In other words, the Ohio State oriented themselves toward Coursera with the presumption of partnership, which meant conceding certain elements of design, implementation, and course structure, while simultaneously building into the course features from which they stood to benefit. As I argued in Chapter 1, intervention is a public orientation in which groups at a power deficit cooperate within the establishment while simultaneously arguing for and putting themselves in a position to benefit in some way. From my analysis of the press releases, news coverage, conference presentations, and academic research surrounding Ohio State's partnership with Coursera, I argue that Halasek and her team cultivated an interventional orientation that stressed a clear research agenda in addition to building in tangible personal benefits.[19]

Motivation: What MOOCs Can Teach the Field

One clear motivation for Ohio State's partnering with Coursera was the opportunity to rethink assumptions about the teaching of writing in new technological spaces. While

[19] Much of this information was obtained from the Ohio State team's presentation "Meeting Students where they are: Using Distributed Classrooms to Support Students" from the 2014 Watson Conference.

many of the MOOC critiques, such as those put forth by Jeff Rice in his chapter of *Invasion of the MOOC,* push back against the use of the word "disruption" when describing the impact of MOOCs on educational culture, the Ohio State Team's chapter invokes the concept of disruption via postmodern theory to suggest that the act of learning and teaching in a MOOC usurps traditional narratives about what constitutes effective teaching. "The MOOC became for us," they write, "a disruptive presence that encouraged us to interrogate pedagogical habits of mind that we had long assumed and left unquestioned" ("MOOC with a View" 157). For example, the team argues that one of the grand narratives disrupted in their experience teaching a MOOC was the one that supposed composition experts are best positioned to provide writing instruction in small courses to college-aged students who are deeply invested in their learning. The sheer number of students and lack of pedagogical resources to respond to each student in a MOOC immediately confronted this notion. Another narrative usurped by the massive enrollment was that of the attentive student who listens closely to course content delivered to them by a writing expert, which elicits productive and meaningful learning experiences (157). This *doxa* they write, was so fully engrained into their pedagogical perspective that they experienced a feeling of disruption as they began teaching *Rhetorical Composing.* While I am calling the orientation Ohio State cultivated to participate in the MOOC discussion *interventional*, it is telling that they characterized their motivations as "interrogating pedagogical habits of mind" and invoke the sense of *disruption* to describe the process, because it indicates that what motivated the team went beyond data collection (something they most certainly did) but also included asking larger questions about how MOOCs complicate *theories of writing*, not just how writing can be taught *in* a MOOC. This motivation differs from Georgia Tech in that Head described her

motivation as investigating whether or not composition MOOCs "work," while Ohio State (and Duke, too, to a certain extent,) cultivated orientations that allowed them to bring new theories of writing to the field. In interventional orientations, critical reflection on the motivations for public engagement means understanding how the relationship will help create new knowledge as well as thinking about the quality of the partnership itself.

Ohio State's open-ended motivation to understand more about writing pedagogy through administering a MOOC became particularly evident after they began seeing the diversity of the enrolled students. Of the 33,000 students enrolled, only 15% were actually college-aged; 72% were "teachers, scientists, database administrators, heads of research organizations, veterinarians, engineers, waitresses, artists, travel writers, and receptionists" (158). The Ohio State team writes that their experience collaborating with Coursera to administer *Rhetorical Composing* forced them to reexamine their own perceptions of "students," "teachers," and "writers" as they encountered different kinds of learners in the MOOC ("MOOC with a View" 159). And, rather than being intimidated by these demographics, the Ohio State team writes that traditional conceptions of a "one-size-fits-all model" of instructional design they had previously relied upon was merely a "cultural and economic artifact of bricks-and-mortar universities." The old model, they write,

> has been shaped by a consumerist culture and a relatively stable population of fee-paying students expected to come face-to-face with instructors twice or three times a week for a semester. The efforts of such students are shaped and regulated by a complex and interlocking economy of letter grades, tuition payments, graduation timelines, behavioral expectations and major requirements. (162)

In a MOOC, they write, students often take responsibility for their own learning, or set their own deadlines and opportunities for learning. This, for them, presents the field of composition with new questions about the linkages between "the diminution of our own control as teachers and the increase in writers' responsibilities and intellectual investments in the course" (162). Despite some of these problematic assumptions (like for instance, the absence in this discussion of the obviously consumerist culture that has shaped the development of the MOOC), Ohio State's main motivation for creating a MOOC was to ask what they saw as previously unexplored questions regarding expertise as it related to writing instruction. It is also important that the Ohio State team was willing to learn from an experience that presented a conflict of values but also not have to change their own values. They did not have to buy in to the hyperbole circulating about MOOCs to see the experience as something they could learn from. This motivation, moreover, showcases how interventional orientations seek to use relationships with establishment groups as opportunities for learning by asking bigger questions as it relates to their own discipline.

Benefits: Reciprocal Rewards

What especially separated Ohio State's interventional orientation from the other two MOOC initiatives was that they were able to benefit substantially from their motivational impulses. Specifically, the team at Ohio State benefited from their relationship with Coursera by tailoring the partnership toward their inquiry in strategic and thoughtful ways. For example, encouraged by the diverse demographic range of students enrolled in *Rhetorical Composing*, and recognizing the need for a more robust form of peer-review than what Coursera offered, Ohio State created an in-house peer review program called WExMOOC, or the *Writer's Exchange*, or more simply, WeX. This computer program asked students to

upload essays that would be reviewed anonymously by four different readers who were given detailed instructions on how to provide productive feedback on writing through the use of a common rubric. Then, the author of the essay used that same software to issue readers a score according to how helpful their feedback was. "Within this context," they write, "the writers themselves assumed full responsibility for rating other writers' essays, responding to other writers' feedback, thinking about their own performance in the class, identifying some of the characteristics—both productive and unproductive—of their own written work" ("MOOC with a View" 159). Through WeX, the students in *Rhetorical Composing* described to one another what they saw in the writing, then assessed how well the writer achieved a particular criterion (according to the rubric), and then suggested ways to make that writing better. Ohio State recognized that they needed a more robust peer-review widget to accommodate the vast range of students participating in the MOOC. And, in doing so, they took action and built their own software program, which functioned separately from the Coursera apparatus they were required to use. This move demonstrates the importance leveraging a partnership with an establishment group in such a way as to provide disciplinary expertise that satisfies the expectations of the establishment group while also marshaling the influence of the establishment group to create opportunities for themselves to benefit, learn, and generate new knowledge about the public problem being investigated.

Ohio State's WeX program also points toward productive models for counterpublic academics wishing to use interventional orientations to find ways to benefit from collaborating with businesses, organizations, administrators, foundations, or other establishment groups. WeX, in other words, was an artifact that came out of the partnership with an establishment group that benefited both the writing experts and the establishment

group. In a presentation at the 2014 Thomas R. Watson Conference, several members of the Ohio State team described this form of rhetorical cooperation through the development of WeX as an attempt to *game the system*. Or rather, when it was clear that Coursera could not provide (or did not provide satisfactorily) an integrated peer-review mechanism, the Ohio State team took matters into their own hands and designed a program that managed peer review of student writing to their expectations. Through an interventional orientation, the Ohio State MOOC team's development of WeX taught them, just like Head, to ask more questions about pedagogical practice. "We've begun to ask ourselves," they write,

> what it means to assume that only an authorized expert can give advice about good writing or that a teacher's advice is more valuable than students. And, as we increase transparency for students, ('allowing' them to see a series of their own discourse analytics and scores relative to the whole), they're making their learning and opinions more transparent to us" ("MOOC with a View" 165).

While the practice of peer-review and collaborative writing pedagogies has already upended these assumptions in other contexts, the creation of WeX by Ohio State is an example of using an interventional orientation to facilitate peer review and collaborative writing in a different way, for much larger audiences. Moreover, by harnessing the collaborative relationship between Coursera and Ohio State (and the resources and computer programmers at their disposal), the Ohio State team created a program that stood to benefit them and their research goals while also simultaneously fulfilling their expected roles with Coursera: an example of reciprocity that sustains partnerships.

Another meaningful benefit to Ohio State was the way they took knowledge gained from the partnership and incorporated it into more traditional writing courses, or rather,

taking what they learned from scaling up and scaling it back down again. The Ohio State team attempted to understand how teaching writing to tens and thousands of MOOC students through peer review could scale back down in subsequent courses. For example, the following year, in the spring of 2013, Ohio State taught three connected sections of the same course, using the same assignments (including WeX for peer review), in which 70 students completed a hybrid online version of *Rhetorical Composing*. By curating *Rhetorical Composing* at a massive scale and then examining how that new knowledge might transfer back down again, the Ohio State team constructed their interventional orientation in a novel way such that the knowledge gained would be continuing and ongoing.[20]

Costs: Mitigated by Strategic Planning

The benefits for Ohio State's partnership with Coursera, in this case, seems to have significantly outweighed the costs. One potential consequence, criticism from the professional community (something Comer experienced with *Achieving Expertise*), was not a factor in the Ohio State intervention. During the period from April to July 2013, when *Rhetorical Composing* ran, for example, there was not any mention of the Ohio State MOOC on the WPA-L. One potential reason for this, I suspect, is the professional standing of the individual team members that insulated them from the level of critique given to Comer at Duke. Also, the guiding questions of the Ohio State team, moreover, gave them incredible flexibility in how they perceived the benefits of the MOOC. When Georgia Tech's MOOC had low retention, Karen Head counted it as a failure. At Ohio State, where only 444 received certificates of completion out of the 33,000 students (a completion rate of 2.45%),

[20] For example, the team taught another MOOC on the Coursera platform in 2014, this time with 11,000 students using the WeX peer review program.

they did not interpret this as a professional cost for their intervention: "To be frank," they write,

> these statistics don't alarm us. Students aren't officially enrolled. Attendance isn't taken. We weren't giving grades for class participation. The course is voluntary, and we recognize that the MOOC platform as an innovative and controversial learning technology invites many 'drop-ins' who are simply interested in seeing what the MOOC and our course were all about ("MOOC with a View" 161).

The team at Ohio State oriented themselves toward the partnership in a way that allowed them to rethink their assumptions about attendance. The costs of running a writing MOOC, for Ohio State, were mitigated by their willingness to be changed by the experience, to learn just as much about their own practices than about the efficacy of MOOCs.

Context: Room for Risk

For Ohio State, their motivations, which allowed for the benefits to outweigh the costs, were predicated on a specific set of conditions that allowed for such a project to move forward as it did. A press release issued by the English department at Ohio State announcing the Gates Foundation grant in January of 2013, for example, notes that the faculty in charge of *Rhetorical Composing* have collectively "authored or edited more than thirty books and been awarded some of the discipline's highest honors." The professional esteem, privilege of tenure, wealth of resources, and combined expertise available to the team at Ohio State provided them with a certain amount of freedom to devote the needed time, energy, and money to the MOOC intervention. Moreover, there is also something to be said about having a dedicated cohort with the same interests, goals, and expertise participating in the same

engagement at the same time. This is in contrast to Comer at Duke and Head at Georgia Tech, because while they had institutional support, they nevertheless were identified as the individuals in charge. A strong support system might also have also protected Ohio State, to a certain extent, from criticism from the professional community, like the WPA-L, who took Comer to task for a MOOC that was not exceptionally different from *Rhetorical Composing*. This insulation from critique, which I take up in the conclusion, is not necessarily a good thing, but rather an important consideration for any academic considering partnering with an establishment group in a mutual project. Moreover, the case of Ohio State in particular showcases another important aspect of interventional orientations: sustained partnerships are inevitably more costly and potentially risky because the outcomes cannot be fully anticipated in advance, and also because it is difficult to anticipate how much time and effort will be needed. But Ohio State also shows how sustained partnerships can provide an infrastructure in which those risks can be rewarded unanticipated ways.

Conclusion: Interventional Orientations for Future Partnerships

Despite the explosion of journalistic and editorial coverage of MOOCs in 2012, the discourse around MOOCs seems to be waning. In 2014, Steven Mintz, writing for *Inside Higher Ed*, speculated that "MOOCs are not dead, but MOOC mania has certainly abated." Moreover, the exchanges on the WPA-L has not reached the heights it had between December and March 2013, and as new research trickles in, the results are not encouraging. The so-called *disruptions* predicted in 2012 were most certainly hyperbole, Mintz writes, and there are several challenges facing the next generation of MOOCs, foremost of which is retention. A study by Justin Reich, research fellow at Harvard, for example, found that out of nearly 80,000 learners taking nine MOOCs at Harvard, the completion rate was 13.3%

(which is much higher than the completion rate of the Gates Grant recipients). For problems like these, Mintz suggests: "If next generation MOOCs are to appear, they will need to draw upon the experience of online retailers, journalism, online dating services, and social networking sites."[21] Moreover, the report "MOOCs: Expectations and Reality" from Fiona M. Hollands and Devayani Tirthali at Columbia University, which explored whether or not MOOCs could be "cost-effective in producing desirable educational outcomes, compared to face-to-face experiences or other online interventions" (6), similarly found scant evidence of economic viability despite the popularity of MOOCs in higher education. However, through interviews with 83 different faculty and administrators at 62 different institutions, Hollands and Tirthali argue that the discussions ignited by MOOCs are timely and ongoing:

> Much of the hype surrounding MOOCs may be subsiding but it is clear that the infrastructure and effort that has been poured into such initiatives are not likely to evaporate overnight. Whether MOOCs as they currently stand persist into the future is certainly debatable, but there is no doubt that online and hybrid learning are here to stay and that MOOCs have ignited many valuable interdisciplinary and cross institutional discussions about how best to improve intellectual capital. (170)

Overall, the authors advise administrators and institutions interested in embarking on MOOC experiments to "establish a strategy for engagement" and devise clear "data collection protocols" in order to objectively assess those goals (15). Their suggestions to develop strong engagement strategies and clear sense of the benefits to the engagement, like data collection protocols, align with my own analysis of the discourse that emerged from the three Gates

[21] Mintz suggests ten specific challenges facing MOOCs: 1) Discussion forums; 2) Cohorting; 3) Interactives; 4) Student engagement and persistence; 5) Progressive personal profile; 6) Personalization; 7) Data analytics and learning dashboards; 8) The user experience; 9) Credentialing; and 10) A sustainable business model.

Foundation grant recipients: interventional orientations that can yield transformative, sustained, and ongoing partnerships require critical reflection on the motivations, benefits, costs, and contexts that surround the relationship. Through press releases, newspaper coverage, scholarly publications, and online discourse, I argue that these four key concepts make the work of relationship building through interventional orientations *count.* Below I situate each key word in terms of a question academics can ask before utilizing an interventional orientation to embark on a partnership with an establishment group to contribute to public issues related to writing.

Motivations for Interventional Orientations

From analyzing the discourse in terms of the motivations of all three MOOC teams that received funds from the Gates Foundation to build a composition MOOC, a central question writing studies practitioners need to ask when considering a partnership with an establishment group is: *Why engage with establishment groups to work on a public problem that matters to the field?* Cooperating and collaborating with establishment groups, whether businesses that host MOOCs, educational technology companies, or other for-profit entities, can be fraught with challenges, and reflecting on and outlining specifically what motivates such a partnership is key to a successful intervention. The kinds of questions that guide an interventional orientation will determine the relative success or failure of the endeavor. For example, Comer articulated early that the motive for entering into a relationship with Coursera was to collect data. Head, on the other hand, articulated their motivations through the *Chronicle* as an inquiry into educating students "more effectively" and whether or not teaching writing in a MOOC "works," ("Here a MOOC, There a MOOC, but Will it Work for Composition?"). The Ohio State team developed an engagement strategy with a

presumption of a partnership in order to discover how the teaching of writing scales up and back down to the classroom. The motivation for adopting an interventional orientation, in other words, is key to understanding both how intervention functions as a public orientation and also for fostering a productive engagement experience.

Benefits from Interventional Orientations

Another question for academics involves critically assessing what success might mean in your specific situation: *What might you want to learn from this engagement experience that will serve the needs and goals as a department/institution?* One of most important aspects of interventional orientations is being critically aware of the different ways one stands to benefit from partnering with establishment groups. This means looking at the situated factors at a local level in order to, as Selfe has written, "act with more strategic effectiveness and force, both collectively and individually" (430). Will the interventional engagement benefit the department to which you or your team belongs? How so? How might it simultaneously contribute to public knowledge about the issue? In the case of discourse that emerged from the Ohio State composition MOOC, for example, their partnership functioned as a form of public engagement in its efforts to bring broader national and international attention both to the risks and rewards of MOOCs in higher education, but also to the writing program at Ohio State—which impacts multiple intersecting publics. Ohio State's interventional orientation serves as a model for how to approach such relationships in

other public issues involving writing. In each case, though, there were some research objectives associated with *each* school's interventional engagement.[22]

Assessing how partnerships with establishment groups can provide potential benefits is one way the three MOOC teams differed from the NCTE's intervention into the Common Core debate in Chapter 3: The NCTE did not have a presumption of partnership to the extent that they could critically assess their motivations and leverage their relationship in such a way that the perceived benefits outweighed the professional costs; without ongoing, sustained involvement, the NCTE could only use the partnership as a platform to broadcast their values, a move that made little to no difference in terms of the mutual goal of crafting language arts standards based on best practices and research in the field of writing studies. In the case of the Gates Foundation funding of MOOCs in composition and rhetoric, there were, in a lot of ways, clear expectations that the intervention would be sustained. However, keeping the relationship ongoing involves critical attention to the ways the academics intervening with establishment groups stand to benefit.

Costs of Interventional Orientations

From analyzing the discourse in terms of the costs or consequences of each composition MOOC funded by the Gates Foundation, an additional question to ask is: *What do you stand to lose from engaging in this problem*? Understanding the risks involved in an interventional orientation is key for strong and sustained partnerships. In the case of the Gates Foundation MOOC grants, Comer encountered intense criticism from the writing

[22] The initial round of grants from the Gates foundation (in 2012) funded the building of "gateway MOOCs," and a subsequent grant, the MOOC Research Initiative, which was due in the summer of 2013, supported further research into MOOCs. Denise Comer's *Achieving Expertise* was the only PI that was awarded an MRI grant, but through email I was able to obtain the application for an MRI grant from Ohio State that was not funded. What this shows is that it is likely two of the three schools had clear research goals, or at least a clear sense of how they would benefit from the intervention.

studies community on the WPA-L as her MOOC launched in March of 2013. One significant cost of interventional orientations is risking professional credibility through a partnership with an establishment group. Also, each institution involved in building a writing MOOC funded by the Gates Foundation mentions at some point how time was a significant cost. Administering a MOOC takes a tremendous amount of time and energy, something Karen Head describes several times in her series of essays in the *Chronicle*. Ethical costs also abound in interventional orientations. Collaborating with establishment groups like for-profit companies with considerably more power presents, as Head mentioned in her essays, unwanted exposure, privacy risks, ethical misalignments, and other tensions that can be problematic for some. Also, it is important to reflect on the financial cost of interventional orientations. It cost each team thousands of dollars in IT support, video editing, and other administrative expenses for each institution to keep their relationships with Coursera afloat. According to the public discourse from each team partnering with Coursera, moreover, accounting for the costs, both material and personal, appears to play a tremendous role in the perceived success of the partnership. This is particularly evident at Georgia Tech, where Karen Head's somber reflection that the cost of maintaining a MOOC, in many respects, did not outweigh the benefits. Georgia Tech's experience can be contrasted with Ohio State, in which time commitments, while significant, were mitigated both by their presumption of partnership with Coursera and the contexts in which the risks were rewarded. As academics wishing to intervene in public debates about writing, it is important to critically assess these potential consequences and consider whether or not they can be mitigated by what one expects to learn/gain/understand through the process.

Context Surrounding Interventional Orientations

The last question for academics partnering with establishment groups is: *What contextual factors inhibit or enable your interventional orientation?* Or rather, when cultivating an interventional public orientation it is crucial to have a strong sense of the conditions that may impede and/or reward the engagement. For example, Head, an untenured professor of English, wrote that while she had the resources available to sustain the financial cost of intervention, the lack of tenure exacerbated an already overwhelming planning process. She reminds readers through her *Chronicle* essays that without tenure, or at least support from an institution that values public engagement, it is very difficult, time-consuming, and risky to move forward. This is perhaps the most important consideration. And one that unfortunately determines not just what is possible in an interventional engagement but also *how that engagement is read* by both the professional communities to which you belong and the larger public debating this issue more broadly. This is not to say that only high-powered and well-established academics with tenure have the right to adopt interventional orientations when engaging in public arguments about writing, but rather that the contexts of engagement often speak louder than the practices themselves. There is also a case to be made that the field of writing studies needs to take more responsibility for nurturing, respecting, investing in, and championing interventional orientations of academics who do not have the support of a program like the Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies Program at Ohio State. Moreover, while having a clear sense of potential benefits, such as a research agenda, is important for interventional orientations, having a team of academics similarly invested in the partnership and being able to draw upon a wider network

of connections, resources, and clout, offers a deeper kind of support system to sustain the engagement

One Final Thought

Whether or not new writing MOOCs will be built in the future, it is important to note that cultivating strong engagement strategies is incredibly important for contributing to public debates about writing (Hollands and Tirthali). Whatever the next topic *du jour* in the field of writing studies may be, cultivating strong public orientations will prepare the field to engage these debates meaningfully, productively, and strategically. My analysis into the public discourse surrounding the Gates Grant recipients reveals that intervention is a viable public orientation only if academics *pay attention* to the motivations, benefits, costs, and contexts that surround the potential partnership with establishment groups. Careful attention to these factors allows for academics to create enough room in their relationships with establishment groups to address public problems in nuanced ways, whether in potentially drafting language arts standards to be used by postsecondary schools across the country or offering writing courses to hundreds of thousands of learners across the globe. From the public discourse circulating around the Gates Grant awards, these four key factors, situated in terms of generative questions for engagement, offer practical suggestions for best practices for writing studies practitioners to cultivate interventional orientations for future public debates about writing.

Chapter 5

> *In our journals and at our conferences, one finds repeated again and again the assertion that our work—our teaching, researching, and theorizing—can clarify and even improve the prospects of literacy in democratic culture. If we really believe this, we must then acknowledge our obligation to air that work in the most expansive, inclusive forums imaginable (Mortensen, "Going Public" 182)*
>
> *What I find more distressing has been the ongoing inability of compositionists (myself among them) to explain ourselves to [outsiders]. Instead we have too often retreated behind the walls of our professional consensus, admonishing not only our students and university colleagues but the more general public as well when they fail to defer to our views on language learning—answering their concerns about correctness by telling them, in effect, that they should not want what they are asking us for (Joseph Harris,* A Teaching Subject *115)*
>
> *We have the brains, the know-how, and the tools. By changing stories at the local level and then working outward to our communities and with our colleagues, we can make a difference*
> *(Linda Adler-Kassner,* The Activist WPA *22)*

Conclusion

Over the past four chapters I have been building a case for approaching public engagement, or what Mortensen in the epigraph above refers to as using knowledge-work in the field of composition to "improve the prospects of literacy in democratic culture" (12), as a dynamic repertoire of *public orientations,* where building and harnessing relationships takes priority over explaining the field to nonacademic audiences. The idea that a more publicly engaged discipline is one where practitioners publish texts for broader audiences is all too common in the field of rhetoric and composition. For instance, in *Fragments of Rationality,* Lester Faigley laments that the field of composition has not made progress in "convincing much of the public" that the teaching of writing is more than the policing of error (77). Doug Hesse describes the problem as "an inability—or shyness—to assert our

expertise" ("Who Speaks for Writing" 10). One specific suggestion Hesse makes is to "pursue—and value—communicating with publics external to the field." To Hesse, this means publishing for nonacademic audiences and valuing, or *counting* those publications as valuable "public rhetorical efforts" (11). And Duane Roen, in his plenary address to the 2014 annual Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), encourages writing studies practitioners to consider taking on a more active role as public intellectuals by working to "share with the public the work that we do as teachers, researchers, and administrators." Roen suggests that "for every ten articles or chapters that each of us writes, what if we wrote one article or editorial for the general public to let them know about the usefulness of our scholarship?" For Harris, Faigley, Hesse, and Roen (to name a few) the disconnect between public perceptions of the field and the knowledge-work produced by the field is best mitigated by having writing studies scholars engage more with public audiences through nonacademic publications that *explain* the value of our scholarship.

However, adages that claim the field does not *write back* to the public obscure other efforts in the discipline to extend the function of public engagement beyond publishing for nonacademic audiences. In this dissertation, I define work that builds and cultivates relationships as publicly engaged, either relationships with others outside academe with vested interests in writing or writing instruction, or relationships that bridge, connect, and/or confront other kinds of publics within and across campus. As Linda Adler-Kassner demonstrates in *Activist WPA*, the work of relationship-building is key for changing the dominant "frames" that have traditionally characterized the work of composition as irrelevant, the pedagogy of composition as policing grammar, or the content of composition

as subordinate to other fields.[1] To Adler-Kassner, engagement is less about *writing back* to change those stories about the field and more about "building a base and developing alliances" (184). One step toward building these relationships, I argue, is cultivating viable *public orientations* toward public problems. Public orientations, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, are ways academics position themselves toward public issues. A dynamic repertoire of public orientations, I argue, allows us to cultivate more effective strategic relationships that equip writing studies practitioners to engage in public issues related to writing in meaningful ways. I suggest three kinds of public orientations compositionists have historically relied upon to engage in public issues related to writing: agitation, intervention, and disruption. Agitational orientations tend to critique the dominant social order; interventional orientations tend to partner with establishment groups that represent the dominant social order; and disruptive orientations tend to usurp the dominant social order entirely.

Each chapter in this dissertation points to specific moments in the field when compositionists relied upon public orientations to engage in public debates about writing in various degrees. By analyzing the successes and shortcomings of public orientations in discursive moments from the history of the field, I show how compositionists have relied on public orientations in the *past* in an effort to reimagine how compositionists can consider orientational approaches as transformative strategies for contributing to *future* public issues related to writing.

Public Orientations

A central component to this argument is my concept of *public orientations*, which I define in Chapter 1 as a set of potential stances toward public problems that writing studies

[1] For more on the public perceptions of composition, see Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University*.

practitioners use situationally to engage in public debates about writing. This is not so much a call for the field to take sides on public issues or to engage in partisan politics, but cultivating a commitment to what Elizabeth Ervin calls "publicism itself" (419) or what Rosa Eberly calls a "public-oriented agency or subjectivity" (170 qtd in Ervin 419). Orienting the work of composition toward public problems means that our public contributions do not necessarily have to be publications that *explain* the field to others. The impact of public orientations might manifest itself through curricular transformations (Chapter 2), collaborative efforts to draft language policies (Chapter 3), or partnerships that bring broader national and international attention to salient public discussions related to writing pedagogy (Chapter 4).

Agitational Orientations

Agitational orientations are oriented toward critique of the status quo, or rather, a stance that is in conflict with the pervasive social order typically propagated by what Bowers et al. call *establishment groups*. Agitational stances prioritize advocacy and solidarity for disenfranchised groups or the circulation of counterpublic discourse. While I address agitational orientations in Chapter 1, I chose not to devote a specific chapter to agitational orientations in the field like I do for disruptive orientations in Chapter 2 and interventional orientations in Chapters 3 and 4. There are a couple reasons for this. For one, while I value critique as a method of inquiry and even as a form of public engagement, I think our default stance in the field is generally agitational. Agitation is the majority of what we do. It is important to name agitational stances as a form of public engagement, though, because it makes room for and celebrates the advocacy work of academics who may not have the professional luxury or the time to form partnerships with establishment groups (intervention)

or subvert the status quo entirely (disruption). However, agitational stances serve primarily as a *foundation* for more robust forms of engagement.[2] As Linda Adler-Kassner notes, critique is a crucial aspect of changing dominant 'frames' that represent the field of composition in the public sphere, but critique serves as a foundation "only if their critiques are one of many elements included in a story-changing process" (82-83). In other words, agitation happens in many ways, every day, in a variety of journals, classrooms, conversations, and publications throughout the field of writing studies. This takes the form of using the classroom as a platform to stand in solidarity with oppressed groups, advocating for social change on campus, or orienting one's scholarship and teaching more generally toward agitating against the status quo. But ultimately, composition studies must consider how certain kinds of situations call for deeper and more involved orientations.

Interventional Orientations

One way to broaden the concept of public engagement is to cultivate partnerships with establishment groups through what I call *interventional orientations*, or rather, stances that prioritize partnering with those in power to work toward what Linda Flower calls a "mutual goal of inquiry." With an orientation predicated on partnership, academics *intervene* in public debates by working alongside establishment groups, offering disciplinary expertise valuable to them, either through expert knowledge of writing outcomes (Chapter 3) or expert knowledge of writing pedagogy (Chapter 4), while also creating for themselves opportunities, artifacts, and/or knowledge from which they stand to benefit. In Chapter 3, for instance, I argue that NCTE's orientation toward their relationship with the authors of the

[2] As another example of cultivating an agitational stance toward public problems in the field of writing, I would call the CCCC's "Students Right to Their Own Language" position statement as the circulation of counterpublic discourse, or rather, a moment when practitioners in the field adopted an agitational stance that saw public problems as power issues in which academics typically side with the least powerful, and embodied that stance in their teaching, research, and service efforts to their discipline.

Common Core English Language Arts (ELA) standards was interventional because it was predicated on a partnership between one group at a significant power deficit (NCTE), and a consortium of powerful establishment groups (the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governor's Association, to name a couple), toward the mutual goal of creating meaningful K-12 educational standards that would answer public and government calls for raising standards and increasing accountability.[3] However, I argued through an analysis of the discourse surrounding this partnership that NCTE's interventional orientation, while producing some positive results, was largely unfulfilling. One reason for this, I suggest, was that NCTE was unable to create a *sustained partnership* and thus a productive relationship in which the NCTE's values could be communicated and heard by the Common Core authors.

This is not to put a value judgment on NCTE's track record for impacting public debates about writing. Adler-Kassner, for example, in *Activist WPA*, analyzes NCTE's efforts to counter dominant narratives circulating about the SAT writing exam in 2005. NCTE strategically drafted a public report about the tests through a "dialogic, methodological process designed to gather input from and build on the critical intelligences of their membership," while simultaneously crafting a powerful media strategy that worked to reframe the public narrative of standardized testing (78). Also, Adler-Kassner writes, NCTE drew from their values, principles, and strategic governance models to *build relationships*: in this case, partnerships with the National Writing Project (NWP) and FairTest (an educational organization critical of standardized tests like the SAT and ACT) (80). NCTE also trained

[3] While NCTE is not without significant power and influence in many public ways, the Common Core creators were certainly in more of a position to influence policy. The nature of their power, in other words, was that they had control over different modes of action for public policy. I am reminded here of Michel Foucault's discussion of power as *government*, or rather, the ability "to structure the possible field of action for others" (221). In this sense, the NGA, CCSSO, and others had significant power. This speaks to another important takeaway from my project: the need to reflect on how the field can become more rhetorically savvy about where its power does and does not lie.

spokespeople to answer questions in compelling ways for journalists. This diligent work of *story-changing*, Adler-Kassner writes, is an important critique of Harris's claim in the epigraph above that compositionists are unable to explain their work to nonacademics. However, the difference here is that in the case Adler-Kassner analyzed, NCTE created partnerships with *like-minded groups* in order to build alliances and coalitions in an effort to increase their critical mass and sway public opinions. My analysis of NCTE's partnership with the Common Core elucidates an interventional orientation, which is a partnership with groups who do *not* share our interests—a kind of relationship interested not necessarily in coalitions but in building partnerships with groups whom they can potentially find common ground in order to work toward a common good. Interventional orientations, at their best, allow for academic counterpublics to provide establishment groups with something they need (which is usually disciplinary expertise) while simultaneously leveraging the resources of the establishment group to obtain something they need (which varies depending on the needs and perceived benefits of the relationship). In the case of the interventional orientation toward the Common Core, NCTE hoped to gain more active influence on and participation in the formation of K-12 education policy (even though NCTE was unable to attain such influence). In any case, an ideal intervention is one in which academics communicate their values to establishment groups in ways that bring disciplinary expertise to bear on important public problems. And this brings us to perhaps another important takeaway: part of our task in composition's public turn may be to develop better ways of imagining and communicating the benefits of such partnerships to establishment groups.

While sustained partnerships with establishment groups have the potential to yield the most benefits, it is not a very common orientation adopted by writing studies practitioners.

There are perhaps a number of reasons for this, ranging from a preference for *critiquing* establishment groups instead of working *with* them, or a lack of opportunity to partner with them in the first place. In chapters 3 and 4, for that matter, the establishment group reached out to practitioners in writing studies first. And, in the case of the partnership between the Common Core and NCTE specifically, it could be argued that the authors of the Common Core were not even interested in sustained engagement in the first place, and NCTE might not have even been able to make an impact on policy even if they had better strategies for sustained engagement. This is in contrast to the partnership between the Gates Foundation recipients and Coursera, in which there *was* a presumption of partnership built into the relationship, mainly because the expertise and public status of the research institutions were specifically solicited from the Gates Foundation with the goal of building MOOCs that aligned with their mission. And while the Common Core authors did not invite NCTE in the same way (which might explain the staleness of their partnership) the important thing to consider here is how improving interventional orientations through fostering a sustained seat at the table (as I argued in Chapter 3) and critical reflection on the situational goals/limitations of engagement (as I argued in Chapter 4), can help the field do a better job of looking for places to build partnerships and invest in them, even when the groups we partner with are not interested in what we have to say or worse, oppose our interests entirely.

In Chapter 4 I describe the partnership between Duke, Georgia Tech, and Ohio State with for-profit company Coursera as a sustained partnership that *does* have the potential to lead to stronger influence in future public issues related to writing. In contrast with NCTE's engagement in the debate about language standards, the three institutions' partnerships with Coursera were more strategic, both on behalf of the academics involved and the

establishment groups participating. While there were still significant obstacles to the interventions, Ohio State exhibited the most productive interventional orientation: a stance predicated on the presumption of partnership, a partnership in which they simultaneously received some kind of benefit (in this case a robust peer-review software program) that outweighed the professional costs of intervening (time, money, and potential pushback from the professional community of writing scholars). Interventional orientations, in other words, require an intense reflection on the motivations, costs, benefits, and contexts underlying the intervention in order to generate meaningful, sustained, and potentially transformative partnerships. In discourse from both of the interventional orientations I analyzed, the main takeaway is that being more conscious of and attentive to the ways partnerships with establishment groups will *count* (however they define it) is crucial.

Disruptive Orientations

When I argue that a large component of public engagement is building relationships across groups, I do not mean to imply that these relationships always have to be productive or positive. In contrast to the later chapters, which outlined orientations for building partnerships with establishment groups with differing goals, disruptive orientations, which I outline in Chapter 2, eschew collaborative relationships entirely and instead leverage professional relationships in such a way as to assert ideological positions and attempt to actualize change. Linda Brodkey, for example, who attempted to revise the required freshman writing course at UT Austin in the summer of 1990 and ignited a maelstrom of debate and vitriol, defiantly usurped her relationships with other faculty and administrators when collaborative orientations were no longer tenable: the disruption, in this sense, occurred at a curricular and departmental level. But her relationships with the establishment (or rather,

those more powerful members of the faculty opposed to E306, members of the press, or the administration at UT pressuring her to change the course), were not coalitions. However, Brodkey's disruptive orientation toward her relationship with faculty and administrators that both resisted her course and/or were in positions of power relative to the English curriculum, was still a distinct kind of relationship. Disruptive orientations, in other words, prioritize changing the status quo. But disruptive orientations are still dependent upon relationships in that the disruption does not happen in isolation. Academics with disruptive orientations position themselves in their professional relationships in such a way as to assert, broadcast, and actualize change. In the case of the *Battle of Texas*, Brodkey's orientation was predicated not on a collaborative partnership with administrators and/or her detractors, but on a defiant stance toward the problem of writing instruction on college campuses, which she asserted in *spite* of the odds she faced. This stance is important for academics wishing to become engaged in public problems related to writing to consider how disruption has historically functioned in the field (as I show in Chapter 2), and how disruption functions as a potential stance toward current public problems related to writing (though, as I argue in Chapter 1, the risks involved with disruption are victimization, loss of employment, tarnished reputations, and ostracization, among others).

Implications and Questions

I am not necessarily advocating for any one orientation over another. Ultimately, from three moments throughout the history of composition, I argue that contributing to public problems related to writing is not just about publishing in more accessible venues for nonacademics, or even getting journalists to cover issues important to the field differently. The three orientations I describe uncover different ways the field *already* engages in public

issues related to writing, and how public orientations can help the field think more deeply about what public engagement means for future publics problems related to writing. The goal, perhaps, is to advocate for untraditional conceptions of the public sphere, or what Adler-Kassner calls "a different kind of public sphere, a republican (small 'r') one" (84). As with each case I analyze in this dissertation, the academics and professional organizations I profile all worked in multifaceted and *untraditionally public* ways to engage in writing-related issues shared by multiple publics, whether through curricular reform, policy change, or strategic partnerships. Each of these moments also gives the field pause to discover not only the ways practitioners have *already been* inventing but can *continue* to invent public orientations for new public debates about writing that arise.

There are many reasons why the field should think about engagement in terms of orientations: for one, it names work as publicly engaged that might not otherwise be considered publicly engaged, which carves out a space for those without the time, energy, or institutional support to write op-eds or give radio and/or TV interviews. It also forces us to consider how we can orient our day-to-day pedagogy and service work toward public problems and make meaningful public reverberations.[4] For another, orientations give practitioners a variety of options and approaches to bring disciplinary knowledge to bear in new and previously unexplored capacities. In the age of accountability and assessment, and in the face of a rising conservatism critical of the kind of social justice work championed most notably in our field by Linda Brodkey, public orientations might help us imagine new partnerships that are generally seen as problematic. What kind of sustained relationships can

[4] I am thinking particularly of Brodkey's pedagogy of using the writing classroom to critique and confront difference, or other pedagogies that discuss the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and other markers of identity as it relates to writing and writing instruction. Calling this work publicly engaged means conceptualizing pedagogy as an opportunity to critique the status quo—a move that has ramifications for different kinds of publics.

we form with the Common Core, which is more and more a reality for college composition instructors? How can we imagine ourselves contributing to a relationship with companies like *Education Testing Services,* MOOC providers, or other for-profit companies that have an interest in literacy education but not necessarily the interests we share? The three public stances I outline in this dissertation make room for that kind of work. Public orientations also work to expand traditional understandings of what counts as public engagement in an effort to account for the variable ways situated and contextual approaches to problems in the community can make a difference.

Takeaways

This project yields some concrete observations for rhetoric and composition practitioners interested in engaging in public arguments about writing. I situate these observations in terms of two suggestions for contemplating public orientations: Leading and Learning.

Leading

In order to cultivate meaningful public orientations, academics need to lead the way. This leadership should take the form of creating and heading initiatives, taking bold stances on important issues, unapologetically working alongside establishment groups, or other important manifestations of leadership that embody relationship-building as engagement. And, while it is important to have institutional support or a cohort of allies and coalitions, it is nevertheless crucial for *individual* leaders to take on sustained engagement projects as a primary dimension of their professional academic identities because bold, individual leadership can pave the way for others, which helps garner attention to and eventual institutional structures for rewarding this kind of work on a broader scale. This may include

encouraging the discipline itself to change to value this kind of engagement, from new forms of graduate training to revised tenure and promotion policies.

The kind of leadership called for here is not easy, especially in institutional contexts where public engagement is conceptualized as something ancillary to traditional academic duties. In E. Johanna Hartelius and Richard A. Cherwitz's "The Dorothy Doctrine of Engaged Scholarship," they suggest that treating public engagement as ancillary to academic work implies that public engagement is something only tenured faculty can afford to do. However, if public engagement is seen as "integral to the academic enterprise as a whole (including *all* of the tasks currently subsumed within the research-teaching-service metrics)," then publicly engaged academics are in a better position to have their work "rewarded and encouraged" (439). In other words, calling for individual leadership in the field is calling for compositionists to imagine their work as what Hartelius and Cherwitz call "mobilized expertise," or a kind of "strategic leveraging of a scholar's intellectual capital in the interest of local, national, and global communities and publics" (436). This kind of leadership, Ann Feldman writes in *Making Writing Matter*, implies that knowledge emerges "in collaboration with others," resulting in " community-based consequences *as well as* traditional scholarly publication" (2-3, my italics). Chris Gallagher, in *Reclaiming Assessment,* takes it a step further and posits that the phrase *engagement* itself functions as a corrective to the public issue he cares about, the accountability movement, by privileging relationships instead of consequences. To Gallagher, being *engaged* means being:

> Richly involved in an activity, to have taken it on. It is not doing the minimum required of you by a *transaction*; it is doing what you ought to do by virtue of

> your understanding of an interaction. This is the spirit, the disposition, the commitment that must drive schooling." (30)

My call for leadership is really a call to individual writing studies scholars to consider public engagement as part of their professional identities and to imagine the various ways *mobilized expertise* can impact teaching, research, and service. It is worthwhile to imagine how the very systems and institutions in which we are embedded might change when predicated on and defined by public engagement in this way.

Learning

As the field thinks more deeply about nuanced ways to engage in public debates about writing, it also needs to continue learning. I situate learning in a couple ways. The first is learning from other kinds of research that compositionists typically avoid. For Brian Huot, contributing to public arguments about writing means learning how to make validity arguments about writing assessment, which also means learning the language of the typically quantitative discourses of educational measurement. The better claims our scholars can make in those terms, he argues, the more opportunities we will have to engage more meaningfully with establishment groups in charge of creating and maintaining language policies. "If we can promote the regular use of validity arguments that attempt to be compelling for all of those who work in writing assessment," Huot writes, "then it might be possible to ease the current climate of isolation" (56). There have been other calls for more empirical research in the field, from Richard Haswell's famous "NCTE/CCCC's Recent War on Scholarship" to Doug Hesse's call in "Who Speaks for Writing," to "publish more empirical research, gathering and analyzing student artifacts and attitudes, then relating our findings to writing that matters in spheres beyond the classrooms (13)." For Hesse, empirical research is not

necessarily better as much as it "facilitates the rhetoric of advocacy" (13). I interpret these calls, especially from Hesse, to mean that different ways of arguing about and presenting research in writing studies might better enable establishment groups to listen to what we have to say.

But when I call for the field of composition to situate *learning* as a best practice for impacting public debates about writing, I also imply that we keep learning more from other fields, like for instance the emerging research on publicly engaged scholarship and the public humanities.[5] Research from these interdisciplinary fields can offer helpful definitions, frameworks, and strategies for gaining institutional support for practitioners in writing studies wishing to develop more publicly engaged academic identities. For instance, in "Scholarship in Public," a report authored by the consortium of publicly engaged universities *Imagining America*, the authors define publicly engaged scholarship as:

> Scholarly or creative activity integral to a faculty member's academic area. It encompasses different forms of making knowledge about, for, and with diverse publics and communities. Through a coherent, purposeful sequence of activities, it contributes to the public good and yields artifacts of public and intellectual value." (6)[6]

Timothy Eatman and Julie Ellison, the authors of "Scholarship in Public," argue that such a definition is helpful for "academic officers and dossier-preparing assistant professors," in

[5] For example, see Julie Ellison's "The New Public Humanists," Gregory Jay's "The Engaged Humanities: Principles and Practices for Public Scholarship and Teaching," or Hiram E. Fitzgerald and Judy Primavera's edited collection *Going Public: Civic and Community Engagement* for primers on how rhetoric and composition practitioners can learn from interdisciplinary approaches to publicly engaged scholarship.

[6] *Imagining America* is a consortium of universities committed to advancing public scholarship and engaged creative practice in higher education. Their mission statement notes that their main goal is to create "democratic spaces to foster and advance publicly engaged scholarship that draws on arts, humanities, and design" One aspect of *Imagining America* that could benefit scholars of writing is their efforts to provide members with information and consultation on forming community partnerships, civic engagement projects, and opportunities for participating in national research and policy initiatives ("Vision, Mission, Values, and Goals Statement").

addition to "graduate students as they develop their engaged work and navigate some of the challenges associated with pursuing nontraditional knowledge creation work in traditional educational settings" (31). Paying attention to the scholarly conversations of other publicly engaged scholars, in other words, will help the field of rhetoric and composition think more deeply, strategically, and with more of an interdisciplinary focus about our intellectual work and the impact our disciplinary expertise can have on the public good. Paying attention in this way might also help us see public engagement as an opportunity to understand literacy and writing from different perspectives than the one we habitually use to see things in our own academic homes.

Final Thoughts

Overcoming what Paula Mathieu has described as "feelings of cynicism about our ability to be relevant in the world" is a daunting task of any academic committed to public engagement. However, one potential benefit to contributing to public arguments about writing through public orientations is inventing new ways to champion more complex and nuanced understandings of the interconnections and complexities of writing that have historically contrasted with public perceptions of the field as rote grammar instruction (Gere). This kind of work is especially necessary in today's political moment, where public perceptions of academic research differ dramatically from actual academic consensus. For example, in January 2015 Cary Funk and Lee Rainie from the PEW Research Center found that there are "stark fissures" between public beliefs on key issues and academic consensus on those issues. For example, they write, 57% of the general public said that GMOs are *unsafe* for consumption, while 88% of scientists conclude that GMOs *are* safe to eat. Additionally, 50% of the general public believes climate change is caused by humans

whereas the scientific consensus stands at around 87%. Just as public perceptions of academic *consensus* are skewed, Funk and Rainie also reveal in their study that the general public differs on what they think the consensus actually *is.* For example, while 87% of scientists believe that climate change is caused by humans, as much as 37% of respondents said the scientific consensus is that climate change is *not* caused by humans. I do not want to suggest that Funk and Rainie's findings are indicative of an *uninformed* public per se, nor do I want to suggest that the function of academic research is to be an arbiter of knowledge that trickles down into the public sphere. Rather, Funk and Rainie's findings about the disconnect between academic knowledge and public perceptions of academic knowledge showcase why academics, as Ernest Boyer suggested in 1996, "must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems" (11). What I mean is that the disconnect between public perceptions of academic research (as evidenced by the PEW study referenced above or long-held beliefs about the public perceptions of composition as grammar instruction) has a lot to do with what I see as a lack of vigor in the relationships between public concerns and academic work. The task of publicly engaged research in rhetoric and composition, I argue, is to build better, *more vigorous* relationships, not necessarily in an effort to *convince* the public to accept academic consensus but to establish more mutually beneficial relationships to better align public problems and academic inquiry.

There is a lot at stake in aligning inquiry in writing studies to engaging in public problems related to writing. For Adler-Kassner, public arguments about writing matter: "These stories have consequences. They encompass every aspect of our work, from placement to curriculum design to classroom instruction to professional development" (18).

Moreover, building sustainable relationships enables our values (and thus, our knowledge) to be communicated, heard, and understood in new and transformative ways. This is why it is important for composition to think more deeply about how it *orients* itself toward public debates about writing, too. While the field has long been connected to the public, the field has long lamented its lack of relevancy in public debates or has oriented itself mainly as instruction in writing for *other* courses in college. But a more public orientation will help composition shift the focus from required writing instruction toward something larger and more important than thesis driven academic essays with correct citation format. And, as Adler-Kassner notes in the epigraph, compositionists have a lot to offer in this regard: "we have the brains, the know-how, and the tools" to make a difference (22). But we also have a lot to learn from other publics who have interests in writing, rhetoric, literacy, and language that often differ from our own. And as composition seeks to cultivate more viable relationships with these outside groups, establishment groups, and with one another—relationships that are both sustained and mutually beneficial—we will see a more complex and publicly engaged discipline.

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ABSTRACT

WHEN WRITING GOES PUBLIC: AGITATION, INTERVENTION, AND DISRUPTION IN PUBLIC ARGUMENTS ABOUT WRITING

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This dissertation argues that public engagement in the field of rhetoric and composition is more than publishing texts that explain the field to outside audiences. It also involves the cultivation of strategic relationships made durable by the ways practitioners orient themselves to public issues. These *public orientations* are potential stances toward public problems that writing studies practitioners use situationally to engage in public debates about writing. This dissertation suggests three possible public orientations: Agitation, which is a default stance oriented toward critique of the status quo; intervention, which is oriented toward partnership with members of the status quo; and disruption, which is oriented toward overthrowing the status quo entirely. By rhetorically analyzing the successes and shortcomings of public orientations in three discursive moments from the history of the field, this project shows how compositionists have relied upon public orientations in the *past* as a way to imagine how compositionists can adopt orientational approaches to contribute to *future* public issues related to writing. Such a move positions writing studies practitioners to make more meaningful and sustained engagements into public issues relevant to the field by bringing the disciplinary knowledge of writing studies to bear on immediate problems in our communities in addition to reinforcing and reclaiming the democratic mission of the university.