

A TWO-YEAR COLLEGE PERSPECTIVE ON STANDARDS IN THE PROFESSION

The Western Regional Conference on Teaching English in the Two-Year College strongly endorses the "Statement of Principles and Standards For the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing" published in College Composition and Communication and adopted by CCCC. While endorsing these standards we also recognize differences within the educational contexts, missions, and practices of four-year and two-year colleges, but we do not believe the existence of differences necessitates the development of competing sets of standards. Rather, as two-year college teachers of writing, we seek ways to collaborate, across institutional boundaries, to achieve the standards already proposed. Two-year college writing faculty are often not included in conversations within the field of composition and rhetoric, including the conversation about professional standards, even though we currently teach approximately half of the college freshman composition courses offered in the United States. We also have a wealth of practitioner, cultural, and theoretical knowledge. As open enrollment institutions, two-year colleges may well be *the* institutional sites where the most pressing, multi-cultural literacy concerns in America are confronted daily. In short, we need to be included in the conversations surrounding professional standards because we have much to offer the profession, and much to learn. Furthermore, we have much to lose, as do our students and the entire field, if we do not raise professional standards for teaching writing within two-year colleges, or if the gains made toward meeting the standards in four-year colleges translate into further erosion of those same standards within two-year colleges. Therefore, against a history of separation and sometimes exclusion which has characterized the relationship between two-year and four-year college writing faculties, and in the spirit of presenting a unified front to secure standards in the profession across institutional boundaries, we offer a two-year college perspective on, rather than a revision of, the standards published in College Composition and Communication.

Conditions for teaching writing within two-year colleges range from tolerable to deplorable. In a recent survey of standards within two-year college writing programs conducted by Helon Raines of Casper College, Wyoming, teaching loads for writing faculty ranged from 12 hours to 24 hours per term. Some two-year college teachers of writing teach eight sections of composition and literature per term which may entail teaching as many as 200 students. Most two-year college English faculty are required to teach at least five courses per term, sometimes exclusively composition courses. With 25 - 30 students per class, the typical two-year college writing instructor teaches well over twice the number of students allowed by the statement of principles and standards adopted by CCCC. Many writing teachers at two-year colleges are part-time faculty who often do not enjoy the same pay, benefits, or professional support extended to contract faculty. While some two-year colleges have no part-time faculty currently teaching writing, most employ part-time faculty to teach an average of 50% of their writing courses and some hire part-time faculty to teach over 85% of the writing courses they offer. Some part-time faculty have backgrounds in composition and rhetoric and receive additional training through faculty development programs; however, many do not. Part-time salaries range from \$720 per course on some campuses to over \$2000 per course on others.

The unique mission of two-year colleges in some cases necessitates hiring more part-time faculty than might be needed on four-year campuses. Besides being open-enrollment institutions, and therefore subject to abrupt and unexpected enrollment increases, community colleges design their programs to meet the immediate educational needs within their communities. In order to accommodate working adults, for example, two-year colleges normally offer a much wider range of evening and weekend courses than do four-year colleges. In addition, short-term partnerships between two-year colleges and business or government are often created to meet specific educational or job retraining needs identified by the community. Sometimes these instructional needs are best provided by part-time or even temporary full-time faculty. The need for part-time faculty in writing programs at two year colleges may justifiably exceed, on occasion, the 10% limit

recommended in the adopted statement on professional standards. None of these realities, however, in any way diminishes the fact that widespread, systemic exploitation of part-time faculty occurs to a much greater degree in two-year colleges than in four-year colleges. Even though each institution must define within its own context what percentage of writing courses taught by part-time faculty can be justified, in no case should a justification for hiring part-time faculty result in hiring unqualified instructors, compensating part-time faculty at lower rates per class than full-time faculty, or offering less professional support to part-time faculty.

Two-year and four-year college writing programs strongly impact one another. Not only do the professional standards for teaching writing within two-year colleges help shape the literate practices of transfer students, but the standards practiced at universities shape the attitudes many two-year college administrators and faculty have about undergraduate writing instruction. In particular, the overwhelming reliance on graduate students to teach composition at universities perpetuates the myth that one does not need much education or experience in the field of composition to teach writing. Writing is often viewed as a utilitarian enterprise that requires teachers of writing to have no special qualifications beyond a degree in a related field. Many graduate student teachers of writing have not yet earned advanced degrees, have no prior teaching experience and are not required to take course work in composition and rhetoric beyond an initial teaching seminar. The myth that composition courses provide good training ground for students who wish to qualify themselves to teach "more intellectual" subjects is reproduced by administrators at two-year colleges who turn over large numbers of writing courses to part-time faculty. Furthermore, the belief that teachers of writing do not need to pursue advanced study in their own field allows administrators to overload two-year college teachers of writing with large numbers of classes and students, leaving little time for such study. From a two-year college perspective, therefore, graduate students who teach writing at universities should be viewed as part-time faculty whether or not they are exploited to the same degree, and acceptable limits should be placed on the percentage of courses taught by graduate students. Like part-time faculty, graduate students are not hired into tenure-track positions, and the positions they fill are rarely converted into tenure-track positions. As written, the statement of professional standards adopted by CCCC seems conspicuously silent on this issue.

Some two-year college teachers of writing are concerned that attempts to meet professional standards at four-year institutions may translate into setbacks within two-year college writing programs. A development in Utah provides a fairly typical example of ways pressure to lower standards are often shifted from one institution to another. University of Utah administrators have recently discussed instituting stricter admissions standards to reduce the number of entering freshmen in an attempt to live within a limited budget. Some administrators have been quoted as saying that the "less prepared" students who would be denied admission to the University could be educated at community colleges in the state "at much lower cost." Since Salt Lake Community College, by far the largest two-year college in the state, presently employs part-time faculty at \$780 per course to teach over 75% of its transfer writing courses, it should be clear that this "lower cost" is partly achieved through the exploitation of part-time faculty and further violation of professional standards for teaching writing. Other two-year colleges in the region have been forced to accept unprofessional course loads and class sizes to accommodate the influx of students. In short, policies that may help university writing programs maintain reasonable class sizes, course loads, and part-time faculty ratios can translate into increased pressure to erode those same standards within two-year college writing programs.

Two-year college teachers of writing are well aware of their marginal status in the field and powerlessness in the face of budgeting practices that affect their programs and students. They realize they will not be able to secure professional standards within their writing programs without strong and vocal support from their colleagues at four-year colleges and universities. Therefore, in the spirit of presenting a unified front, the Western Regional Conference on Teaching English in

the Two-Year College offers the following suggestions for building collaborative structures to help the entire profession improve standards for teaching writing:

- 1) All teachers of postsecondary writing must strive to include one another in meetings and other efforts to improve professional standards for teaching writing within and across institutions.
- 2) All proposals to improve standards within individual institutions should include research into the possible impact implementation of these improvements might have on writing programs within neighboring institutions. Should some negative impact be identified, the proposal should include recommendations for offsetting these consequences.
- 3) New articulation agreements should be developed for transfer of writing course credits from two-year colleges to four-year colleges and universities. These agreements must require protections for academic quality at both institutions. University writing programs should make clear they will not accept transfer credits from two-year colleges that violate agreed upon professional standards regarding course loads, part-time faculty ratios, professional training and compensation for part-time faculty, class sizes, etc.
- 4) Graduate students at universities who wish to qualify themselves to teach at two-year colleges should be encouraged to complete a teaching practicum at a nearby two-year college, if possible. In addition, university writing faculty might work together with community college writing faculty to develop a university course on literacy and curriculum issues within two-year college contexts. Joint agreements between two-year college and four-year college writing programs regarding assistantship/fellowship funding and the development of specialized training programs should be explored.
- 5) Likewise, two-year college teachers of writing who wish to gain experience teaching university writing courses should be encouraged, when possible, to do so. Exchanges between carefully selected graduate students and/or faculty from universities and faculty from community colleges could be developed.
- 6) The strict distinction between teaching institutions and research institutions should be challenged more often. All teachers of writing need access to new knowledge in the field of composition and time to consume a share of this knowledge, if not participate in its creation. Teaching loads at two-year colleges must be reduced to reflect this need. Furthermore, two-year college instructors and university instructors/graduate students might collaborate on classroom based research within community college settings.

This partial list of recommendations and this two-year college perspective on "The Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing" adopted by CCCC is meant to represent a work in progress, not an end in itself. No one has asked two-year college teachers of writing to provide such a perspective, which may explain why it needs to be voiced. Perhaps other two-year college perspectives will be added to this one. The Western Regional Conference on Teaching English in the Two-Year College strongly endorses the existing standards published in College Composition and Communication and desires increased collaboration across institutional boundaries to implement these standards. We believe we have much to offer the profession. Two-year colleges employ a large number of writing teachers and educate culturally diverse students whose literacy needs are arguably the most urgent. By establishing a partnership with university faculty, we hope to participate more fully in the field, improve standards within the profession, and assist university writing faculty in their attempts to foreground literacy issues on their own campuses.

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