

THESIS

COMPOSITION UNITED: IMPROVING ARTICULATION BETWEEN TWO-YEAR
AND FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES

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ABSTRACT

COMPOSITION UNITED: IMPROVING ARTICULATION BETWEEN TWO-YEAR AND FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES

In 1977, Mina Shaughnessy posed what she believed was an “embarrassingly rudimentary question”— “What goes on and what ought to go on in the composition classroom?” (320). Over thirty years later, the answer to this question still remains under intense debate as educators struggle to maintain their distance from the K-12 standards and still ensure that students are receiving an equitable education at every institution of higher learning.

This thesis argues for improved articulation between composition programs in two-year and four-year colleges in the same community as a partial solution to this debate, advocating for a collaborative model as opposed to the increasingly popular competitive model for university operations. Two-year and four-year in the same community need to work together in order to ensure that students are receiving the same key concepts in their education, regardless of their place of enrollment. This will also illustrate academia’s dedication to students’ success and counter gainsayers arguing that there is another agenda.

Finally, this thesis proves that, by increasing articulation and fostering communication, the overall structure of composition programs will be strengthened. This heightened dialogue between educators will allow them to learn from colleagues with different areas of expertise and strengthen areas of weakness. It will aid in successful assessment and professional development, and, ultimately, our institutions of higher learning will produce more confident, successful writers.

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Introduction

In January 2004, *The New Yorker* published an editorial cartoon mocking students' transition from K-12 to post-secondary education, depicting "a bridge solidly grounded on each shoreline, with each side arching mightily toward a different center, which results in each side ending abruptly just past the other. While traversing the expanse might be possible, smooth travel, obviously, [was] not a possibility" (Todd and Rusch 1). This cartoon, while ironic, encapsulates many frustrations regarding an issue that concerns educators in every level: articulation. This educational concept was once defined by Richard Ernst in 1978 as a "systematic coordination between an educational institution and other educational institutions and agencies designed to ensure the efficient and effective movement of students among those institutions and agencies, while guaranteeing the students continuous advancement in learning" (32).

While our approaches toward articulation have evolved since 1978, this definition still covers the main principles of this term. However, due to the complexity of the issue and the changing student dynamics, educators across the United States are still fleshing out this concept and how it applies to each level of education. What exactly should students be learning in the classroom? What skills should they have before they move on to the next classroom? How can we streamline the classes to ensure that students are successful as they move forward, regardless of whether or not they remain with the same teacher, school, or district? More importantly, how can educators address these questions

in a way that allows the teacher the necessary flexibility to meet the varied needs represented in each individual classroom?

Articulation in the writing classroom is no exception to these concerns. Overall, there has been an increased interest in how students are writing throughout their academic career, with national movements coaching teachers to implement writing across the curriculum and specific programs focusing on a more streamlined approach to teaching writing in the school system. However, everyone seems to have different ideas regarding the best teaching of writing and the necessary skills needed at the varying levels. In any English classroom, the question will eventually arise as to what students learned in prior classes, what they need to learn in this specific class, and what they will be learning in future classes. Furthermore, who decides this?

These questions of articulation have been tackled by teachers, administrators, and legislators alike, and considerable time and effort have been invested in the attempt to ensure that students are learning the appropriate information in each level. Each state has specific standards for each subject and grade that teachers are required to meet each year, and administrators in the public school system have varying ways of mandating how teachers meet these requirements. Teacher education programs now instruct teachers in training on how to develop lesson plans that specifically coordinate with these standards. The system is far from perfect; however, it is something that is continually evolving.

In the college setting, much has been done to ensure articulation between high school and post-secondary and between public colleges in the same state. Countless articulation agreements exist across the United States, as educators and legislators alike realize the significance of streamlining basic educational standards in order to reach our

changing society. In 2007, the Governor of Colorado, Bill Ritter, established the Governor's P-20 Educating Coordinating Council, stating, "Our goal should always be to create a world-class education system for our children...From pre-school through 'grade 20,' this council will make sure our 'education highway' provides a continuous path of knowledge and skills for our young people" ("Gov. Ritter"). This "continuous path of knowledge and skills" is certainly difficult to navigate. It requires a smooth transition from elementary to middle school to high school to college. Never before have we had a population this transient or with this level of access to education. Therefore, we recognize that, while we are still wrestling with questions of articulation, we are, in reality, in uncharted territory regarding student demographics and educational access. The challenge is to take what we have learned thus far and adapt it to our current situation while exploring what will work best for us in the future. For higher education, this establishing of articulation standards is even more difficult as it is often split into two distinct categories: the two-year college and the four-year university. While these institutions are often thought to be different from each other, recent legislation—including statewide articulation agreements—does not differentiate between the two.

Despite the focus on articulation in the educational setting, there appears to be less focus on articulation between two-year and four-year colleges. While many formal articulation agreements exist, they often do not trickle down into the actual classrooms. In my thesis, I argue that two-year and four-year colleges should include a more informal approach to articulation in addition to the formal articulation agreements in order to address the changing dynamics of higher education and propel higher education forward into the new landscape of the twenty-first century.

Structure of the Study

In my review of literature, I begin with a brief history of composition in both two-year and four-year colleges and discuss the primary theories behind the establishment of the two-year college. This will establish the foundation for my argument by detailing the complex relationship between the two-year and four-year college and how composition has been addressed during this history. This foundation is essential for my argument where I contend that two-year and four-year colleges must address the power struggles that complicate informal articulation and move toward a more complete articulation setup, with both informal and formal components. Furthermore, I argue that articulation between college composition programs, particularly those in the same community, will not only aid in the continued success of both the students and institutions, but will also be a significant component of the higher education system needed in our evolving society. I conclude this argument with an illustrative example based on interviews, research, and teaching experience at a two-year college (Pueblo Community College) and a four-year college (Colorado State University-Pueblo).¹ Finally, I present my conclusion where I examine some challenges of articulation but conclude that these challenges are worth overcoming in order to propel higher education forward into the new landscape of the twenty-first century.

Review of Literature

In order to understand the complexity of articulation between two-year and four-year colleges, it is imperative to understand the academic conversation concerning their

¹ As a graduate student, I have had little experience in administration. This thesis is solely in response to my teaching experience and research in this area.

connections and their corresponding student dynamics, as well as a brief history of articulation and collaboration in composition.

English Composition Instruction in the Four-Year College

English composition instruction in post-secondary education finds its roots at Yale—then known as the Collegiate School—in 1767, when tutors began teaching their students composition, language, and grammar. In 1817, the Professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory was established at the same university. This was later changed to the Professorship of Rhetoric and the English language in 1839 and, again in 1863, to the Professorship of Rhetoric and English Literature, exemplifying the changes the program had experienced as its founders determined its focus. These early classes focused primarily on oration; while students did write, they were also required to present some of their writings to their class (Scholes 3-5). In 1874, freshman composition began in Harvard as a response to poor writing skills among the constituency (Rose, “The Language of Exclusion...” 548).

As students progressed, composition began to transition from primarily oral works to written works. By 1905, oratory tradition had almost been completely eradicated in most composition classrooms. It was at this point that literary criticism began to emerge in the classroom (Scholes 10). While there was some grammar instruction, it played a small part in the overall classroom instruction. In 1914, Walter Bronson examined some graduate writings from Rhode Island College and commented, “When we examine their spelling, grammar, and other beggarly elements, it is something of a shock to find that these students, of native American stock and of classical nurture, are far from impeccable” (qtd. in Scholes 5).

From the 1940s to the 1970s, English departments across the United States flourished (Chase), and it was during this time of growth that composition as we know it today began to develop. In “Freshman English, Composition and CCCC,” David Bartholomae reflects on the impetus that caused the NCTE to begin to regard composition as something somewhat separate from the discipline of English. At its national convention in 1949, NCTE chose to hold several sessions on the topic of “College Undergraduate Training” (39). These sessions—classified by Bartholomae as “lively” and “contentious”—opened up such conversation that NCTE quickly realized that just a few sessions would not be adequate to address the issue of freshman composition. The next year, they held a two-day conference dedicated solely to freshman composition, which later formed the basis of CCCC (40). This “lively” and “contentious” discussion in 1949 was just the beginning.

The formation of CCCC came from the pressing need of a new area of the English department. Up until this point, composition had been taught by full-time faculty and lecturers. However, the influx of the students as a result of the G.I. Bill caused English departments to begin relying on adjunct faculty and graduate students to help teach these courses (Bousquet 158). CCCC wanted the teachers handling this area to form a group to promote awareness, assist in training, and help develop this emerging course (Bartholomae 41). The latter, however, seemed to be quite more challenging than anyone had anticipated. Bartholomae writes that the early documents of CCCC reflect almost a sense of loss as how to address freshman composition and keep it somewhat streamlined: “No one knows, on any given day on any given campus, what goes on in freshman English; it’s there as a force on every campus, it carries a common name, but it refers to

everything, anything—no one knows what it is” (41). With this in mind, it is not surprising that, in 1977, Mina Shaughnessy posed what she believed was an “embarrassingly rudimentary”—but necessary—question: “What goes on and what ought to go on in the composition classroom?”(320). Rather than being fully answered, this question remained at the forefront over the next thirty years.

The Two-Year College

While composition theory is not specific per se to the two-year or four-year college, it is important to detail a brief history of the community college for a better understanding of its connection to the four-year college and its contribution to higher education. In 1901, the first community college was established, founding a national tradition that has continued to thrive. Community colleges are now scattered throughout the United States, intended to serve as “the primary gateway of access to higher education for disadvantaged students” (Anderson et al. 423) by offering both vocational and transfer options to an estimated 41 percent of the undergraduate population in America (Sullivan 6). However, the primary motives of community colleges are a matter of frequent speculation. Gregory M. Anderson, Mariana Alfonso, and Jeffrey C. Sun divide the current theories concerning community colleges into the following categories: functionalists, neo-marxists, institutionalists, and statist². Functionalists tend to agree with the accepted philosophy of community colleges as offering access to minorities and other groups who are often denied access to higher education. We see this often in anecdotal writings originating from the community college. John Pekins, a community

² I chose to focus primarily on the functionalist and neo-marxist ideologies, as they are the leading theories that impact my thesis. Institutionalists and statist branch off from the neo-marxist theories and include such leading scholars as Brint and Karabel.

college instructor and author of the essay, “A Community College Professor Reflects on First-Year Composition,” is an example of a functionalist, with his writing reflecting a passion for his students as he shares his

... heartfelt concern for these people...—men and women—some younger, some older—all of whom have arrived at my classroom with admirable goals related to acquiring satisfying careers for themselves and secure futures for their families. They have registered at this community college to help bring their dreams to reality. This course...College Composition...is the anchor course for their dreams.... (232)

For Pekins, many educators, and countless students, community colleges offer hope to those who are often denied access to higher education and who have had considerable challenges compared to the majority of freshman college students.

In contrast to this vision of hope and help, neo-marxists argue that the community college actually “legitimize[s] inequality by perpetuating the illusion of social mobility in capitalist societies, which is best illustrated by the existence of an ineffective transfer function at 2-year institutions” (Anderson et al. 426). One of the more notable neo-marxist critiques came from Burton R. Clark in 1960:

Certain social units ameliorate the consequent stress by redefining failure and providing for a ‘soft’ denial; they perform a “cooling out” function. The junior college especially plays this role. The cooling-out process observed in one college includes features likely to be found in other settings: substitute achievement, gradual disengagement, denial, consolation, and avoidance of standards. (569)

Clark argues that the “ideology of equal opportunity” has caused public pressure upon students to pursue a college education and further pressure upon colleges to adopt open admission policies; however, he submits that this results in students “who have little academic ability gain[ing] admission into colleges only to encounter standards of performance they cannot meet” (571). Thus, he argues that, for many, “failure is *inevitable* and structured” (571). However, the public outcry against mass student failure

has caused higher education to strive for a “soft” response to failure: an alternative route. This alternative route often includes the two-year college, where Clark suggests that these students are gently shifted from a potential transfer student to a community college student pursuing a terminal two-year degree. While this “cooling-out” is hidden from the general public, it allows society to “encourage maximum effort without major disturbance from unfulfilled promises and expectations” (576).

In 2006, Gregory M. Anderson, Mariana Alfonso, and Jeffrey C. Sun complicate the neo-marxist viewpoint of the community college, tackling Clark’s work in their essay, “Rethinking Cooling Out at Public Community Colleges: An Examination of Fiscal and Demographic Trends in Higher Education and the Rise of Statewide Transfer Agreements.” They acknowledge that current data confirms Clark’s theories that most of the students at two-year colleges end up pursuing terminal degrees; however, they investigate the fact that, despite this data, states continue to work out articulation agreements to ease the transfer of students from two-year colleges to four-year colleges. Their theory is that articulation is actually a state coping mechanism to handle “the stagnation of higher education appropriations, the spiraling costs of tuition and an excess demand for affordable higher education” (422).

Anderson, Alfonso, and Sun note that the statewide transfer articulation agreements began to increase around the 1990s; incidentally, this is the same time that data revealed that most students attending two-year colleges were not on the transfer track (424). If this is the case, then what was the purpose of the increase in transfer agreements? Anderson, Alfonso, and Sun propose that these agreements were an effort for state governments to “attempt to manage competing economic and social constraints

without allocating additional funds to higher education” despite the fact that “a significant number of entrants do not appear strongly motivated to, or well situated for, transfer” (446). Currently, their research reveals that these articulation agreements had little impact upon the success or number of transfer students.

Despite the emphasis on transfer agreements, it seems that a large number of community college students pursue terminal “vocational” degrees, which impacts the disparity between composition classrooms in two-year colleges and four-year colleges. Vocational degrees are often placed in a different category than baccalaureates, and students who pursue them are also often placed into distinct categories. Mike Rose reflects on this as national perspective: “...Vocational education—and, more generally, the divide between the academic and the vocational curriculum—has been one of the most longstanding and visible institutional manifestations of our culture’s beliefs about hand and brain, mind and work” (*Why School* 82). He goes on to share the consequences of this belief:

It is the academic curriculum, not the vocational, that has gotten identified as the place where intelligence is manifest... Thus a language of abstraction, smarts, big ideas surrounds the academic course of study, which is symbolically, structurally, and often geographically on the other side of the campus from the domain of the manual, the concrete, the practical, the gritty. (82)

Thus, it is not surprising that composition classrooms in vocational two-year colleges focus on “the concrete, the practical, the gritty,” while four-year colleges move toward a curriculum around “a language of abstraction...[and] big ideas.”

The emphasis on the “the concrete, the practical, the gritty” is probably the most apparent in the use of the formal modes of discourse to teach writing, an approach that is favored by many community colleges. These modes—narration, description, exposition,

and argument—became popular in the late nineteenth century and were used as a primary foundation for composition in most colleges until the 1950s, when composition began to evolve as a separate entity (Connors 444). According to Robert Connors in “The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse,” “The modes did not entirely disappear, but they were certainly changed, truncated, and diminished in power” (452). However, in 2003, James Kinneavy advocated for the continued use of the modes, stating that “no composition program can afford to neglect any of these basic aims of discourse” (137). Furthermore, he states that the “study of these distinct aims of discourses is only a continuation of the basic liberal arts tradition” (138). Many two-year colleges do rely on the modes to teach composition, which is evident in various composition textbooks. These modes are often taught in conjunction with practical written forms that students can use when they are out in their desired vocations—i.e. classification with nursing reports, etc.

Another possible reason for the focus on the modes is rooted in the amount of developmental courses that are taught in the two-year setting—which also is at the heart of some of the criticism aimed at two-year colleges and the idea of a “cooling out” factor. In 2009, one-third of all freshmen entering universities had taken at least one developmental course. In community colleges, this number doubled (Smith 1). These developmental courses can be problematic when one realizes the statistics surrounding the students enrolled in these classes. Only thirteen percent of students who take developmental classes will earn a bachelor’s degree. Furthermore, these courses are costing students, their families, and taxpayers over \$2 million annually (2). As a result, some states such as Florida and Utah are actually banning these courses in the four-year colleges (2). This then leads more students to enroll in two-year colleges to take any

developmental courses and other basic general education courses needed for a baccalaureate degree such as mathematics and social sciences.

Currently, forty-one percent of our nation's undergraduates attend two-year colleges. While not all of them will transfer to a four-year university, many of them will. Therefore, it is vital to ensure that students taking classes in multiple institutions will have at least a similar foundation. The looming question is not whether or not one specific method of teaching composition is correct; instead, the pertinent matter is how we can ensure a seamless transition between colleges. This question then opens up the door for communication so institutions can determine the key concepts needed in foundational classes such as composition. It is critical for these guidelines to be established in a way that institutions are able to maintain their autonomy while teaching students the general skills they will need to succeed in any institution of higher learning. This then leads us to articulation.

Articulation and collaboration

Collaborative learning is a key concept when considering articulation between colleges. Collaborative learning in education began to emerge in 1964 when M.L.J. Abercrombie released the results of a ten-year study of medical students that revealed that the information learned in that particular setting was “better learned in small groups of students arriving at diagnoses collaboratively than it is learned by students working individually” (Bruffee 417). Further work was done by Edwin Mason³ and Charity James,⁴ which reflected the political environment during the Vietnam War (1963-1973)

³ *Collaborative learning* (London: Ward Lock Educational Co. 1970)

⁴ *Young Lives at Stake: A Reappraisal of Secondary Schools* (London: Collins, 1968)

when attempts were made to remove ideals considered to be “socially destructive authoritarian social forms” from our education system (Bruffee 416). Composition instructors then began to experiment during the early 1970s with this concept in what Bruffee calls a “nearly desperate response of harried colleges...to a pressing educational need” (417). It was in this situation that peer tutoring was born and collaborative learning began to appear in college classrooms across the United States.

In 1984, Kenneth Bruffee published his essay, “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind,’” which discusses a social constructivist view towards composition, advocating collaborative learning as a “way of engaging students more deeply with the text and also as an aspect of professors’ engagement with the professional community” (415). His theories are based on the work of Michael Oaksehoff, who argues that “human conversation takes place within us as well as among us, and that conversation as it takes place within us is what we call reflective thought” (qtd. in Bruffee 419). This is rooted in social constructivist theories such as Lev Vygotsky who asserts that “reflective thought is public or social conversation internalized” (419). Thus, Bruffee supposes, “To think well as individuals we must learn to think well collectively—that is, we must learn to converse well” (421). The importance of collaborative learning is based on his theory that “writing always has its roots deep in the acquired ability to carry on the social symbolic exchange we call conversation” (422). Thus, conversation in the classroom is crucial to successful writing instruction. Not only does the conversation between peers influence a student’s writing, but groups of students are able to work together to access material otherwise inaccessible. He concludes that in order for collaborative learning to be successful, composition instructors must “create and

maintain a demanding, academic environment that makes collaboration—social engagement in intellectual pursuits—a genuine part of students’ education development” (434).

While collaborative learning has taken on many forms within composition classrooms, what is significant to this thesis is the theory that learning is enhanced in the collaborative setting. The reasoning behind this is that *thinking* is enhanced in a group setting, which therefore stimulates learning. If thinking in the classroom is enhanced by this theory of collaborative learning, would not other situations outside the classroom also benefit from this theory? It is with this theory of collaborative learning that I advocate for improved articulation—increased *communication* between individuals currently “in the trenches” in their specific programs—between composition programs. It has been illustrated that collaborative learning can work quite successfully in the classroom under the proper circumstances. As a result, we teach collaboration to our students K-20; we ask them to communicate with each other and teach each other because we have learned that communication fosters learning and growth. Somehow, in this “exchange of reflective thought,” ideas are born. I believe that this same theory that succeeds in the classroom—under the proper conditions—will succeed in a larger setting, first between composition programs in a community and then between entire institutions.

The Argument

With the foundation of collaborative learning, I propose that all institutions include an informal approach in their articulation planning—one that enhances formal state articulation agreements. This informal approach is *organic*—something that is composed of living organisms and is alive, changing, and continually evolving to suit its environment. It is not something that can be relegated to paper agreements or left

dormant for any amount of time. State articulation agreements, while increasingly popular in an effort to conserve funding and clarify certain general requirements in higher education, do not completely meet the needs of our students and institutions. While these agreements play an important part in the articulation process, they cannot ensure complete and thorough articulation. Paper documents can only accomplish so much; instead, it is the people interpreting the paper documents and investing themselves in the process that can make the articulation effort a success or failure.

Full articulation is not without its obstacles, however. While one can easily discuss the success of collaborative learning, which is the foundation of articulation, one would be remiss in negating the difficulties that come with it. It is not an easy task because, as Bruffee admits in his article, “Sharing Our Toys: Cooperative Learning Versus Collaborative Learning,” “We are not born knowing how to share our toys or wanting to share them” (14). The urge to resist collaborative learning is instinctive; our natural urge is to cling to that which is ours rather than to share. Bruffee goes on to elaborate on this concept, “By learning to share ‘our toys,’ I mean learning to share our books, our ideas, our beliefs, our way of life, our cities, our country, our world. Most of us spend a lifetime learning to share our toys” (14).

The idea of “sharing our toys” in the academic setting is certainly not something that comes easily; in fact, the very notion is often rejected. We can see some of the pertinent issues in both Myers’s and Trimbur’s responses to Bruffee’s raw theories. Greg Myers challenges Bruffee’s ideals concerning collaborative learning and offers a counter to it, believing that Bruffee “underestimates the difficulty of the reforms he proposes, because he sees the resistance to them as a matter of habit, not of ideology” (453). While

he does not disagree completely with the idea of reality as a social construct, Myers does believe that there needs to be a way to criticize this construct. Furthermore, he advocates for an evaluation of “the role of consensus in the production of knowledge” as something more than “just is” (451). Myers believes that conflict should be given the same amount of emphasis in the classroom as collaboration:

This stance requires a sort of doubleness: an awareness that one’s course is part of an ideological structure that keeps people from thinking about their situation, but also a belief that one can resist this structure and help students to criticize it. (454)

According to Myers, we must look at conflict as a primary role in collaboration. John Trimbur complicates Myers’ commentary even further in “Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning” and combines Bruffee’s and Myers’ theories into a more realistic view of collaborative learning as he explores the realities of consensus:

We need to see consensus, I think, not as an agreement that reconciles differences through an ideal conversation but rather as the desire of humans to live and work together with differences. The goal of consensus, it seems to me, ought to be not the unity of generalizable interests but rather what Iris Marion Young calls ‘an openness to unassimilated otherness.’ (476)

Therefore, it is more than just a mere sharing of the toys that poses a problem. While our initial reaction is indeed to cling to that which we feel rightfully belongs to us, we are also navigating a complex world of consensus and conflict. One cannot possibly embark upon this journey to articulation unless one acknowledges that power conflicts will inevitably result.

There are certainly power conflicts present between a two-year and four-year college, particularly those in the same community, and these conflicts can complicate articulation. One conflict that often emerges is the different purposes and demographics that two-year and four-year colleges often have, and, perhaps with a nod to Burton

Clark's⁵ "cooling out factor," the mistaken mindset that two-year colleges are often considered as being lower or of less value than the four-year college. As a result, these colleges are sometimes considered second best, with a lower-quality education. For full articulation where students are able to make the transfer between institutions with ease and advance in their learning experience, two-year and four-year colleges must come together and realize that they are both serving the general population and have equal value. One is not inherently better than the other. These conflicts cannot be ignored in the articulation process. Regardless of which theory one follows regarding its true purpose, the two-year college was created to fill a gap the four-year college did not sufficiently fill, and, as a result, there are different student dynamics and different goals in two-year and four-year colleges.

The power dynamics that result from the clash between vocational and academic education are perhaps the most prevalent, though they are often cloaked behind other issues. As Mike Rose states, "The schools one attends and the work one does are powerful social markers, perhaps the most powerful, by which we make judgments about a person's intelligence" (74). When one chooses to attend a two-year college with an emphasis on vocational education versus a four-year college with an emphasis on academic education, a clear power divide emerges, with the four-year college often valued over the two-year college in society. This is a reflection of the prevalent beliefs in our culture that intelligence resides primarily in the academic setting. As Rose explains:

Thus a language of abstraction, smarts, big ideas surrounds the academic course of study, which is symbolically, structurally, and often geographically on the other side of the campus from the domain of the manual, the concrete, the

⁵This is in reference to Burton Clark's essay referenced in the review of literature: "The 'Cooling Out' Function in Higher Education."

practical, the gritty. (82)

Not only is the vocational usually separated from the academic in a specific college, it is often relegated to a completely separate institution. With the vocational/academic divide fostering this break between institutions in the same community, the relationship between the vocational and the academic *must* be addressed in articulation.

When the disparity between vocational and academic education is addressed, it is usually the vocational that is urged to adapt to the goals of the academic setting. The intelligence used while manipulating the “practical” and the “gritty” seems to be marginalized while academic intelligence takes the forefront. As Matthew B. Crawford, an electrician, mechanic, and PhD, points out in his book *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, “The current educational regime is based on a certain view about what kind of knowledge is important: ‘knowing that,’ as opposed to ‘knowing how’” (161). Realistically, though, ‘knowing how’ is as important as ‘knowing that.’ Crawford elaborates on this further, “If thinking is bound up with action, then the task of getting an adequate grasp on the world, intellectually, depends on our doing stuff in it” (164). Overall, though, there seems to be the prevailing mindset that vocational education requires less thinking and is reserved for those who cannot succeed in the workplace.

With this clear divide between academic and vocational education, the question may arise as to why one would even try to bring these dichotomies together. What good would come out of adding to the workload of overloaded administrators and teachers by forcing them to interact with another college that may be different from their own institution? I would then urge those with this valid question to examine the issue even

further. Could it be, as Bruffee points out, that institutions of higher learning have more in common than one might think?

...sociologists have demonstrated [that] all communities are held together by the same sorts of 'integration mechanisms.' This similarity is especially evident among academic and professional knowledge communities in the western world. Intellectual indebtedness, shared expertise, technical knowledge and traditions...patterns of argument, patterns of approval and reward....levels of collaboration, trust, conflict, competition, and often even resources...turn out to be largely the same in general outline. (116)

Regardless of distinct differences in methodology or even student demographics, two-year and four-year colleges *do* have commonalities. Composition programs in these institutions have even more in common.

The idea of collaboration between composition programs in two-year and four-year colleges is neither new nor original to this thesis. There have been a few pioneers in this endeavor. In 1993, California State University in Bakersfield and Bakersfield College realized the disparity between their colleges was negatively impacting their students. As a result of both colleges developing "standards, placement and assessment independently," students "found themselves trying to meet two sets of requirements, often resulting in frustration and anger with one or both institutions" (3). To better address this, the two institutions applied for and received a grant allowing them to embark on an experimental program designed to improve articulation. Their goals included the following:

- 1) to articulate placement agreements for entering students at both institutions
- 2) to compare developmental performance standards
- 3) to coordinate our freshman Composition course goals and grading standards
- 4) to participate in the lower-division exit exam process
- 5) to correlate proficiency standards on both campuses (4)

After all phases of the program were complete, the faculty reflected, "...we have indeed begun to build bridges of communication, understanding, and respect...this project not only improved relationships among the schools at all levels, but, ultimately, improved our students' lives, both directly and indirectly" (11). These two colleges in Bakersfield recognized that their autonomy as institutions was not worth the frustration of their students. After this process, they realized that the benefits of improved articulation were greater than imagined. While there is a significant amount of time and effort involved, the benefits far outweigh the initial inconveniences.

As those two colleges learned, it is now time to "share our toys." It is no longer possible to keep our ideas concerning professional development and student retention carefully cloaked away from public view, fearful that other institutions might discover them and appropriate them for their use. As Kathleen Blake Yancey stated in a recent WPA e-mail exchange, "There's something here about our all being in the same boat and trying to be sure that it's as sea-worthy as possible. To do otherwise, it seems to me, is to put us all into jeopardy."⁶ In order to do "get in the same boat", however, one must embark on the uncomfortable and uncertain journey of change. As Bruffee admits, "For 'associated life' to become an important element in education, the people involved almost always have to undergo some kind of change. Working together well doesn't come naturally. It's something we learn how to do" (14). Collaboration involves compromise. Bruffee argues that to "reap the benefits" of "associate life," we all need some "reacculturation up front and, perhaps, from time to time, some more along the way. By

⁶ This remark was made on July 11, 2010, in response to the following question on the WPA listserv: "Where is Basic Writing Going and Why?"

reacculturation, I mean renegotiating membership in groups or cultures we already belong to and becoming members as well of other groups or cultures” (14). If we are to preserve our reputation in higher education, we have to join other groups and subcultures, including those who we once considered competitors. Only through collaboration will we become successful at providing a thriving environment of learning.

The Benefits of Articulation: The Public

The benefits of improved articulation between composition programs in two-year and four-year colleges are multi-faceted. One important benefit of improved articulation would be an overall improved public image. In February of 2010, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and Public Agenda released a joint report detailing “public anxiety” surrounding higher education. Currently, “six out of ten Americans... say that colleges today operate more like a business, focused more on the bottom line than the education experience of students” (Immerwahr and Johnson 2). The study also reveals that, while more Americans believe that a university education is vital to success, they also believe it is more difficult to obtain (3).⁷ Sixty-nine percent believe that “there are many qualified people who do not have access to higher education,” bringing the percentage up by seven points in only two years.

Out of all of the statistics presented in the aforementioned study, one thing should be noted: the survey language does not differentiate between two-year and four-year colleges. In fact, one question is phrased as such: “I am going to read to you some statements about colleges, meaning both two-year institutions, such as community colleges, and four-year institutions, such as state universities and private four-year

⁷ 55 percent of respondents

colleges” (11). This brings to light one of the most compelling reasons for improved articulation. While the two-year and four-year colleges generally operate independently, with different structures, goals, curriculum, and methods of assessment, they are often included together under the comprehensive title of “higher education.” It does not matter to the general public that there are distinct differences; they are often still considered the same regarding funding and publicity.

Regardless of the efforts of countless dedicated faculty and staff at our nation’s educational institutions, the overall perspective of higher education is not very flattering. Annette Kolodny, a university administrator and author of *Failing the Future: A Dean Looks at Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century*, admits, “Nearly everyone—whatever their motives or political views—seems to agree that the future demands significant changes in the ways educational institutions fulfill their multiple missions” (40). In Marc Bousquet’s book, *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*, his view of the university is unforgiving at best:

Understood as a humanly engineered historical emergence of the past three decades, the ‘managed university’ names a global phenomenon: the forced privatization of public higher education; the erosion of faculty, student, and citizen participation in higher education policy, except through academic-capitalist and consumer practices; the steady conversion of socially beneficial activities (cultivation of a knowledge commons, development of a democratic citizenry fit to govern itself) to the commodity form—the sale of information goods, such as patents and corporate sponsored research, and the production of a job-ready workforce. (176-177)

While these arguments are certainly quite opinionated, research has still revealed that many in the overall constituency of the United States are not exceptionally impressed by higher education. According to the report from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, “This [the results of the aforementioned survey] does not mean

that the public is actively hostile to higher education, but it does suggest that the public may not be especially sympathetic to the internal problems of the higher education system, either” (Immerwhar and Johnson 9). Most of the general public is unaware of the intricacies of higher education and mass funding that is necessary to support a two-year or four-year college.

A better public image would also serve as a counter to the new “for-profit”/academia-as-business movement. In 1997, John Lombardi, president of the University of Florida, stated, “We have taken the great leap forward and said, “Let’s pretend we’re a corporation” (qtd. in Bousquet). This “great leap forward,” however, has the public skeptical. Marc Bousquet believes that this move toward a corporate education is damaging to our educational system and, more importantly, our students. He claims that “irresponsible staffing practices” stemming from a corporate viewpoint causes students to “drop out, take longer to graduate, and fail to acquire essential illiteracies, often spending tens of thousands of dollars on a credential that has little merit in the eyes of employers”(3). These “irresponsible” staffing practices consist of a teaching staff largely comprised of adjunct faculty who have “started a degree but not finished it; was hired by a manager, not professional peers; may never publish in the field she/he is teaching; got into the pool of persons being considered for the job because she[he] was willing to work for wages around the official poverty line;... and does not plan to be working at your institution three years from now” (2). Professor Mark Taylor of Columbia University addresses this in his *New York Times* editorial where he frankly states, “The dirty secret of higher education is that without underpaid undergraduate students to help in laboratories and with teaching, universities couldn’t conduct research

or even instruct their growing undergraduate populations...It is simply cheaper to provide graduate students with a modest stipend and adjuncts with as little as \$5,000 a course—with no benefits—than it is to hire full-time professors.”⁸

Our nation is losing confidence in higher education, and this reaction may in fact have long-term effects on the university through funding. As Mike Rose wryly admits, “Ours is the land of opportunity—that phrase is a core part of our national story. But opportunity is determined by public attitudes and public policy” (5). He further explains, “We have been living in a time of disenchantment with public institutions and public programs” (6). Taxpayers want their money well spent regarding higher education. In a conversation across the WPA listserv, Kathleen Blake Yancy reflects on this: “As a firm supporter of public education, I especially want them [funds] well-spent because to have them badly spent or perceived as badly spent jeopardizes such education itself.”⁹

Recently released statistics confirm the desire of taxpayers to see their tax monies spent wisely in education. As part of the survey from National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and Public, only twenty-five percent of Americans felt stimulus money should aid universities during this time of economic distress. Instead, they wanted to see most of the money go toward aiding students with tuition and fees rather than contributing to lowering the operating expenses of a university (3). Ultimately, the stimulus provided funding to a variety of areas of higher education, including grants to students and funds allocated to the states to use at their discretion; \$39.5 billion was

⁸ Taylor does not reference his source for adjunct salaries. Bousquet cites the following information regarding this: “According to the Coalition on the Academic Workforce survey of 2000, for instance, fewer than one-third of the responding programs paid first-year writing instructors more than \$2500 a class; nearly half (47.6 percent) paid these instructors less than \$2,000 per class” (3).

⁹ This remark was made on July 11, 2010, in response to the following question on the WPA listserv: “Where is Basic Writing Going and Why?”

allocated to handle the need exposed by budget cuts, and another \$8.8 billion was earmarked for governors to distribute to “high need” areas, including education, if necessary (Lederman).

Funding is critical to the success of institutions of higher learning and has been an issue for decades. Back in the 1970s, the recession caused tax revolts, and, in the 1980s, the Reagan administration addressed this economic downturn by giving large federal income tax cuts, which increased the deficit and affected the funding of federal programs (Kolodny 48). As a result, tuition costs have continued to increase to counter the lack of federal funding, which has caused some of the mounting public frustration with higher education. With the current recession and budget cuts, most public institutions rely heavily on governmental aid to subsidize education. As budget cuts continue to increase, many schools have been moving toward other, more lucrative endeavors as seen in the movement of “for-profit” universities.

When it comes to budget crises, it can be argued that composition programs cannot afford any more budget cuts. William Chace, Professor of English and President Emeritus of Emory University, calls these programs the “sturdy lifeline” of the English department, as most universities require them and thus partially fund them. However, this funding can often be limited. As part of the humanities portion of the university, it can garner very little outside income, as opposed to other portions, such as psychology and medical science, which are often awarded grants and other federal monies (Chace). Thus, when the university experiences budget cuts, composition suffers as well. All too often, composition follows Chace’s disturbing description:

Its instructors are among the lowest paid of any who hold forth in a classroom; most, though possessing doctoral degrees, are ineligible for tenure or promotion;

their offices are often small and crowded; their scholarship is rarely considered worthy of comparison with literary scholarship. Their work, while crucial, is demeaned.

It is possible that improved articulation between composition programs—and, ultimately, the entire institutions themselves—could help with this budget crisis. Currently, many communities in our country are skeptical of higher education. They see the flaws and question its intentions; thus, when it comes time for additional funding, the needs of higher education do not come to the forefront. The previously-mentioned studies reveal that taxpayers would rather see the monies given to the students versus the institution as a whole, which complicates things further.

Improving articulation would help the overall view of higher education in a community and in the nation in general. Currently, articulation is a pertinent term, as legislators are insisting that high schools and colleges bridge the gap between being a high school senior and a college freshman. By extending this articulation to the gap between two-year colleges and four-year colleges, higher education will be moving forward and allowing the communities to see its intentions of creating a larger educational community. A conscious effort by these institutions with appropriate publicity would not only allow the public to see a more unified front from the post-secondary institutions in their community, but also help them gain a better understanding of the value of the education, including composition. As Annette Kolodny states, “...the quality of the education reflects the quality of the community that supports it” (37). Perhaps now, the struggles higher education is facing can be partially accounted for by observing the lack of support from the community. I believe full articulation is a step

towards changing that.¹⁰

Transfer students

Improved articulation will also significantly impact a group of students that are often neglected in higher education: transfer students. While colleges usually track how many students transfer to and from their university, these students are frequently lost after their initial admission. While the unique position of a transfer student is something that certainly appears in academic conversation, there has not been a general consensus as to how to best address this issue.

Transferring to another university is inherently a difficult task, as transition in any situation is difficult. Bruffee discusses the act of transition and describes it as such:

They give their lives—and their language a measure of stability as they loosen or give up their loyalties to the communities they are already members of, give up the comforts and sense of identity pertaining to those communities, form loyalties to communities that are new to them, and experience the comforts and sense of identity pertaining to those communities. (76)

These students have spent as many as two to three years at another institution, navigating through its system and becoming comfortable in that community. Then, they rather abruptly switch to another community, in a similar transition to a high school student transitioning to college. This community is usually quite different, with little connection to their prior location. Rather than finding a large group of members in a similar situation—as many college freshman do—these students find themselves in a new community among a group of students who are already established and fluent in the new discourse of their community, placing them in what Bruffee would call “a transition community,” which he describes as “an odd, unstable, ephemeral social entity” (76). He

¹⁰ By “full,” I am referring to both informal and formal articulation.

declares that, "...membership in a transition community may often be, as acculturation always is, stressful and uncertain" (77).

According to Dr. Erin Frew, Assistant Provost for Assessment and Student Learning at Colorado State University-Pueblo (CSU-Pueblo), transfer students are some of the hardest students to track and assess. While CSU-Pueblo—and many other two-year and four-year colleges—tracks the number of students who transfer in, there is little done to assess how well these students succeed in the new environment. After the initial push to ensure students transfer, these students are often left to navigate the maze of this new community alone. To further complicate this, the transfer students from community colleges are often the most vulnerable. The population includes a large number of first-generation college students—over half of first generation college students begin at a community college—as well as students from a variety of ethnic and economic backgrounds (Cox 53). According to Rebecca Cox, Assistant Professor at Seton Hall University, who has performed extensive research in the community college setting, "The high attrition rates—within individual courses and across various degree programs [at the community college]—suggest that students face barriers that divert them from realizing their goals"(53). These barriers do not disappear when a student transfers. In addition to assimilating to a new environment, a student must navigate through a new community, often relying on poorly-developed communication skills and a weak or missing support system due to the complexities of being a first generation student or coming from a fractured home environment. Further complicating the difficulties facing a transfer student is their inability to articulate their struggles during the transfer. While they may

struggle with the issues previously noted, they often do not recognize and cannot articulate their concerns to someone who can remedy the situation

Improved articulation between composition programs will be one way to help reduce this self-consciousness and facilitate the rough transition between communities. If it is indeed the mission of an institution to provide access to members of a community, then it is important that the institution not forget this group that is often neglected. Students at two-year colleges who realize that there is a connection between their two-year college and a nearby four-year college are more likely to transfer to that university. It will ease the fear of the unknown for students because of the familiarity that they have gained during their first two years. Furthermore, when they arrive at the four-year college and find further evidence of articulation, the adjustment will be easier. The unfamiliar landscape will be dotted with small oases of familiarity, bridging the gap and easing the overall transition.

In 1970, Stanley Fish wrote *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, in which he advocates a specific process that helps “make a transition to membership in another community, one in which self-conscious practice is part of the knowledge it constructs” (qtd. in Bruffee 177). While this theory was originally intended to help students transition between interpretive communities that limit their reading of literature, this same theory can also be applied to students transitioning from one physical community to another. Essentially, Fish claims that one must first help students understand the language of the community they already belong to—and become fluent in that language—which gives them self-consciousness about that community, thus aiding them in making conscious decisions to switch to another community (178).

If we begin teaching this self-consciousness in all composition programs, our students will be taught skills that will assist them in the transfer process. Furthermore, they will arrive on campus understanding certain portions of the language as well as the skills needed to acquire the remainder of the new language. Even if a student does not transfer to another composition course, these skills will still be valuable as they take other courses. When students are asked to write papers for advanced classes, it will be with a foundation that has been articulated between programs. They will understand the language and structure that is expected in their coursework. Students will be less likely to be confused over assignment guidelines or receive poor grades due to a misunderstanding of those guidelines. Overall, these individuals will become more confident writers, students, and learners.

Illustrative Example

Throughout this thesis, I have made occasional references to a particular example involving two institutions that I observed while researching this matter of articulation. This illustrative example involved the articulation between the composition programs in two institutions of higher education located in Pueblo, Colorado: Pueblo Community College (PCC) and Colorado State University-Pueblo (CSU-Pueblo). The history of these two institutions has been intertwined since their inception, with both originating from Southern Colorado Junior College, established in 1933.¹¹ While both colleges originated

¹¹In 1937, the name was changed to Pueblo Junior College as part of the formation of the Pueblo Junior College District, which enabled the college to benefit from taxes. As Pueblo Junior College, its mission was to provide the academic coursework necessary for students to transfer to a four-year university, as well as provide courses for those wishing for a terminal, vocational degree. The Pueblo Junior College District was later dissolved in 1961. In 1963, Pueblo Junior College became Southern Colorado State College, which offered four-year degrees. In 1974, a separate section of Southern Colorado State College entitled “College for Community Services and Career Education” was established to focus on vocational activities on its campus. In 1975, Southern Colorado State College was granted university status

from the same institution and serve the same community, they have emerged as two distinct institutions; each has a different focus and varied methods of portraying that focus. Despite these differences, both institutions have made great strides in articulation—both between the institutions themselves and between the individual composition programs.

In the Fall of 2010, PCC had a total of 6,561 students enrolled in their main campus, branch campuses, and online (Pueblo Community College). Approximately twenty-five percent of these students are considered first-time college students, with an average age of twenty-nine. More than eighty percent of the student body receives financial aid, and PCC has been designated by the U.S. Department of Education as a Hispanic-serving institution. Currently, PCC is receiving two Title V grants (Pueblo Community College). The institution describes itself as a “one of the most dynamic and progressive community colleges in Colorado,” with the following as its goal:

We continually strive to provide modern facilities, state-of-the-art equipment, and comprehensive technical and transfer programs that prepare students to enter the job market or transfer to a four-year school. Our faculty and staff are committed to student success, offering quality classroom instruction and academic support. (Pueblo Community College)

At PCC, freshman composition¹² is under the care of the English department and does not have a separate director. English Department Chair, Deborah Borchers, and Assistant Chair, Luis Nazario, oversee both full-time and adjunct faculty in all areas, including

and once again changed its name to University of Southern Colorado. In 1978, its “College for Community Services and Career Education” became a separate entity—Pueblo Vocational Community College—and, in 1979, it became a State System Community College. In 1982, the name changed once again to Pueblo Community College. In 2003, the University of Southern Colorado became Colorado State University-Pueblo.

¹² This includes developmental writing courses, as well as Composition I and Composition II.

composition.

In Fall 2010, CSU-Pueblo had a total of 4,815 students enrolled, including non-degree, degree plus, and graduate students. Approximately eighty percent of the student body receives financial aid, and it is also a member of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, receiving the Outstanding HACU-Member Institution Award in 2008. It currently states its mission as the following:

Colorado State University-Pueblo is committed to excellence, setting the standard for regional comprehensive universities in teaching, research and service by providing leadership and access for its region while maintaining its commitment to diversity. (Colorado State University-Pueblo)

At CSU-Pueblo, the English Program has a specific program for freshman composition: First Year Composition. Dr. Donna Souder, Director of Writing, oversees this program.

As public colleges in Colorado, both institutions follow GT Pathways, developed by the Colorado Department of Education, which guarantees transfer of certain general education courses between public state colleges and establishes articulation agreements for various degree programs. Since composition is not a degree program and falls under general education requirements, articulation between PCC and CSU-P is usually structured per GT Pathways. For every general “guaranteed transfer” course—under which composition falls—GT Pathways has established some general criteria that a school must meet. However, one must note that these guidelines are rather vague. According to their “Communication General Education ‘Guaranteed Transfer’ Course Criteria,” students exit their composition classes with the ability to “use the English language effectively,” “read and listen critically,” and “write with thoughtfulness, clarity, coherence, and persuasiveness.” This is then broken down into four categories: rhetorical knowledge, writing processes, writing conventions, and content knowledge (Colorado

Department of Higher Education). Each course is to develop student learning in each area, preparing for the next level, and ultimately preparing them for a successful college career. PCC and CSU-Pueblo vary in how they have chosen to address these standards.

At PCC, Deborah Borchers relates that these transfer guidelines are what largely determine their specific composition curriculum. Thus, Borchers and Nazario strive to achieve a standard curriculum in all classes to ensure transferability of the classes. In order to do this, all composition instructors are given a fairly structured outline of their classes. The syllabi are designed and printed by the department, and they are aligned with the State Community College System. The assignments and course outline are developed by the department to best suit the syllabi and are then given to the instructor. In Composition I and II, the teachers are also given handouts, etc. that have been developed for the course. The ENG 090 course follows *Bridges to Better Writing*, a textbook authored by three PCC English faculty members. While the department encourages creativity, it is creativity expressed through this framework. Instructors are allowed to vary their approach in teaching the curriculum, but the basic essays—an explanation essay, an evaluation essay, and two research essays in Composition I and two research essays in Composition II—cannot be changed.

At CSU-Pueblo, careful attention is given to creating course descriptions that meet the general requirements of GT Pathways. According to Dr. Donna Souder, Director of Writing, transfer issues are usually not handled within the composition department. The university contacts her only in specific cases where they are not sure if a course should be considered transferable. Both composition courses are guaranteed transfer courses through GT Pathways, so the focus of the First Year Composition program is

mostly on creating a consistent composition program that best benefits the students. In this movement towards consistency, Souder created the First Year Composition Committee. This committee began with a mixture of graduate teaching assistants, adjunct faculty, lecturers, and ranked faculty, and its current composition is of a similar mixture. The goal was—and is—to give every type of composition instructor a voice in the development of the composition curriculum while making the program more consistent. This committee meets several times a year to develop assignments, perform assessments, and modify the curriculum. Every semester, the curriculum is re-examined in an effort to adapt to improve teaching and assessment in the program (Souder).

At PCC, assessment of the composition program is primarily internal. Currently, PCC answers to the Higher Learning Commission and has an Assessment of Student Learning Committee that oversees assessment with the assistance of the part-time coordinator of assessment, Duane Garrett. Departmental assessment is handled by each department internally, and the methods vary by department. Each specific degree program is also required to present an assessment plan, which includes student learning outcomes. This assessment plan sometimes focuses on the success of a particular course in reaching student outcomes; other times, it focuses on the program itself (Garrett). One of the goals of the Assessment of Student Learning Committee is to have every program at PCC participate in assessment at the program level, assessing its effectiveness in producing graduates who are either job-ready or prepared to transfer. However, not all programs have reached this stage (Pueblo Community College).

Borchers relates that one of the challenges to assessment within their composition program is funding; thus, to streamline costs, they largely depend on instructor feedback

and course evaluations to judge the success of courses. Any type of additional assessment requires a request for funding, which is challenging. Recently, the English department implemented a mid-term survey to receive feedback from students during the semester and give it back to the instructors in time to make changes for the rest of the semester. Just this one area of assessment required a grant to hire an individual to administer the surveys (Borchers). Extended assessments are even more difficult. Usually, the instructors are asked to assess students using certain guidelines and then give that information to the department for formal assessment. The department uses instructor feedback to gauge how well students are performing at the end of the class.

At CSU-Pueblo, assessment is critical to both the overall institution and the composition program. Their overall goal is accessible education to the local community. This includes a baseline of reading/writing and critical thinking, which forms the foundation of assessment. In addition to its accreditation requirements, it is also a member of a voluntary system of accountability where it publicly reports assessment results. CSU-Pueblo is continually assessing how to better reach its goals as an institution (Frew). Dr. Erin Frew, the Assistant Provost for Assessment and Student Learning, shares that assessment is something that is continually evolving. As far as CSU-Pueblo is concerned, she places it about mid-range on the evolutionary scale, believing that the tools are available to all departments; however, some leaders are more advanced in their usage than others.

After the general assessment standards are met, assessment is then broken down into specific programs. Each program has been asked to create Student Learning Outcomes where they prioritize the skills each graduate needs to obtain throughout their

schooling and successfully demonstrate for future employers, graduate schools, or both. Furthermore, each department must undergo a program review every five years to justify the program (Frew). Since the First Year Composition Program is not a department, it is not required to undergo a program review, and, like PCC, assessment is primarily internal and performed by Dr. Donna Souder and the First Year Composition Committee.

Articulation between CSU-Pueblo and PCC has varied in intensity over the years. Formal articulation between them is currently at its peak with the recent articulation agreement signed in April of 2010. This was part of a large effort by CSU-Pueblo to smooth transitions for transfer students from all of the primary community colleges in the state; in July 2010, CSU-Pueblo became the first state university in Colorado to arrange an articulation agreement with every community college in Colorado for every major degree program (Zaletel). While Governor Bill Ritter was present for the ceremonial signing of all of the articulation agreements in July of 2010, this course of action was not a result of any state legislation; rather, this was an effort from a focused CSU-Pueblo faculty and staff. Joe Marshall, Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Management at CSU-Pueblo stated that this was a very significant step for Colorado students, proving that "...it doesn't take legislation but rather the will to do what's right for students" (qtd. in Zaletel).

In addition to the more formal articulation agreements, the composition programs between the two institutions have also begun moving toward improving informal articulation. In years past, while formal articulation was still in the early stages, informal articulation was at its height. Borchers recalls earlier years where the two programs actually had meetings to share ideas and goals; however, they eventually dwindled.

Currently, both she and Souder are very open towards increased informal articulation, but they are also very aware of the obstacles that they face in this path. As Borchers candidly shares, “There’s just not enough time.”

Even if there was time to begin these meetings again, it would be almost impossible to bring together the diverse faculty, which is comprised largely of adjunct instructors. In Fall 2009, adjunct faculty taught seventy-one percent of the composition courses at PCC (Borchers). Due to the low wages paid to these adjunct faculty members, the department also has to pay wages for any additional professional development, which adds yet another cost and makes even departmental articulation a challenge. However, if the adjunct faculty is neglected, then seventy-one percent of the classes would not benefit from the meetings. Departmental articulation is slightly easier for CSU-Pueblo because most of the adjunct faculty is more involved on campus. Some are actually graduate teaching assistants, who are required to attend faculty meetings and professional development as part of their graduate coursework. Still joint meetings between all of the faculty in these two departments would certainly be challenging and time-consuming. One specific advantage to the current system in Pueblo, though, is that both institutions do share some adjunct instructors, which, as Souder shares, is actually an “accidental push” for articulation. When PCC needs extra adjunct faculty, their English department contacts CSU-Pueblo’s First Year Composition program and asks if there are any recommendations. Often, this sparks communication between the programs.

While there have been many positive steps taken regarding articulation between the two institutions, there is still room for growth in the area of informal articulation. Like assessment, articulation is something that is continually evolving with no institution

able to claim that they have completely mastered articulation. Thus, this is not unique to these two institutions, and it is not considered a fault of either institution. One would be hard-pressed to find any institution that has mastered this concept, if it is even possible at this point. Thus, in order to address the reality of the 21st century realm of higher education, these institutions—and composition programs—will need to continue moving toward improved articulation, including more informal articulation. Despite both institutions' focus on providing access to higher education, the reality is that “the purported accessibility of higher education has not resulted in high levels of college attainment” (Cox 52). Currently, eighty-five percent of first-time college students leave college before completing their bachelor's degree (qtd. in Cox 52). This is a significant issue that needs open communication between institutions in the same community in order to address it. It can neither be relegated to one institution nor ignored. It is time for communication to increase between composition programs and between institutions to benefit the educational institutions as a whole, as well as their faculty and students.

As referenced in my argument, one benefit of improved articulation for both institutions would be increased professional development. Instructors at both institutions would benefit from mingling with and learning from each other. Often, it is the instructors at the two-year college who are assumed to be less experienced or educated; however, according to Marc Bousquet, the author of *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*, it is usually the two-year colleges who have the most experienced staff, with many of the “terminal adjuncts” teaching for ten to twenty-five years (25). They offer years of teaching experience to the fresh doctoral graduates and new graduate students that are often present at a university; likewise, these new

graduates are often from larger universities and have had exposure and practice using new techniques and theories. Furthermore, the faculty at a university is often more specialized, offering more specific knowledge to the community college body of faculty, which is usually restricted to basic courses. It is through informal articulation that the vocational and academic meet, complementing each other and producing instructors who are able to meld them in teaching this next generation.

Improved articulation would also help the students attending both institutions. Due to their proximity, CSU-Pueblo is often displayed as an ideal place of transfer for PCC students wishing to pursue a four-year degree. As evidence, ninety students made this transfer in 2008 alone. With improved articulation, these institutions could not only ease the transition of students, but possibly increase the potential number of transfer students from other institutions.

Overall, this improved articulation would then impact the entire community. There is a pressing need for social change in the Pueblo community, and higher institutions of higher learning should lead in the movement for change. A significant factor in the high poverty rate¹³ is the rate of high school dropouts. In December of 2009, CSU-P President Joseph Garcia addressed this issue, stating, “For every young person who leaves school without a diploma, there is a cost to the community.” This dropout study revealed that \$4.1 billion in extra income would be generated from cutting the national number of dropouts in half, and there would be a \$536 million increase in state and local tax revenues (Gewertz). While Pueblo was not one of the cities studied, Colorado Springs, a nearby city with a larger number of dropouts—but lower dropout

¹³ 8.2 percent—the highest in the state of Colorado (Pueblo West View)

rate—was carefully examined. Data revealed that if the 2,100 dropouts of 2008 had only been 1,000 dropouts, the 1,000 extra high school graduates would have most likely produced \$15 million in additional income, spent \$1.1 million on car purchases, invested an additional \$52 million in homes, and produced 110 new jobs. Furthermore, the gross regional product would have increased by \$18 million. While one cannot draw exact suppositions as to the results in Pueblo, Colorado, judging from the results of the national study, a decrease in high school dropouts could only improve the economy. With a poverty rate of 8.2 percent and an unemployment rate of 9.5 percent, the effects of this economic boom would be significant. Perhaps Governor Bob Wise, President of Alliance for Excellent Education, was correct when he stated, “The best economic stimulus package is a high school diploma.”

While the significance of high school dropouts is often left to the K-12 sector, I believe that it is time for post-secondary education to become more involved. By joining together and improving articulation, PCC and CSU-Pueblo can continue working with local schools to encourage students to continue pursuing not only their high school diplomas, but other degrees and certificates as well. Individuals who receive high school diplomas are less likely to be incarcerated or depend on government assistance, and they are more likely to be involved citizens and parents. Furthermore, they are more likely to raise children who will pursue higher education (Wise). By working together to combat ignorance regarding education, both institutions can present a united front and use the resources unique to each institution to complement each other and benefit each other for the greater good of the community. It is through education that we can reduce unemployment, poverty, and domestic violence that pervades our community. By joining

together, we can confront the “cynicism” that Kolodny states is pervading our nation: “But at the end of the current millennium, any sense of community is in short supply, vicious corporate downsizing for the sake of short-term profits, a fraying social safety net, and widening inequalities in income distribution have turned the nation sour and cynical” (37). By demonstrating their commitment to education and the community *together*, both institutions will benefit.

Conclusion

In 1972, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) issued a Resolution on Stressing Articulation among English Programs that advocated for a “renewed effort to bridge communication gaps between the various levels,” arguing that it “is clearly imperative, particularly to eliminate curricular omissions and overlap...” It’s been over thirty years since this statement was first issued, but these words still ring true.

Articulation is a key component to the changing landscape of higher education. The next few years will bring new changes and challenges to higher education, including increased enrollment. Between 1997 and 2015, experts have estimated that there will be a twenty percent increase in general college enrollment, as approximately one-third of all newly-created jobs will require a minimum of a bachelor’s degree (Kolodny 34). Not only will this increase require more faculty, staff, and equipment (laboratories, computer labs, etc), but the demographics of these students will require additional resources. Students are no longer coming in well-prepared with family support and adequate resources at their disposal; instead, many are first-generation, with few resources and little support. Students will need more scholarships to afford the basic expenses, and there will be an

increased need for counseling and developmental services (34). We cannot expect our population to change without making internal changes to address the needs that accompany them.

Not all of the incoming students will be first-generation. In addition to traditional students, higher education will continue to serve a large population of non-traditional students as more workers are encouraged to continue their education and returning military personnel utilize the GI bill. With the rapidly advancing technology, many who are already gainfully employed must return for further knowledge and training to continue being successful in their place of employment. According to Kolodny,

The ease with which individuals will be able to access vast quantities of information whenever they want will be matched by a commensurate demand to learn how to analyze that information, recognize recurrent patterns or connections, and extract what is truly important. In effect, the new information technologies will make higher education both more necessary and ongoing, if only because learning to make connections and to reason rigorously across and between the disciplines is a lifelong process requiring sensitive tutelage. (35)

Thus, individuals from all backgrounds will continue returning to school for further education to meet the needs of the technologically advanced workplace. Furthermore, in order to teach our students how to make connections across disciplines, we need to learn to make connections across disciplines, departments, and campuses. This is not restricted to two-year or four-year colleges. As John Pekins relates, “The landscape has changed for us all” (235). It is our response to that landscape that will ultimately determine our success.

Thus, the question is not so much whether or not the “landscape” is changing, but rather it is how we will adjust to the changing landscape. And we will adjust. Patrick Sullivan sums up the attitude of many composition instructors in education when he

states, “Just because this work is challenging does not mean that it can’t be done or can’t be done well” (19). It is this attitude that will help us reach toward more informal, improved articulation. This progress may take some time, but, according to Annette Kolodny, the struggles that higher education is undergoing in its current state are merely reflections of growing pains. She refers to the history of the university, pointing out its leadership in research and change, arguing, “Rather than being labeled as a failing enterprise, the public research university would stand as an incredible success story, especially in comparison with the current state of our governmental and business institutions” (174). Kolodny believes that the problems facing the university, rather than signaling an imminent death or even a steady decline, simply indicate the need for change in higher education, both in the classroom and in academia. Admittedly, any type of change is always difficult in a university setting, but history shows us that academia is quite capable of doing so, with “the capacity to innovate in the face of challenge [being] the modern research university’s most salient feature” (Kolodny 174).

Articulation is one aspect that must be included on the list of changes that higher education needs to implement to address the needs of our current economy and demographics. In his Op-Ed article for the *New York Times*, Professor Mark Taylor¹⁴ of Columbia University, proposes several changes he believes that the university must make in order to adapt to this current society. His third change involves improved articulation. He explains, “All institutions do not need to do all things and technology makes it possible for schools to form partnerships to share students and faculty.” This articulation

¹⁴ Taylor is the Chair of the Department of Religion and is a prominent post-modernist who has authored several books and regularly contributes journalistic work to *The New York Times* and other major newspapers.

is not formal articulation; it is informal. It is communication between schools and teachers, working together to meet the needs of their students.

I do understand that the very nature of the collaboration behind articulation makes this difficult, and the intricacies of higher education itself complicate it even further. As Patrick Sullivan states, "...Every college has its own unique history, its own political and social realities, and its own learning culture. It will be a challenge, given this reality, to find common ground" (16). Kolodny also goes into this in her book, discussing its complexity:

This familiar pattern of hierarchical reporting lines combined with the fact of semi-autonomous units, each with its own complex infrastructure, places an impossible decision-making burden on deans, provosts, and presidents. And it all but paralyzes the evolution of campus-wide organic institutional perspectives. Moreover, in the current budgetary crises affecting most public universities, this pattern has contributed substantially to adversarial relationships between staff, faculty and central administration. (195)

This complexity of the current hierarchy—which works well in some instances—makes articulation difficult. Most of the time, it is easier to stay in one's own department and handle the overwhelming load there than tackle yet another project. In this age of budget cuts, with administrators juggling multiple positions, articulation seems like another burden.

However, articulation is not something that can be relegated to political documents that are argued over and signed, placing guidelines that remain through the years. For it to be successful, articulation must have an informal component that is continually changing and growing, full of life and movement. This informal articulation must be run by those who are the most affected by it, and it *cannot* be left up to one small

group of administrators or even politicians. To do so threatens the integrity of how we teach. Sullivan goes into further detail on this, stating his concerns that

few of the people involved in making these decisions and shaping our public policy about education are teachers, and few have more than a passing acquaintance with the college classroom. If we do not conduct this discussion ourselves, and speak with a strong voice about the issues we care about most, someone else will do it for us. (18)

If we leave articulation up to governmental legislation enacted by those who do not understand the realities of the classroom, we will be compromising our classrooms. Only those “in the trenches” can truly understand the reform needed...and the fact that reform in and of itself is not sufficient. As Myers states,

...our problems will not be solved just by new methods or new theories, or new knowledge. We should begin by realizing that our interests are not the same as those of the institutions that employ us, and that the improvement of our work will involve social changes. No amount of merely educational reform will end the alienation... (455)

If we leave articulation up to stagnant documents created by politicians and administrators who are not in the classroom, we will not see the changes we need. It is precisely the challenges that confront us that prove my theory that articulation must begin in the composition department by *teachers* and between institutions in the same community.

Why composition? First, the composition program is integral to many institutions. Over the years, it has evolved into something much more than simply writing instruction. Many institutions require all students to take at least one composition course, making these classes one of the few opportunities to reach the majority of the students. These classes are also where we begin to teach beginning freshmen the skills they need to succeed in the college classroom. As Mike Rose points out, there are very specific

qualifications that a student needs to succeed at in the classroom. He argues that students need “multiple opportunities to discuss and write about what they’re learning: to test their ideas and reveal their assumptions, talk through the places where new knowledge clashes with ingrained beliefs” (121). Where would students begin this process other than the composition classroom? It is there that we can begin to teach students to make connections between their classes and the “real world,” teaching them the skills that the business world wants to see in our new graduates. It is through the composition classroom that we can create the discourse that Rose believes is vital in our society—“public talk that links education to a more thoughtful, open society...a discourse that inspires young people to think gracefully and moves young adults to become teachers and foster such development” (29).

By beginning with composition programs, we are starting at a logical position. To be successful, articulation must begin internally and work outwardly. One must first begin mastering horizontal communication before tackling vertical communication. Thus, one must begin in each composition program by fostering horizontal communication between instructors and administrators. The administrators of each composition program should follow Kolodny’s description of “a strong risk-taking administrator [who] distribute[s] problem-solving horizontally by developing an inclusive team approach” (195). Implementing the team approach helps distribute the work load so that administrators are not overwhelmed, and it helps interdepartmental articulation. This does require some risk on the administrator’s part, but, as CSU-Pueblo’s First Year Composition program proves, it can be done successfully. Not only does this team approach bring the benefits of more ideas and trouble-shooting, it also adds more

individuals to help keep the curriculum consistent throughout the program. It also helps make assessment more feasible. Once a program understands how to make horizontal communication successful, it can then begin to work towards vertical communication throughout its institution and to other institutions in the community.

Modeled within the composition program, this team approach can then be implemented in other areas of the institution. CSU-Pueblo is currently beginning this by creating a diverse team comprised of faculty and staff, including maintenance and cafeteria workers, to help facilitate communication throughout all departments and best meet the needs of the students (Frew). Kolodny advocates for this in her book, believing that “only inclusive problem-solving teams brought together to utilize all relevant talents on a campus can adequately grasp the complexity of the modern research university” (197). Taylor also reiterates this in his editorial: “Responsible teaching and scholarship must become cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural... There can be no adequate understanding of the most important issues we face when disciplines are cloistered from one another and operate on their own premises.”

This model can also be used to begin working toward informal articulation between institutions in the same community. If each program is working toward successful horizontal communication, the articulation effort between the programs will flow more smoothly. The programs must learn to work together toward a common goal of educating and empowering their students. We must understand that the current system is swiftly becoming archaic in the rapid evolution of higher education, and that the new demographics of our students and our changing technological society requires us to re-

evaluate our procedures and common way of handling things. Our students have changed; our society has changed. Thus, we must learn to change as well.

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