

THESIS

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE “NEW” MAJORITY OF NON-TENURABLE FACULTY FOR  
FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION CURRICULA AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

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## ABSTRACT

### THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE “NEW” MAJORITY OF NON-TENURABLE FACULTY FOR FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION CURRICULA AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Of late, much discussion has arisen around university employers' treatment of the "new" majority of contingent faculty. However, little is being said regarding two important points: first, that in the field of rhetoric and composition and in first-year writing classrooms, especially, this majority of contingent faculty is not at all new. Secondly, that some attention should be paid to what effects this writ-large university labor shift may be having on the pedagogical and curricular decisions within composition programs, particularly as they pertain to faculty's academic freedoms and the teaching of critical thinking skills. As such, this thesis sought to attend to both of the above issues by documenting the history of rhetoric and composition's labor force, aligning that history to activism and critical pedagogies and, through a local example, discussing the implications of the "new" majority of untenurable faculty on the pedagogies and curricula utilized in first-year composition. My findings indicate, as suspected, that the majority of contingent faculty is not a new phenomenon to the field of composition. Nevertheless, this contingent majority does impact the ways in which critical thinking and pedagogies may be used within the first-year composition classroom. Results seem to show that such a shift in university faculty profiles will indeed affect professors' abilities to wield traditionally understood ideas of academic freedom but that, drawing on Foucault's notions of power and his term "specific intellectual," individuals within composition departments, and perhaps university-wide, are able, through conscious action to uphold the democratic ideals of a postsecondary education: to create civic-minded, critical thinkers.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### *Beginning Life as an Educator*

As a child, I never considered being a teacher. I was going to be a doctor, a neurosurgeon or a forensic pathologist until I failed college Chemistry. But, my back-up to healing was creative writing -- poetry, of all things.

“What are you going to do with that?” my Dad asked me. English Literature major that he was, he offered no encouragement.

Shortly thereafter, teaching became my back-up to writing.

I had some knowledge of what that might mean. My mom is a high school math teacher: overworked, underpaid and vastly underappreciated. She has been a teacher since 1974 and in that time she has taught every grade K-13 but 3<sup>rd</sup>. She has a graduate degree and a lifetime certification from the state of CA in K-12. She has been nominated for Teacher-of-the-Year more than eight times and she is phenomenal at her job, but her paycheck does not reflect this, even now.

I never wanted to be a teacher because I did not want to be undervalued or underpaid the way my mother has been. Nonetheless, teaching landed in my lap when I sat on a lounge chair on the beach at the age of 21 and my cell phone rang, the voice on the other line offering me a job for which I had not applied. I started teaching at a 6-12 rural school three weeks later.

I have spent eleven years working in the public school system. I have been probationary, tenured, contingent, contractual, “at-will” and now am “permanent,” which actually means that I have a renewable three-year contract for as long as I want it or as long as I do not do anything egregious to lose it. I know first-hand that teaching is brutally hard and that teaching English

may be the most difficult of all, perhaps especially in the public schools given that state tests tend to be at least 50% focused on English as a subject matter. For instance, the PARCC test, which has been adopted by at least 20 states to assess the Common Core State Standards, requires a Math and an ELA/Literacy test. This appears as if it were a 50/50 split until one looks at the tests and realizes that English comprises both reading comprehension and writing assessment and that the math assessment, particularly in upper grades (6-12), also requires a great deal of reading ([www.parcconline.org/samples](http://www.parcconline.org/samples)). In addition, in secondary schools, it is the English classes that are most often supplanted by homecoming votes, survey taking, and even fire drills, simply because “everyone has an English class.” Such conditions do not raise the value of English teaching or reinforce the status of its practitioners. Working sixty hour weeks teaching, planning, grading and preparing students for standardized tests is routine for today's teachers. Additionally, the new educational reality is that standardized tests determine teachers' worth as professionals, the amount of money their schools earn from the state and Federal governments and teachers' "merit pay."

Despite all of that, teaching has become a labor of love for me. More specifically, and perhaps more absurdly, I love to teach writing which may well be the most laborious of the teaching labors.

English is a central part of every American's educational experience. Consider the new PARCC test and the Common Core standards, which are supposed to be rhetorically-based. Consider college entrance exams, where much of the testing involves composition or reading, not including the directions. Consider that nearly every student that attends a public university in Colorado is required to take a composition course and that what is really taught in those classes is communication and critical thinking: the cornerstones for academic and life success.

Then, look at the average salaries for a teacher. The average starting teacher's salary, according to the National Education Association (NEA) is \$34,935. Beginning non-tenure-track faculty who hold a Master's degree in the English department at my home institution make somewhat less than this, or the bare minimum that the university can pay an instructor, a reality that is not true in other departments. Likewise, English graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are paid the same or less than TAs in some other departments and yet may do substantially more work as a result of serving as instructors of record for two sections of first-year composition, with all the attendant grading and responding to student writing that is implied by these courses, along with regular course preparation and management.

I question the juxtaposition, the overt contradiction, between the established importance of writing and its status and compensation. I question what our educational system is asking of our educators and our students.

I am not alone in asking these questions, for it is neither coincidental nor accidental that financial and labor critiques are originating in the Liberal Arts majors and with Liberal Arts faculties. This space, where the majority of the core curricula is housed, is intended to create an informed citizenry, one that would refuse to succumb to a body politic, one that would instead, insist on informing it. As a result, this space also fosters social activism which is capable of talking back to the very systems it inculcates.

### *The Difficulty of Going from "Educator" to GTA*

I started this project with a generalized, myopic view of a situation. It stemmed from being a GTA and watching the experiences of my peers and me as we navigated the chaos that is graduate school, teaching, and life, simultaneously. Our shift in the composition program from the first-year composition topic, Internet and Social Media to the Ethics of Higher Education

was, from my social epistemic point of view, imperative to pushing students out of their comfort zones and making them aware of the ethical quandaries facing the university, a system of which they are a complicit part. At a practical level, my secondary teacher side balked at the idea of marginalized instructors with insufficient theoretical grounding in composition teaching such a complex and emotion-laden course: how would they handle the debates such topics would incite? How would they do the course justice without any background in education, or in composition theory, or (in the case of many GTAs) with life?

Independent of topic, would GTAs be able to balance their own course loads with the large amounts of work that teaching a course, especially when new to the content and to the profession, requires? Could they be students and teachers and still give the undergraduate students the time and effort and thoughtfulness that they deserve? Could they possibly facilitate students' understanding of any complex topic within the rhetorical situation? Should GTAs even be asked to do such things when they have zero job security? And what about the other college teachers who have little job security, the non tenure-track faculty? With an academic freedom that is barely tenable, would they have the tools to navigate (or avoid) the difficult discussions that could arise in an intimate classroom focused on hotly contested topics?

My questions and concerns were endless and they often contradicted one another. My beliefs and experiences as an educator, graduate teaching assistant (GTA), and activist did not always align, and more often than not, were in direct opposition to one another. And when I began to understand the larger picture, in which GTAs are simply one facet of a non-tenurable faculty workforce, I realized that I had no idea how to reconcile my concerns with my convictions. So, I did what many curious graduate students do, I chose this as my thesis topic.

*Pedagogy: How Does One Teach Critical Thinking?*

“This seems out of date. I mean, no one labors like this anymore,” one of my students at the military academy prep school, where I currently work, says.

My mouth drops open. But, before I can say anything, another student pipes up, “You think people don’t work anymore?”

“Well, not here, in the U.S.,” the student says. “We outsource everything now.”

“What about the field workers, the factory workers? They’re laborers. Haven’t you seen *A Day Without Mexicans?*”

The class giggles as he says this but he glowers at them and they shut up instantly, an ingrained response when silently reprimanded by one’s superior, even when he’s a peer.

“Seriously,” he continues, “this country’s economy is based on illegal [sic] workers. Without them, our lives would fall apart.”

“It’s true,” another Preppie chimes in, “I used to work in a factory before I enlisted; it was awful: crap conditions, ghostr hours, no pay and even less respect. Someone has to do all this stuff, otherwise, how long would it be before we didn’t have gas in the pumps or food at the grocery stores?”

Another student raises his hand and says, “I have zero experience with any of this. I was raised in Southern Missouri in a pretty white, well-off area. I’m not saying I don’t get it; I’m just saying I can’t empathize because it hasn’t been part of my worldview at all. These readings didn’t speak to me like they obviously did for you. Listening to you all helps me understand their purpose.”

I nearly cry I am so thrilled by this conversation. The promise of the institution where I am currently employed is that we are developing Leaders of Character; it is a tall order, one that is literally plastered on every sign, and it is subject to routine disappointment. Yet here my

Preppies are living up to that expectation<sup>1</sup>. I am proud and equally, relieved. This class, bright academically but seemingly impossible to engage, is actually having a heated discussion around the assigned readings, and I have not had to ask a single question or make a single comment. They are challenging one another's perspectives in ways I had hoped for but had not seen at all this quarter. Finally, they are demonstrating that they have critical thinking skills.

On the surface, the concept of critical thinking may seem straightforward<sup>2</sup>. However, the definition of the term varies by discipline and decade and thus, trying to teach it becomes daunting in any setting, let alone when one faces curricular, pedagogical, cultural or academic challenges. Developing critical thinking skills is a common course objective on first-year composition syllabi. Critical thinkers question their belief systems, confront the status quo, and play Devil's Advocate to those mainstream values that so often are left not only unopposed, but unseen. Consequently, critical thinkers are individuals that are highly-sought across job markets.

Regardless, it is specifically within the context of the writing classroom that I ground this project: the necessary role first-year composition plays in the development of critical thinkers. This is one of the reasons I came back to the classroom; because to me the development of critical thinkers is an imperative of any educational system and especially, of the United States' educational system.

And as a writing teacher, I see no more valuable or logical place for the development of such skills than a writing classroom, where students must read and discuss and communicate the ideas and ideals that encapsulate an increasingly diverse world.

First-year composition (FYC) is one of the few required courses at most post-secondary institutions, and thus, houses the greatest promise for furthering the development of critical

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<sup>1</sup> I am an Instructor of English at the United States Air Force Academy Preparatory School

<sup>2</sup> For an extant literature review on the subject of critical thinking see Ken Petress' *Critical Thinking: An Extended Definition* (2004).

thinkers. In college, whether a community college, a four year college, a technical college or a university, students have begun to embark upon their lives as untethered young adults, often surrounded by unfamiliar peoples and places. FYC is one of the first spaces students inhabit where they are simultaneously new and known. The classes are usually the smallest they will have, especially at a larger university, and may be the only course students take where the instructor knows their names. Likewise, FYC often seeks to teach the rhetorical situation: a concept that situates multivariate perspectives in the reality of an inherently varied society. For many students, this is their first (sometimes only) opportunity to explore values, ideas and ideals that they have not encountered before, or, not encountered without a parent, close friend, guardian or coach peering over their shoulders. It is a unique time in a person's life and a unique space as well, which together create an inherently unique situation, ripe with academic possibilities.

It has been eleven years since I owned the title of first-year teacher. Since that year, I have had the pleasure of being a middle school and high school English and Reading teacher, a Literacy Coach, a Professional Development and Literacy Coordinator, a grant liaison, a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) teaching first year composition (FYC), and an Instructor of English at a postsecondary institution. Yet, every time I teach a course I strive to find the moment, the topic, the reading, the comment that will grab students' attentions and incite thoughtful conversation; I endeavor to intentionally construct the situation that I stumbled upon above: students thinking critically and challenging perceptions.

I attempt. And then, I fail. And I wonder: did I not ask the right questions? Are the readings unrelateable? Too challenging? Too easy? Is it me? Is it them? Sometimes, I get answers to these questions via students' off-hand comments, written feedback on informal

metacognitive activities or end-of-semester (or quarter) formal evaluations. And these last ones, they can hurt. Yet I am lucky; I have never had an evaluation returned to me with a mean comment about my clothing or my hair, an unconcealed dig at my intelligence, a snarky remark about my personality, or a vulgar picture drawn in the box where the comments are supposed to go. It has not happened to me, yet. But, I know that it might happen in the future if I continue to push students out of their comfort zones, if I continue to challenge their carefully constructed realities. I know that one day I may read an evaluation only to find that it is not my pedagogy or my curriculum or my course that is being evaluated, but me. Yet honestly, I hope the negative comments, if they do appear, stay in the superficial because if they shift slightly into the realm of the professional, then I believe I might be at risk, particularly if I still find myself in a renewable or untenured appointment.

When students are challenged intellectually, instructors run the very real risk of also challenging them ideologically. And such ideological threats, whether real or perceived, may be enough to cause a backlash in the form of negative course evaluations and complaints to the Composition Director, the Department Chair or the Dean. It is this potential for backlash that contingent faculty may have cause to fear. For when one's job hangs on the promise of positive student evaluations, supportive peer observations and furthering one's professional development in the area of teaching, the curricula one teaches, matters. The threat that contingent faculty may feel, if and when they deliver a controversial curriculum, means many may choose not to teach that curriculum, may choose to pedagogically sterilize it, or, if not given (or unable to enact) the choice, may choose to leave a particular postsecondary setting or the field of teaching altogether. Such possibilities pose a potential hazard to the civic-minded education that the founders of the United States felt were imperative for the sustenance of a democratic nation:

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves, and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power. (Thomas Jefferson to W. Jarvis, 1820)

In 1776, John Adams claimed, in his *Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law* that, “The jaws of power are always open to devour, and her arm is always stretched out, if possible, to destroy the freedom of thinking, speaking, and writing.” Given that the first-year composition classroom is both a contact zone for fostering intellect, and for upending those who would see their own power usurp that of the constituency, it is an ideal space for resisting Adams' "jaws of power."

In a society where “...public spheres that promote dialogue, debate and arguments with supporting evidence, [have succumbed to] entertainment spheres that [merely] infantilize almost everything they touch,” the democratic ideals of Jefferson and Adams as they were intended “have morphed into a public service that is nothing more than idealism” (Giroux 10). It is only through intentional civic-minded education that we may hope to retain or regain the public values and social relationships that can provide the culture required for a substantive democracy to thrive.

What better place to discuss ideas than in a classroom focused on the rhetorical situation; on the ability to think critically; read closely and carefully; and communicate effectively, regardless of audience and context? FYC lends itself to educating critical thinkers. Yet it may be that nothing threatens the sanctity of a classroom, particularly a classroom as important to establishing critical thinkers as FYC may be, than an overburdened, unsupported and oftentimes disrespected workforce. Such a workforce may choose to risk job safety to enact a critical pedagogy in order to effectively create critical thinkers. Conversely, such a tenuously positioned

workforce may instead intentionally sterilize or choose a sterilized FYC curricula in order to maintain job safety, thus failing to adequately educate students in ways that are consistent with the critical thinking goals of FYC in public, higher education settings. Both are becoming increasingly likely in first-year composition classrooms at postsecondary institutions across the United States. As such, this project seeks to answer these questions:

- 1) What are the implications of highly political topics for the non-tenurable faculty majority who are largely responsible for teaching FYC, especially given threats to academic freedom that widespread teaching off the tenure track may reflect?
- 2) How might FYC curricula reflect or be driven by the uncertain state of the non-tenurable faculty majority?
- 3) In what ways might a contingent labor force impact first-year composition pedagogy?

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### *Pedagogy: Radical, Critical and/or Activist*

In Colorado we have a saying, “If you do not like the weather, wait five minutes and it will change.” Colorado is notorious for averaging 300 days of sun a year but also for its capricious weather patterns. Here, it is never unlikely that on a balmy May day six inches of snow will drop-in unannounced and then melt again by the afternoon. The same could be said of education in the United States, for the trends shift as if on a pendulum, back and forth, every 20-30 years. Thus, what is ‘trendy’ now, is not new, but a reinvention of that which was popular several decades past so the current generations can re-examine, re-define and reuse it. It is like the recycle slogan coined in a contest I myself entered during elementary school: Reduce, reuse, recycle. Once the number of individuals who remember the trend is reduced, reuse the basic contents, and then, when it is again found wanting for myriad reasons, both logical and not, it will be recycled for 20-30 years hence. Thus, when I use a term like radical pedagogy, it is evident to me that such terms have a long and perhaps checkered history and that I would be remiss not to articulate both how I am using it here, and my understanding of its past.

Roger Simon defines pedagogy as the proposal of “a political vision for ourselves, our children and our communities” (371). Thus, radical pedagogy (a.k.a. critical pedagogy, activist pedagogy, engaged pedagogy, liberatory pedagogy, empowering pedagogy, or the pedagogy of possibility) strives to introduce students to and engage them in the analysis of the world in which they live with its inequities, hidden power structures and perpetuating systems. Radical pedagogy focuses classrooms on these systems to teach students the tools they will need to become critical, civic-minded thinkers, individuals who are not passive bystanders (consumers) but actively

engaged, interested and critical citizens, citizens who will enact the principles on which the United States democracy was founded: equality, liberty and justice for all (George 92). In this way, radical pedagogy distinguishes itself from critical studies and feminist pedagogy, because it is dedicated to the education of citizens for the specific aim of citizenship. I do not mean citizenship as a rubber-stamped certification held up as a reason to build tangible fences across intangible borders. I mean citizenship as the act of informing oneself of and actively engaging oneself in the society where one lives.

Likewise, pedagogy is not defined by the curricula and content of a course; the most politically charged material can be rendered sterile by an instructor, much as the most benign can be made controversial. Pedagogy, like citizenship, is never simply the ‘what’, but rather, the much more complicated ‘how.’ Pedagogy is never neutral.

Consequently, classroom pedagogy could be viewed as socially epistemic. One interpretation of Karl Marx’s notion of ideology might well be that of a classic, social epistemic, where the sets of beliefs are crafted upon a society’s social and material realities, which render them specious. However, unlike Marx, the likes of John Dewey (1938), Henry Giroux (1983; 1987, 1988; 1990), Ira Shor (1987; 1996), Peter McClaren (1989) and Victor Villanueva (1993) among others, continue to believe that schools and classrooms can function as Mary Louise Pratt’s (1991) “contact zones” for the reinvention of a status quo, rather than the spaces doomed to perpetuate it. From this perspective, a classroom might become a zone where the systems that have culturally, contextually and communally defined what passes for knowledge or for truth can be examined from multiple perspectives, challenged, dissected and discussed.

It is within a classroom setting where Dewey’s ideals are most apparent. Likewise, a writing classroom is especially apropos for playing out his philosophical convictions, for where

else is it so obvious that language communicates as it confounds and creates? That is, a writing classroom insists that students engage in Freire's *conscientizacao*, critical consciousness, which requires them to be doing much more in the way of thinking than simply listening to lectures and regurgitating information rotely (58). Writing classrooms require that students view language as a way to communicate to an audience but also as a tangible and malleable thing that serves to recreate, question, and confuse even as it communicates (Dewey). As Foucault sees it, "power and knowledge imply, implicate and presuppose one another" (Foss et. al. 352) and thus, opposing such a multi-directional web must be done via what Foucault calls the "specific intellectual." Where the universal intellectual (Foucault's opposite of the specific intellectual) is overt and too broadly and thinly spread to be strong, the "specific intellectual" is focused and acute, like the sun through a magnifying glass. Likewise, the "ideals and norms to which specific intellectuals appeal in their work [must] always [be] internal to the practices they are critiquing" (Foss et. al. 356).

This is why it is so important for contentious issues to remain front and center in a classroom that serves as both a space for the systemization of hegemonies and for raising awareness of them. One of the dangers of such classrooms, according to Victor Villanueva, is that "multiculturalism alone can be deceptive, in that it suggests a friendly pluralism that does not exist outside the classroom" (Cross Talk 623). In light of this, the writing classroom might be said to best function as a contact zone among diversely human experiences, power dynamics, and linguistic faux pas, a space where students can truly learn to think critically on a meta-level, parse out nuanced differences between turns of phrase, socially constructed systems, and the power structures that define and direct. To accomplish these "radical" goals, it must be more revolutionary than all of that. Here Villanueva cites Wilkie when he points out that, "...for Freire,

as for Gramsci, as for Marx, a 'revolutionary act [is] an act of criticism with an eye to the practical'" (Cross Talk 629). At the same time, it must also be admitted that although instructors are well-intentioned, pedagogies and curricula no matter how "radical" or "critical" are always somehow connected to the reinforcement of universal hegemonic structures (630). What this means for Villanueva is that even effective instructors are unlikely "to move those who [are] not already predisposed to [this] worldview" (631). His words echo Freire's when he asserts that "we must try to convince the students and on the other hand we must respect them, not impose ideas on them" (Shore and Freire 46). Undertaking such work is extremely difficult and fraught with potentially dangerous hurdles.

It is not the purpose of a writing classroom to create revolutionaries. Foucault claims that such a reality would simply serve to reform a system, that is, replace one system with another, rather than transforming the way the current system is viewed (Foss 354). Instead, the writing classroom may serve to illuminate power structures that exist to students so that they can make up their own minds about how best to specifically oppose or confirm. Villanueva contends that hegemonies and counter-hegemonies need space to be evaluated and students a forum for learning the skills necessary to do this type of evaluation such that myths are not perpetuated further (Cross Talk 631).

Similarly, Foucault posits that such systems are typically not backroom plots intentionally devised to oppress or exclude. Rather, they generally represent discursivity, cultural codes, characteristic networks, and styles of thought that oversee the grounds for organization which mold language, perception, values and cultural practices within a given context (Foss et al. 348). Such power creates and defines norms and cultural schema through hidden power systems (Foss 356), which need to be made evident to would-be critical thinkers. Foucault does

not believe that individuals must be demarcated by their material and social conditions nor that they need be confined to spurious categories. For Dennis Lynch and Stephen Jukuri this further implies that the writing classroom might be in a particularly relevant position from which to take on the task of exposing students to such hidden systems and the ways in which individuals are often unaware of the societal and cultural norms that they unwittingly perpetuate (271). Lynch and Jukuri posit that in the field of composition, conservatives fear domination and radicals fear exploitation and that through a "more complex understanding of Foucaultian power, [the field of rhet/comp] will be able to move beyond [these] fears" (272). Such a move would "allow teachers and students to negotiate their actions and change their goals in relation to one another" thereby creating a space where critical thinking may occur (272). As Audre Lorde said, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (111). Essentially, re-envisioning hegemonies in an intentional and communicative (that is, pedagogical) way can create critical thinkers. Yet there are always very strong limitations to the purposes to which such critical thinking might be practically or even aspirationally employed.

Dewey purports that students need to recognize that how they communicate is just as important as what they are communicating; because the deliberate use of rhetoric lends itself to creating and confounding as much as it does to simply conveying. Thus, he supports the notion that critical thinking should be fostered in classrooms. However, just as the power dynamics of society are often played out and reinforced within educational settings, so too are the power dynamics of a classroom problematic. The result is that even a well-intentioned teacher, carefully utilizing radical pedagogy to foster critical thinking, may inadvertently undermine his/her

objectives because s/he holds the power in the classroom. Patricia Bizzell exemplifies this in "Marxist Ideas" when she explains:

One of my students recently pointed out that if he questioned a text the way I wanted him to do, he would be giving up his intellectual independence to me, and after all, his father was paying good money for him to attend this fancy liberal arts college so he could learn to think for himself." (66)

Critical theory aims at emancipation and enlightenment by making students aware of their environments' hidden coercions which ideally, would enable them to determine where their interests (and loyalties) lie (Foss et. al. 354). Subscribing to Freire's ideal that teachers, as humans, should not themselves become "oppressors [who] dehumanize others and violate their rights" in order to push their own political agenda means (as Foucault asserts) that there is no underlying truth that waits to be imposed upon the world. Instead, the truth is founded on relations within discourse communities (Freire 56). As one of my participants in this study, Writing Program Administrator (WPA) 1, said when interviewed, "the purpose of a Women's Studies class is not to create 25 feminists" but instead to expose students to theories, perspectives and privileges they have never heard of and then allow them to make up their own minds about what to do with the systems that put them in place." A teacher's or a curriculum's role in disrupting students' unexamined beliefs does not extend to replacing it with another set of beliefs or way of thinking.

To do the kind of teaching that opens up new possibilities for seeing events, people and issues is a central objective of teaching critique, which can (but does not have to nor will it always) lead to resistance. Foucault suggests that power is relegated to multidirectional nodes, which are hardly discernable and rarely named. He argues that for resistance to be possible, it too must act in the same, dispersed, grassroots, silent way. Thus, major tools of resistance may be utilized to subvert only when they specifically attack that which already exists and is ordered

(Foss et. al. 356). Critical pedagogy, as a systematic form of instruction that is focused on critical thinking and critique, can provide the scaffolding for resistance, but it does not necessarily lead to any set of beliefs or any particular action of resistance, nor should it.

*The History of Activism in the Field of Rhetoric and Composition*

As the previous section suggests, there is nothing ‘radical’ about the concept of radical pedagogy. The belief that education’s purpose, especially in the secondary and postsecondary realms, is to create a class of civic-minded, critical thinkers has been apparent since the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Today it is apparent in the mission statements of many post-secondary institutions (Haefner 517). As George Kennedy has documented in his research, in ancient Athens, there were no lawyers, no individuals who specialized in the law or its proceedings. Adult male citizens were expected to actively participate in the court system. Likewise, it was assumed that ordinary citizens had enough education to competently prosecute or defend their own cases, or those of relatives (*Classical Rhetoric* 20-21). It was not until 467 BCE that the first case of ‘formal training’ in the ways of speech and argument preparation were recorded: a Syracusan was said to be teaching basic persuasion techniques for a nominal fee (*New History of Classical Rhetoric* 12-13) and these lessons, which began as oral discussions, turned into the first classically rhetorical handbooks in fifth century Greece (*Classical Rhetoric* 23).

Education and writing thus have a long history and the intertwining of ‘radical’ pedagogy with writing is well-documented, if initially unintentional. As the view that writing is property arose, and copyright laws became more and more tied to individuality and originality, so too did writing’s conflicts with authority. Susan Stewart summarizes the rise of the writer as separate from his/her work, the emergence of originality as imaginative, and writing and publishing as rational business in her book, *Crimes of Writing*. She credits Hobbes with effectively separating

originality from the individual when he defined an author as a “site of attribution,” a cog in an imaginary “system of authorship” (9). Yet, Stewart points out that if looked at differently, this notion of author and individual is more carefully viewed as the separation between writing and authority, and thus, originality converges with “the decline of the absolutist state...the advent of mechanical modes of literary production and the rise of social democracies” (9). That is, the increased separation between writing and authority can be equated with a view of ‘truth’ making that became more individual and allowed for the rise of classic epistemology. During this time period, the search for truth allowed the bourgeoisie to adopt the ideal that individual, original thought (as evidenced via writing) could combat authority (Goldman). In this way, the rise of the written form became involved in the breaking down of feudalist and religious dogma.

Prior to this enlightenment, ownership was common, in the sense of the word that belies a collective claim. Individuals who gave speeches were those who were deemed ‘experts’ despite the fact that many of them were simply saying what others had said before or, what others had written for them to convey. The new view allowed that an individual’s recorded thoughts constituted labor and was therefore, that individual’s personal property. The ownership of thought, and the further belief that those thoughts must, because they were recorded, somehow be original, effectively supplanted the collaborative nature of writing and rhetoric, and dissolved the traditional view of ownership as common. This focus on the individual continues to be evident in our present ways of envisioning, teaching, and policing writing. It contributes to our sense that the individual student as a critical thinker and writer is capable of forms of agentive behavior.

However, the dissolution of writing/composing as collaborative necessarily changed the relationship between composition/rhetoric courses and the ways that student work was evaluated.

Where students once were evaluated in groups and orally, now they were evaluated as individuals, adding considerably to the writing teacher's workload (Connors *Overwork* 109). Likewise, as students were encouraged to practice self-expression, the contact between teacher and student became more individualized and resembled the current notions of composing and evaluating writing (Connors *Overwork* 110). The increased time that teachers had to spend evaluating student work and conferencing with students about that work, was tantamount to the rise of composition as a 'laborious' field (Connors *Overwork* 108). It was here that the exploitation of writing instructors may have begun and the earliest glimpses of writing as a 'service' course were seen. This historical shift from writing as collaborative to writing as individually created and owned permanently changed composition pedagogy. As a result, composition teachers were faced with having to "read the writing of more students than was possible," a reality that effectively began to "drive away any possibility that rhetoric as a field could attract the talented scholars who might have been able to forge it into a modern scholarly discipline despite its lack of Teutonic breeding" (Connors *Overwork* 113). These alterations, necessarily, if inadvertently, aligned the field with activism.

Susan McLeod outlines the very long history of composition as a contact zone in "A History of Writing Program Administration," the third of her books on the topic. In one chapter she articulates that The Morrill Act of 1862 established public land grant universities, like Colorado State University, which "emphasized applied arts such as engineering, agriculture, and home economics" (26). These institutions were specifically aimed at individuals who had not been able to afford a college education, defined by the Act as "the industrial classes." The Act's purpose was to provide educational access to a larger segment of the American population,

specifically, farmers, ranchers and merchants. These groups were part of the countries' expanding citizenry and as such, needed an education in order to be critical and informed voters.

Robert Connors' notes on *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*, claim that the Morrill Act brought a new population of students to American higher education. He says, "From the province of a small group of elite students, college education became, during this time, much more available to the masses. The colleges suddenly found themselves with students who needed to be taught to write, who needed to be taught correctness in writing, who needed to know forms, and who could be run through the system in great numbers. [Rhetoric and Composition] evolved to meet these needs [after the Civil War]" (9). What we now call first-year composition was launched into universal necessity almost instantly and thus became a required course. In turn, already over-burdened writing instructors found themselves inundated with more students, more classes and many more essays to evaluate.

As English departments became the norm in universities nationwide, they, unsurprisingly, began to compete for resources. Thus, when the National Education Association recommended, in 1888, that high schools teach both Literature and Composition in a single class, the college entrance exams rushed to emulate this, which catapulted English Departments to follow suit, jamming Literature and writing into one discourse as a way of ensuring their prosperity and necessity in higher educational institutions (Parker 350). Writing teachers were consequently asked to additionally incorporate both their writing curricula and literature into one course, with the same results as previously. As McLeod emphasizes, it was the focus on power and money that incited English departments to vie for control of the only universally required course. Such courses garnered large enrollments, making English one of the biggest (and often,

most powerful) departments in the university (27) while rendering its teaching staff the most burdened.

Harvard's then President Eliot was determined that English become the new version of the classics by preparing students in the courses to be productive and civic-minded members of a democratic society. He was hired by Adams Sherman Hill to be Boylston Professor of Rhetoric in 1876 (McLeod 29-30). It was Hill who implemented the first composition placement examination, an act that incited a chain reaction in which all secondary schools adapted their curricula to support Harvard's new model (Brereton 9). Likewise, these new placement tests added yet another item on the To-Do lists of composition faculty.

In 1891, Harvard's Board of Overseers appointed professionals to determine the effectiveness of the secondary schools in preparing workers for writing tasks. The committee concluded that the preparatory schools were failing to adequately educate students and indicated that these schools needed to do a better job, rather than relegate the task to universities and colleges. These Harvard Reports of 1895 and 1897 were widely publicized, generating a series of "Why Johnny Can't Write" newspaper and magazine articles. This media perpetuated the vision of composition as being synonymous with spelling and grammar usage errors, and handwriting. And this viewpoint that learning to write equals learning matters of superficial correctness (the current traditional model) continues to haunt first year composition and reinforces its reputation as a service course (Berlin 61). According to Robert Connors, "the change that [had] obtained between 1840 and 1890 [was that] the Boylston Chair descended—even in the mind of the Harvard president—to the status of an academic sweatshop, which wears its people out like ball bearings, which then have to be replaced" (111).

In 1900, Harvard became the first institution to offer a single writing course, causing writing instruction to cease across the curriculum and by 1901 most colleges and universities had a freshman composition class, following Harvard's lead (Russell). Since this institutionalization, writing has mostly remained confined to one or two lower level courses (Wozniak) thus solidifying its status as a "service" course and its instructors as "laborers."

*Rhet/Comp and the 'New' Majority of Untenable Faculty*

As McLeod and Connors have clearly documented, there is nothing new about a marginalized majority in the field of rhetoric and composition. As a result of this debasement, one of the landmark events addressing writing's labor and those who conduct it was The Wyoming Resolution of 1986.

At the time of the Resolution, "English departments [were] the departments most likely to employ part-time faculty members, and they almost always hire[d] them to teach writing" (Robertson 275). Indeed, in 1986, at the Wyoming Conference on English, the Wyoming Resolution was collaboratively crafted by a cross-ranks group of tenure-track faculty, contingent faculty and graduate students. The Resolution's main purpose was to improve composition teachers' working conditions, pay and benefits and it called upon the Conference of College Composition and Communication (CCCC), to create professional standards for the field of rhetoric and composition and to enact censure in upholding these standards (McDonald and Schell 360). Despite only the first goal being met, in the CCCC's 1989 publication of a "Statement of Principles and Standards for Post-Secondary Teaching of Writing," the Resolution nonetheless marked the moment at which the field of rhetoric and composition officially took note of the problematic labor issues inherent to the field's writing classrooms.

However, that is not to say that the issue of contingent labor in rhetoric and composition, and in fact, in English departments first became evident in the late 1980s. In reality, the recognition that contingent labor was being over-utilized in English departments began in the early twentieth century with the use of lay readers. The use of such contingent laborers denigrated and reinforced the teaching of English (and especially of writing) as something that was a service to other departments. Likewise, it served to reinforce the belief that teaching writing is less difficult and so, less professional, than the work of other departments.

As early as 1912 the Modern Language Association (MLA) reported the “Cost and Labor of English Teaching” stating that “English is a fundamental and necessary subject in all schools” but that it is “a physical impossibility...for any composition teacher to bring his [sic] work to a proper standard of efficiency” (3). Essentially, the report said what we know to be true today, that teaching writing well requires small class sizes (15 or fewer) and a low course load in order to allow the teacher adequate preparation, grading and conferencing time. This is a reality that is almost always violated in postsecondary institutions today, especially when referring to contingent faculty.

The MLA report, in addition to other published research around the mid-twentieth century (Dusel, 1955; Conant, 1959; Jewett, 1957; Wykoff, 1958; Yale University, 1959; Diederich, 1967) gave rise to the increased use of lay readers, ancillary help provided mostly by English degree holding “housewives,” who were called upon to ‘assist’ the primary instructor by grading the writing assignments students were asked to do. Because these studies showed that composition teachers could not possibly do the planning, teaching, grading and conferencing work that they were asked to do at any given university, rather than lessen the workload carefully laid out by these studies to the hour, the researchers and subsequently, the universities decided it

would be more cost effective to hire inexpensive, part-time labor. University leadership took to heart Wykoff's assertion that "one teacher and one reader could do the equivalent of two teachers' work at a 25% savings in dollars...." and still uphold Dusel's assertion that "literacy is a first essential, not a luxury, in a democracy" (19).

One irony is that individuals who were given the imperative task of teaching literacy, the oft declared 'essential' to the very foundations on which democratic ideals are predicated, were themselves unable to partake in these freedoms. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), in its 1940 Statement on Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure concluded that, "[t]eachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject [... and that] [c]ollege and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline...." Despite this, because they were contingent, the (mostly) women who comprised the lay readers group were unable to communicate with complete academic freedom, a reality that has continued from the earliest moments of the field (Robertson et. al. 274).

Admittedly, the AAUP's statement does not specifically address contingency in writing classrooms. However, there have been ample instances of dissent around the poor conditions of contingent laborers specific to the field of rhetoric and composition. For instance, there have been push-backs to the shift in the structure of composition classrooms and their labor force by scholars in the field (Braddock, et. al., 1963; Logan 1963; Doherty, 1964; Wilson 1966) who cite a tension between "qualified" and "available" individuals and the vast similarities between composition labor structures and those of sweatshops. This necessary 'labor of love' was also challenged by the lay readers themselves (Barry 1959; Burke 1961) who articulated that long

hours, meager pay, and lack of student knowledge were obstacles to adequate performance. Regardless, the lay reader programs were ultimately seen as positive in that they allowed for ‘challenging’, ‘purposeful’ work for women who wanted to supplement their household incomes while alleviating professors’ workloads and stress (Blackman 243). According to Kelly Ritter, these clearly engendered, patronizing and pedagogically unsound realities were the foundation for our current contingent faculty working conditions in the field of rhetoric and composition (Ritter 387).

In an article written in 1981, Ben McClelland, a Professor of English and the Otilie Schillig Chair at the University of Mississippi, summarized the number of part-time faculty teaching composition as nearly half of all composition faculty reported (13). He explained that of this population, 41% were required only to have a BA or BS degree to be hired and that the degree did not have to be in the subject taught (13). He further stated that only 24% of these employees were provided fringe benefits and that community colleges were the most exploitative (16). As McClelland’s observations suggest, contingent faculty employment is not new but perhaps just newly acknowledged as a problem.

Partly in response to the Wyoming Resolution, in October 1989 the Conference on College Composition and Communication published a position statement called the "Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing." The statement highlighted the number of college teachers "who now constitute an enormous academic underclass. More than half the English faculty in two-year colleges and nearly one-third of English faculty at four-year colleges and universities work on part-time and/or temporary appointments" (1). It may be worth saying again that this was 1989.

The C's Statement discussed that "these teachers work without job security, often without benefits and for wages far below what their full-time colleagues are paid per course" (1). It further explained the notion of the highway flyer, who drives to multiple colleges in order to piece together a living and the Statement chastises such practices for "damaging the quality of education" because such conditions "mar [teachers'] effectiveness and reduce possibilities for a loyalty to the institution's educational goals" (1). The statement describes this reality as one where, "All lose: teachers, students, schools and ultimately a democratic society that cannot be without citizens whose education empowers them to read and write with critical sophistication" (1). It further claims that "...the responsibility for the academy's most serious mission, helping students to develop their critical powers as readers and writers, should be vested in tenure-line faculty" (1).

At this point the statement acknowledges a shift in belief systems regarding this last requirement and proceeds to offer guidelines for "Professional Standards that Promote Quality Education" by group: tenure-line, graduate students, part-time faculty and full-time temporary faculty. The Statement highlights the need for equal working conditions for contingent and tenure-line faculty, while also arguing for the validity of composition as a scholarly field and the necessity of adequate preparation for ensuring a quality education for students (2-4).

The statement ends with a section on "Teaching Conditions Necessary for Quality Education," which focuses on having manageable class sizes (15, ideally, but no more than 20); a workable number of classes per term (no more than three) and access to professional development and "relatively private conference space" (5).

As this statement and various histories suggest, first-year composition has been staffed in most universities over many decades with an untenurable majority of contingent faculty. Why

then, in the twenty-first century are we utilizing the term ‘new’ when referring to this same majority as “The New Faculty Majority” of faculty members who are untenurable, contingent labor? The answer stems from an alternate history than the one discussed above, the history of the university outside the English department. Because, while a majority of contingent, untenurable (and underpaid, unappreciated and overworked) laborers is ‘typical’ in the composition realm of English Departments, the same cannot be said to have been visibly the case for other disciplines such as Math, Science, Sociology, Psychology, History, or Communications. This is not to say that these disciplines failed to engage in their own cost and labor savings. Consider, for instance, such innovations as the self-taught math “pod” in which students pace themselves through a series of tutorials and tests in order to demonstrate their mathematical literacy. Such efforts might be said to be mathematics’ answer to the labor problem of teaching vast numbers of underprepared students. While such approaches may be more defensible from a labor point of view, they almost certainly are not more defensible from a pedagogical one.

At the same time, there have been shifts in the university writ large which reflect an increasing dependence on contingent, non-tenurable faculty. This trend has caused a challenge that is familiar to composition to have gained a foothold as a national, higher education phenomenon and trend across disciplines. Where here once the issue of a majority of contingent, untenurable workers was largely a composition issue, and especially a FYC issue, over a matter of about three decades, it has become an issue prevalent across universities as percentages have reversed: in 1975 75% of U.S. faculty were tenure-line and 25% were non tenure-line; today 75% of U.S. faculty teach off the tenure-track (CAW).

In 2004, Martin Finkelstein and Jack Schuster published their second co-authored work about the issues surrounding faculty working conditions titled: *The American Faculty: The Restructuring of Academic Life*. Their first co-authorship came in 1998 and both had published works separately on this same topic, what they term a "silent revolution" (Future of American Faculty 27). In an interview with R. Eugene Rice and published in the journal *Change* in Mar/Apr 2004, the authors outline what they see as the major tenets encompassing this academic restructuring. Finkelstein and Schuster claim that the "silent revolution" has two parts: first, there was an increase in part-time faculty beginning as early as the 1960s, which has gained such momentum that universities in the U.S. were in 2004 at a 50/50 split between part and full-time faculty. However, they say it is the second part of the "silent revolution" that is much more insidious: the majority hiring of full-time non-tenure track faculty. In 2001, they showed that 55.4% of all newly hired full-time faculty were off the tenure track and "this trend exhibits no signs of slowing" (Future of American Faculty 27). Furthermore, they report that more than half of all new university faculty appointments come in the form of these new full-time non tenure-track positions, which are demarcated by limited-term contracts. The authors say that while this trend is predictable given the major shifts in academia in the past few decades and in particular the need to maintain program flexibility given unpredictable finances, the effects this alteration has on student learning, future faculty and university realities is concerning.

The trend seems to be that new non-tenurable full-time faculty, while qualified to teach their subject matter, have fewer roles and responsibilities at the university. Whereas tenure-track faculty do research, teach and take part in service, full-time teaching faculty generally only teach, although there are some instances where their sole responsibility is to conduct research.

They may also work fewer hours (Future of American Faculty 28). This "unbundling," as it has been called indicates a significant trend toward outsourcing off the tenure-track (32).

One issue that the authors see as a result of this shift towards specific roles is that the United States, whose universities have worldwide authority and admiration, are now taking the model that gave them such international acclaim and are supplanting it with the model that most other countries use with less success (Future of American Faculty 29).

The shift comes consistently across universities and colleges in the U.S., although the impact may be less on those that already have a teaching focus, and is partly spurred by tenure-line faculty themselves who prefer to spend time on their research projects than embark on service and teaching "duties" (29). Still, as opposed to the dual-career structure of old, in which there are part-time faculty and tenure-track faculty, the rise of what Finkelstein and Schuster call "the tripartic model" comprised of tenure-track, part-time and full-time nontenurable faculty, further fragments the academic landscape into what they say is a permanent restructuring of postsecondary education (30). Once the full-time teaching faculty positions are made normal, which they are increasingly becoming, universities are unlikely to return to a more expensive, less flexible model. While thus far tenure-track positions are still available, the new full-time positions are effectively circumventing them, according to Finkelstein and Schuster, such that, if "half of all full-time appointments [are] off the tenure track...tenure simply becomes irrelevant, which undermines academic freedom" (29).

Unfortunately, this means that the institutions that have historically analyzed and criticized societal values, "engaged in bold inquires" and taught critical thinking suddenly come under immense pressure with a much smaller tenured faculty-base on which to stand. Finkelstein

and Schuster suggest that such a small base may undermine the academies' ability to engage in critical thinking and analysis in ways that are not altogether "pedestrian" (34).

The authors recognize that this shift in university structure is a response to public concerns, economic concerns from within university departments and a bottom-up need for flexibility (Future of American Faculty 31). However, one of the greatest risks of this new tripartic system is that the university system will become even more polarized, resulting in a "handful of affluent, elite institutions" (31). These few institutions will maintain "the old-time academic center of gravity" while most others will adopt further outsourcing of food services, bookstores, academic courseware, packaged degree programs, and a further adoption of distanced learning. The need for both new technology and face-to-face student-teacher interactions will be upended by economic drivers insisting on one over the other and the poor economy only worsens the effect, as those who need jobs, however overqualified they may be for them, will take what they can get, tenure-track or not.

Similarly, this economic drive will be encouraged by those individuals who have fewer options in other avenues. The authors highlight international candidates for teaching positions and women who seek more flexibility in their personal schedules as two groups who are more than willing to accept full-time nontenurable positions in order to obtain lifestyles that they want. As such, already women and minority faculty members are a disproportionate number of the full-time nontenurable faculty across the United States (Future of American Faculty 32).

In 2009, the United States Department of Education conducted a Fall Staff Survey, which found that:

of the nearly 1.8 million faculty members and instructors who made up the 2009 instructional workforce in degree-granting two and four-year institutions of higher education in the United States, more than 1.3 million (75.5%) were employed in contingent positions off the tenure-track, either as part-time adjunct faculty members,

full-time non-tenure track faculty members, or graduate student teaching assistants." (Executive Summary 1)

Likewise, according to the Coalition on the Academic Workforce's most recent 2010 survey, which was conducted to address the lack of data surrounding contingent faculty and their workplace conditions (Executive Summary 1)

- Over 75% of faculty members held part-time or contingent positions.
- Only 22.6% had any access to healthcare through their academic employers and of those only 4.3% were university-paid.
- More than half of the part-time respondents earn less than \$35,000 annually.
- Part-time teaching is not equivalent to temporary employment and over three-quarters of respondents said they had sought, will seek, or are seeking a full-time tenure-track position.

Clearly, what Finkelstein and Schuster called "the silent revolution" in 2004, remains very much alive and even expanded almost a decade later, but these scholars had hopes that the shift was not "altogether inevitable" (Future of American Faculty 35).

Ironically, or perhaps not, in the years since Finkelstein and Schuster documented the trend toward casualization of the academic faculty, grassroots efforts have developed within those casualized ranks which address the issue from a faculty labor point of view. This perspective is perhaps today best articulated by Maria Maisto, the President of the New Faculty Majority Foundation, an advocacy organization that focuses exclusively on issues related to non-tenure-track faculty. Maisto had this to say in a blog she co-wrote for the Huffington Post in October 2013:

The tide may be turning for low-wage workers, including those in academia. [...] First,

they have coordinated their actions nationally, maximizing their impact. Second, they have developed community support in order to minimize retaliation and build the public awareness needed to sustain their activism.

As this quote suggests, academic workers, though not those on the tenure-track such as Finkelstein and Schuster rallied around, have become increasingly organized through such efforts as Maisto's New Faculty Majority. Other entities, such as the University of Southern California's Delphi Project have taken different directions aimed at focusing more attention on the issues of contingent faculty labor. These organizations, projects and events continue to build the case for improved working conditions for contingent faculty and increased awareness of the issue. That is, they seek to push universities into recognizing the status and working conditions of campus workers and the need for a Just Budget Policy like the one Georgetown University adopted in 2005 in order to guarantee a living wage and right to unionize (Maisto et. al.). Efforts such as these hope to ensure the academic freedoms on which a self-governing republic is founded and serve as a reminder to universities and their constituents that "Leaders who undervalue ideas, arts and humanities open doors to plutocrats, despots, factions, violence, and chaos—all ancient enemies of prosperity, freedom and democracy" (Schneider). It is worth noting that trends that were long documented and a source of concern, first in composition and later throughout the whole academy, are today being most effectively challenged by those who are living at the crosshairs of their implementation. It is largely the underemployed, non tenure-track faculty worker who today challenges the hiring practices of higher education. This worker has been made manifest and afforded a national profile through the organization by the same name, "The New Faculty Majority" or NFM.

*Power, Labor and The "New" Majority of Nontenurable Faculty*

One of the premises undergirding the necessity for a liberal arts education (or any higher education degree, for that matter) is that higher education is the 'key' to achieving success regardless of origin (ethnicity, class, gender etc.) and obstacle (Wyatt-Nichol 259).

On the contrary, as NFM President Maria Maisto mentions when referring to her own struggle with academia and contingent status: "I'm glad that my grandfather didn't have to witness what has shocked my father: that higher education failed to live up to their experience and expectations" (Working Class Perspectives). The failure that many hardworking and hopeful individuals experience is because, as Freire posits, their hope relies upon "a politics of literacy forged in the political and material dislocations of regimes that exploit, oppress, expel, maim, and ruin human life" (196).

Unfortunately, it is not failures that are paid attention to but the one or two whose stories bolster false hope and a belief that the mythical American Dream might actually be possible. It is these individuals who Gramsci calls a "new intellectual;" one who, according to Villanueva in *Bootstraps*, "acts as an intellectual liaison between the groups seeking revolutionary change and the rest of society" (129). This is a different type of individual than Foucault's "specific intellectual." Gramsci's "new intellectual" has insider knowledge of the group about which and to whom s/he speaks, like Villanueva himself. Conversely, the "specific intellectual" is one who is able to resist hegemonic power structures through his/her areas of expertise and the local contexts they inhabit. "New intellectuals" are able to act as go-betweens because they are former members of the marginalized group and serve as an example of one who "made it out." Yet the narrated story of these individual cases needs to be critiqued.

Villanueva explains that rather than utilizing these individuals' stories of 'success' as proof of progress, students need to be shown how to critically analyze them in terms other than the already constructed myth. The stories instead need to be construed in a way that the students can see how they work as part of a larger context, embedded in Western notions of individualism and other more harmful hegemonies. Being able to view the stories critically and as part of common social and cultural lore makes it more likely that the stories are seen for what they are, fictions, rather than as an example of real change/revolution (Cross Talk 632). Likewise, students will be exposed to different ways of seeing and understanding the culture in which they live. In view of the topic of interest, contingent faculty labor, the occasional "success story" about the "one who got out," "got tenure," or had enough sense to move on needs to be critically examined.

Today, contingent faculty members, all of whom have a minority status in the academy, must confront this situation. The increasing prominence of individuals who are given minority status but who are actually a physical majority renews the hope that once enough people choose to name, critique and transform the current inequities, the ones who come after will be spared (Sanchez 167). This "new intellectual" of Gramsci's exists in a heterogeneous society wherein oppressed groups seek access to the institutions of power (Bootstraps 129). However, for Villanueva, given that this particular group of oppressed individuals is beginning to gain recognition as a material majority within a specific cultural context, and articulately name the issues to which they are subjected, they may actually be in a better position to adjust the situation and garner the respect and material compensation that they deserve. That is, they may have gained enough contextual authority that they can reform the system in which they are a part (Cross Talk 633). However, for Foucault, a reformation does not constitute a full transformation

of the system, and as such, even if they earn the compensations they deserve, they will have much more work to do before the system itself is transformed, if indeed that is their intended aim (Foss et. al. 355).

According to Sanchez, things that are seemingly inherent features of a Western knowledge-producing industry are actually systemically constructed. And further, those who are part of the dominant culture, in this case tenured academics, who may truly be concerned with the state of contingent faculties' working conditions and professional status, may be inadvertently contributing, through their positions as gatekeepers in the community, to the perpetuation of a system of dominance (Sanchez 165).

Like Foucault, Villanueva also draws attention to the differences between transformation and reform, between resistance and revolution (Foss et. al. 356). If revolution is the complete overthrow of the system and its replacement by another, then reform is an adjustment of a system without altering its structural, foundational elements. In contrast, transformation constitutes the structural altering of the system currently in place such that the power differentials tangibly shift. Such resistance involves grassroots fostering of critical thinking which seeks the enactment of systemic transformation rather than a revolution resulting in the simplistic reformation of the status quo via new titles and new authorities (356). For both Foucault and Villanueva, revolution is untenable because it leads to new forms of old oppression, effectively discounting the entire system, parts good and bad. Furthermore, the thorough rhetorical hegemony exercised in the United States by the ideology of individualism, and furthered by American Dream and bootstrap myths, makes the possibility of any universal activist movement practically impossible. Americans' continued faith in the impossible may be contributing to flawed systems like the contingent faculty system in higher education (Sanchez 167-168).

Thus, Villanueva argues for "something less than armed revolution, something more than reform," and his view of rhetoric is as something that occupies space between these positions. Since hegemony's power is mostly rhetorical, and its perpetuation reliant on the oppressed's consent, the enactment of counter-hegemonies inside the system being targeted is to attack them where they live and attempt to reevaluate rules and the institutions that craft, revise and enforce them (Foss et. al. 356). Slowly, rhetorically, methodically, alternative visions surface that illuminate what is acceptable and what is possible. Links are made "between the dominant order and the oppressed group, between tradition and innovation, between permanence and change, thereby fundamentally altering the means by which the status quo is (re)produced" (Sanchez 168).

As Ann George points out, "citizens in a democracy constantly need to make decisions about... complex issues" (Tate et. al. 101). Hairston argues further, connecting these issues to matters of curriculum and pedagogy, that critical thinking has as its "goal to meet the needs of students living in an increasingly diverse society" (192). Such are the cornerstones of critical, radical, activist pedagogies where "students direct their own education" with facilitation from teachers who are free to help them (Smith via George: Tate et. al. 101). It is in this context and in light of the current employment context of higher education, that non tenure-track teachers may find themselves working not only as purveyors and defenders of higher education but also as its critics. Are teachers without opportunity for tenure free, as Smith says they must be, to undertake the kind of facilitation that's needed? At the very least, it would seem that they need guarantees of academic freedom or, at a minimum, access to standard faculty grievance procedures, in order to conduct this work well.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

For this project, I sought to determine what potential impact a majority of non-tenurable faculty might have on the curricular and pedagogical decision-making that accompanies first-year composition courses. One traditional purpose of college and an often stated objective of first-year composition is to create critical thinkers who are capable of closely examining mainstream and popular beliefs, values, and ideologies as well as understanding alternative perspectives. In order to examine how this objective and the curricula and pedagogies that surround first-year composition classes might be affected by contingent employment, I utilized what Creswell calls a qualitative grounded theory design using open, axial, and third-level coding (424). This design allowed me, as part of a comparative analysis approach, to articulate categories based upon the transcriptions of interviews with seven individuals who held the title of Writing Program Administrator/Composition Director at Colorado State University from 1973 to the present (Creswell 434). I also employed a constant comparative analysis of online survey responses from Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), tenured (TTF) and non-tenurable faculty (NTTF) members (434). The surveys were conducted online and the interviews were conducted in-person or via email and/or telephone, where necessary. The questions utilized in the semi-structured survey were open-ended in order to gain a more nuanced and detailed understanding of participants' ideas, opinions and experiences related to their roles in composition departments, in regards to pedagogy and curricula development (Creswell 387).

Likewise, and prior to undertaking my field work and interviews, I sought to obtain IRB consent, which was granted, as well as information regarding the history of composition within the CSU English department. The results of my research regarding this history are in Chapter 4

of this thesis. What I thought was going to be a simple process proved complicated and elusive. When I accessed the composition curricular files which were posted on the CSU Composition webpage, I realized that the files went back only to 1996. Similarly, because of the flood in the early nineties many of the curricular documents that pre-dated those online were lost, and so, not available for perusal. Thankfully, some of the faculty in the department had not cleaned out filing cabinets and I was able to obtain a few documents that way, but not nearly as many as I had hoped. Consequently, I came to rely on the memories and generosity of those within the composition program (currently and formerly) who were willing to tell me about the department's long and fascinating history either through formal interviews or in less formal discussions/emails. The timeline I was able to piece together from these encounters and documents can be found in Figure 1 and the narrative synthesis, in Chapter 4.

For the interviews, participants were given the opportunity to elaborate upon, explain or clarify their personal and professional experiences, knowledge of department histories, personal and professional stances and opinions regarding first-year composition curricula, pedagogical methods and trends and the impacts of a faculty majority that is not tenurable on the current, former and future use of first-year composition curricula and pedagogical practices. Faculty were given the opportunity to provide ideas or express concern about pedagogy and curricula as it relates to first-year composition and a non-tenurable faculty majority in order to "avoid constrain[ing] individual responses [which] is ideal when the researcher does not know the response possibilities or wants to explore the options" (Creswell 387). Both explanations of purpose applied in this case.

The survey was distributed to all Graduate Teaching Assistants, NTTF and TTF who indicated a willingness to participate, and who have taught or been involved in curricular

discussions and/or creation of first-year composition materials at Colorado State University recently or in decades past.

- 1960-1965 Glen Matott
- 1965-1969: Dick Anderson
- 1969-1973: Gilbert Findlay
- 1973-1977: Steve Reid
- 1977-1978: Jim Tanner
  - Current Traditional
    - five paragraph essay
- 1978-1990: Jean Wyrick
  - Current Traditional
    - modes/forms
  - WaW
  - Writing as a Process
- 1990-1993: Kate Keifer
  - Cognitive dimensions of writing instruction
  - WAC/WID
  - Rhetorical Situation
- 1993-1996: Steve Reid
  - Rhetorical Situation
  - Critical reading and thinking
- 1996-1999: Mike Palmquist
  - Critical reading and thinking
- 1999-2002: Donna LeCourt
  - Cultural Studies
- 2002-2006: Mike Palmquist
  - Climate Change
  - Cultural Differences
- 2006-2009 Steve Reid
  - Cultural Differences
  - Rhetoric of Green
- 2009-2012: Sarah Sloane
  - Rhetoric of Green
  - Internet and Social Media
- 2012-2014 Lisa Langstraat
  - Internet & Social Media
  - Ethics of Higher Education

Figure 1. Timeline of the CSU Composition WPAs and Curricular Topics

The survey was created using the online tool Kwik Survey and the link was sent via email to 35 people total. Thirteen people responded to the online survey, 1 TTF, 2 NTTF and 10 GTAs.

The email provided explicit instructions to complete the survey and included the link to the

appropriate survey. The first question asked the participant to indicate his/her role: GTA, NTTF or TTF, depending on the recipients' current and/or former position(s) at Colorado State University and the length of time s/he had or has worked at Colorado State University. There was a different survey for each category: graduate teaching assistant, tenure-track faculty, or non-tenurable faculty (See Appendix A, B and C, respectively).

It is important to note that GTAs, while definitely a sub-set of the contingent faculty group given their status as instructors-of-record for first-year composition courses, differ substantially from NTTF in that they are almost always temporary to the university in which they teach, and the city it inhabits. GTAs are graduate students and as such, most are of the mindset that their time teaching first-year composition is temporary in the same way that their status as a graduate student is temporary, and will change when they obtain their degree. Conversely, NTTF are individuals with advanced degrees who have deliberately chosen to be teachers of first-year composition and who are a part of both the university in which they work and the local community in which they live. As a result, their personal investment in teaching, in the field of composition and its pedagogy, the university and the community it inhabits is much stronger than that of most GTAs.

I sent reminders to all participants who had not responded definitively to the initial participant request email, one week prior to the communicated deadline and then again the day of the deadline. Once the survey deadline passed, the survey data was compiled using the Kwik Survey analysis function and also exported to SAS 9.3 (statistical analysis software) for phrase frequency analysis.

Colorado State University (CSU) was identified for two reasons:

1) Opportunity. This local sample can be understood as a convenience sample, one with which I was familiar and to which I had access.

2) Interest. CSU has chosen a new first-year composition topic (to be implemented in Fall 2013), The Ethics of Higher Education, which might be considered to be a politically-charged or at least “edgy” topic. This choice comes at a moment when the pedagogical trend in first-year composition courses leans toward the neutral, or perhaps arguably toward the “safe.” That is, the current shift of first-year composition, spearheaded by Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle (2006), has been the Writing-about-Writing (WAW) movement, where the readings are not centered around politically-charged topics but are focused more on writing as a topic in and of itself.

I asked individuals who are (or were) Writing Program Administrators at Colorado State University, tenured professors with CO150 teaching and curricular experience, and an expert in the field of academic labor, Maria Maisto, President of the New Faculty Majority organization, to participate in in-person interviews. I specifically wanted to interview Maria Maisto because her viewpoint as a seasoned labor activist and contingent faculty member would have provided a valuable outsider perspective on the roles of contingent faculty in academia and the impacts they are having on universities nationwide. Due to conflicting and overly busy schedules, I had to settle for quoting her from other sources, instead.

Once I received responses from those asked to participate, I scheduled the interviews for specific dates and times, based on individual needs/preferences. When in-person interviews were impossible due to geographic location or scheduling issues, I asked the participants if they were willing to respond via email or phone and sent out emails or scheduled phone calls, accordingly.

I digitally recorded the in-person interviews using the iPhone Application *Audio Memos* and ensured that they lasted no longer than one hour each. I later transcribed them. Individuals who preferred to respond to the questions via email did so either via an attached Word document or in the body of the email. I did not record one of the phone interviews as I had not yet found the iPhone Application that made it possible to do so. Instead, I took notes as we spoke and sent them to the interviewee for approval. For the second phone interview, I recorded it using the iPhone Application *Call Recorder*. Prior to the interview, I obtained the interviewee's consent to record the call. After the interview was conducted and the call recorded, I was able to transcribe the interview as I would have if it had been conducted in-person.

Individuals who agreed to be interviewed were automatically demarcated according to position and the order in which the interview took place (i.e. WPA1, WPA2 etc.). Once I transcribed the interviews and deleted the audio-files, I was able to utilize the information in the study anonymously in most cases, and by name, when the participants specifically gave permission to do so. As such, most of the WPA respondents are not quoted directly but simply referred to as 'WPA1', a 'GTA' etc. The interview transcriptions do not have identifying information on them, other than the individual's decade of service (as it is relevant to the study's findings), the date the interview was conducted and some of the other capacities in which the WPA served.

I analyzed the survey responses using constructivist grounded theory and constant comparison analysis. First, I used SAS 9.3 to statistically analyze the responses for phrase frequency. Unfortunately, that analysis showed little useful data. Thus, I utilized the survey questions themselves to create categories that were then instrumental in synthesizing the responses into a theory about how GTAs and NTTF members view their roles as teachers of

first-year composition, the role of first-year composition at the university and how the curricular and pedagogical decisions are shaped by those who create them and also those who utilize them. Because only one TTF member completed the survey, that data is incorporated with the other survey data to avoid identifying the respondent inadvertently. I used these views as a frame to help create a more complete picture of first-year composition curriculum and pedagogies at CSU and how that local example might be situated within the larger scope of rhetoric and composition as a discipline.

The interview responses were analyzed using an emerging grounded theory and constant comparison analysis. As such, after the first two interviews were conducted, I reviewed the audio files and made decisions about the next interviews based on those findings. For instance, if the data was showing gaps in understanding around historical themes in CO150 at CSU, I would then ask specifically about that timeframe or theme in order to create a more complete picture on which to revise the emerging theory. The results of both the interviews and the survey questions were aggregated and synthesized in order to inform the larger field of rhetoric and composition as to how labor and power influence first-year composition classrooms, their curricula and their pedagogies.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE HISTORY OF COMPOSITION AT COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY<sup>3</sup>

#### *Specific Intellectuals and the Potential Resistance a Local Context Holds*

While Colorado State University did not, to my knowledge and according to several individuals I interviewed during my research, intentionally set out to be one of Foucault's sites where specific intellectuals would mount resistance against traditional systems, regardless it has managed to become one through its rich and often, progressive history. It's an interesting position for a conservative, land grant institution to find itself but it has found its way here nonetheless.

In the 60s and 70s at CSU, most of the university at large, including the faculty council, believed that English and especially teaching writing were providing a “service” to the university. The goal of a writing course, in the minds of many faculty outside the English department, was to teach students to write in correct modern English, without sentence errors and with a clear, direct style. The major colleges in the early land grant schools such as CSU were agriculture, engineering, veterinary medicine, and perhaps business, and those colleges expected the “service” departments to prepare students with a basic literacy necessary for their academic courses (WPA 4, WPA 5 and WPA 7).

In 1969, the chairman of the English Department, Paul Bryant, and the dean of the college wanted to professionalize the teaching of composition in the English department. At that time, the English department (composition and literature) was considered a service department, and most of the composition courses and many literature courses were taught by what we would

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<sup>3</sup> This history is one person's undoubtedly somewhat flawed and incomplete account of the CSU composition program's history based on a triangulation of interview data from many sources. It is not based on the researcher's own first-hand knowledge. Any inaccuracies in this account are purely the error of the author and not a misrepresentation by interviewees.

now call special or adjunct teachers, most with an M.A. degree in literature or creative writing. The college came up with the funds to hire ten faculty members. A partial list of those ten faculty included David Lindstrom, Gilbert Findlay, Ward Swinson, and John Boni (WPA 7).

Some of those instructors who were contingent at that time were let go in that year or later to make room for the tenure-track faculty being hired. The following three years, the department continued to hire a few new faculty, including faculty who had an emphasis in teaching writing. Since there were very few degrees in composition and rhetoric at the time, faculty hired had either taught composition extensively or had taken composition related courses (WPA 5 and WPA 7). Faculty hired in those years—1970-1972—included Linda BenZvi, Carol Jennings, Carol Cantrell, and Stephen Reid (WPA 7).

In the 1960's, CSU was on the quarter system, and the writing courses were E101 (labeled remedial) E102 (First term writing) E103 (second term writing or researched writing) and E104 (writing about literature). E104 morphed into E140, Introduction to Literature. There were not subject or topic focal points for the composition courses during the 60s and 70s. The courses focused on teaching the modes and strategies (WPA 5). Early assignments were comparison-contrast papers, definition papers, causal analysis papers, narrative and descriptive papers, expository papers, and argumentative essays (WPA 7). Around 1970, Professor Findlay changed the prefixes of the courses from an E prefix to a CO prefix, and E103, normally taken in the second term or quarter, was moved to a sophomore course with a 200 number: CO202 (WPA 7).

The composition line-up in the 70's was then CO101, CO102, and CO202. Masters candidates in English literature and creative writing taught the introductory composition course, then CO102. In 1970, Gilbert Findlay and Bill McBride instituted the first fall training week for

new graduate teaching assistants. At that time, the pre-fall semester Professional Internship in English (known in the department as PIE) lasted three days. During the rest of the year, several faculty members interested in mentoring new TAs and visiting their classes each took on three new graduate teaching assistants. In addition, Professor Findlay wrote a newsletter for the new graduate teaching assistants, providing them with tips and suggestions for teaching the week's upcoming assignments. Textbooks from that time included a collection of essays organized by strategy (*Contexts for Composition* was an early title) (WPA 7). Although Findlay and McBride had a coherent philosophy for teaching writing, the first common syllabus was created in 1973 by Stephen Reid when he took over as Comp Director/WPA that year.

A Composition Director is anyone who coordinates a composition program in ways that are intentional and informed by current research. It is not merely an administrative position, but also a scholarly position (WPA 2). The Comp Director then, as now, responded to queries from college and university administrators, solved problems that came from the freshman orientation program, the bookstore, GTA hiring and training and curricular choices (WPA 3).

The Comp Director also oversees the development of curriculum and coordinated programs with the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE), whose goals for CO150 (first-year composition) broadly defined are to give students frameworks and tools (rhetorical and process) to become more critical thinkers, readers, and writers at a reasonably sophisticated level (WPA 3). The Composition Director/Writing Program Administrator must be prepared if anyone inside or outside the program raises questions, to explain and sometimes defend the curricular decisions reflected in textbook selections, syllabus details, and even specific assignments. Of course, individual faculty members have autonomy and would also be expected to explain their own curricular choices. Despite that, occasionally questions come to the Comp

Director about the larger goals of a curriculum (or how a particular curriculum meets other stakeholders' goals, e.g., meets land-grant mission, meets CCHE guidelines) (WPA 4).

Therefore, the Comp Director needs to be involved in the discussions and decision-making about the curriculum, particularly when the faculty includes GTAs teaching what very well may be their first stand-alone class (WPA 2 and WPA 4).

That first common syllabus designed in 1973 was specifically created as a guide for new teaching assistants (GTAs). Stephen Reid, Gilbert Findlay, and Bill McBride conducted the fall orientation sessions. Also, around 1970, the English faculty voted to require every English faculty member to teach a composition course. After a few years, a few senior professors managed to excuse themselves from teaching composition, and by the late 70s, fewer than half the tenured faculty taught composition regularly (WPA 1 and WPA 7). During this time, the “composition program” consisted of one faculty member, Stephen Reid, and one part time secretary, to run the entire composition program. Later, after Dr. Jean Wyrick (1978) and Dr. Kate Kiefer (1979) were hired, the three of them ran the program for the following decade (WPA 5 and WPA 7). Even then, however, most English faculty, while emphasizing correctness, still thought teaching writing should include meeting the larger goals of teaching critical reading and critical thinking.

Dr. Wyrick was hired in 1978 by then chair, Jon Pratt, who wanted someone to come in and help organize the composition program. Although she arrived at CSU untenured, her experience at the University of Florida as the head of composition and her forthcoming textbook on the topic, *Steps to Writing Well*, were both catalysts for her early tenure, which she earned while at CSU. Her book was used in the CO 150 class as the primary textbook and Dr. Wyrick put the money she earned from the book's proceeds as a result of that requirement back into the

CSU program. She commented that she felt it was a “conflict of interest” to do otherwise. The first few years that her book was the seminal text for CO150, Dr. Wyrick also wrote the syllabus for the course. When she took over as Composition Director in 1979 following a brief stint in the role by Dr. Jim Tanner, she said she used to joke that she was going to stand on the street corner with a lantern and a sign that said “Would YOU like to teach college English?” because

we never knew until the last minute, because it was soft money; or we would get X dollars for this number of sections but then we would have more classes that were needed and not enough teachers. It was always crazed the week before classes started trying to rustle up people to teach.

At this time the chair of the English department wanted tenure-track faculty to teach first-year composition and some made an effort to teach CO150 every few years but many of them hated it and many of them were not trained in composition. Many of the NTTF were chosen straight out of the GTA pool, too, so at CSU, the contingent faculty were the ones who had undergone the training provided by Dr. Wyrick, Dr. Kiefer, Dr. Reid, and so on, as the program became more and more refined. Thus, especially at this time when so few people had composition degrees, the contingent faculty were sometimes better teachers of comp than the tenured or tenure-track professors who had been forced to teach it and who preferred to teach writing via their own areas of expertise (i.e. literature, creative writing etc.). Likewise, any contingent faculty who were found to be less than stellar teachers could be let go easily, a reality that was rare given the larger number of contingent faculty employed (roughly 40 including both NTTF and GTAs) but it did occasionally happen (WPA 6).

Also around this time the presiding Dean, with a background as a Psychology professor, wanted to change the structure of writing classes to more closely reflect the social science and science-type lecture halls so popular with first-year courses. To keep the classes small, Dr. Kiefer, Dr. Reid and Dr. Wyrick had to fight constantly and loudly but eventually managed to

get the classes capped at 28, which, with attrition would end up being a class of 24 or 25. CSU currently caps its CO150 courses at 24.

Dr. Wyrick held the Composition Director position for eleven years because during this time in CSU's history Comp Directors served at the pleasure of the chair (WPA 4, WPA 5 and WPA 6). Such a stint in the position is no longer possible at CSU as the composition program now requires three-year rotations to help avoid Comp Director burnout (WPA 2, WPA 5 and WPA 6). Similarly, the composition director must be a tenured professor as it is difficult (and unwise) to put an untenured person into an administrative position that deals with controversial issues.

In 1979, when Dr. Kate Kiefer was hired, her primary role was to take over the basic writing program. Dr. Kiefer created the teaching syllabus for the GTAs who, in those days, taught one section of the 2-credit CO101 course and one section of the 3-credit CO150 course each semester (WPA 1 and WPA 4). She recalls that she "taught lots of sections of CO150 when I first came to CSU, at least one section every semester when we had the 3/3 load (1979-1985). But every faculty member taught one section of CO150 every semester in those days with the higher teaching load and much smaller NTT group (8-12 instructors, many teaching just one or two sections)."

Dr. Kiefer, Dr. Wyrick and Dr. Reid were instrumental in standardizing the GTA training. When Dr. Wyrick and Dr. Kiefer first arrived at CSU and observed GTA's classes, who were participating in the PIE mentioned previously but who had very little training aside from that, they discovered that the GTAs were just doing whatever they thought best in the classroom. The creative writers were teaching poetry and the Literature students were focusing on literature

and there was no norm or understanding of what the composition program was trying to do, no common goals.

As a result, Dr. Kiefer, Dr. Wyrick and Dr. Reid started CSU's GTA and NTTF training program. They got permissions from the university and the college of liberal arts, gained funding from grants and from the department, and had instructors (both GTAs and contingent faculty) come early and get paid to participate in intensive all day, every day classes for a week in August. The participants had already been sent (in June) a large binder that included the curricula and lesson plans that they would be teaching for CO150. However, the WPA/CD who put together the binders and oversaw the training sessions was not compensated for her/his summer work time, a tradition that, unfortunately, continues.

At the time, the graduate students, many of whom were wonderful writers themselves, had no idea how to teach writing because there were no courses; they had had no courses in pedagogy or composition theory because many of those things were just being created by the likes of Maxine Hairston, James Kinneavy, Mina Shaughnessy, Ira Shor and Linda Flower etc. These individuals made those in the comp program start to think about: what are we doing and why are we doing it and how should it be taught?

At the time, many of the GTAs were teaching the 'basic writing' course (CO101) that Dr. Kiefer oversaw, which consisted of sentence and paragraph structures, grammar etc. Concurrently, incoming GTAs began to take the course E684, now E687, where they were 'taught' composition theories and writing pedagogies before they started teaching their own sections of CO150. Simultaneously, the students were required to audit a section of CO150 that used the same curricula that they would be teaching. This gave them the opportunity to utilize E684 as a discussion space for what they would be teaching, why it was important and how best

to teach it; they focused on their mentor's class and analyzed what was working and what was not and were able to have their pedagogical, curricular and theoretical questions answered in order that they were better equipped to teach their students the following semester. At this point, CSU had very recently switched from a quarter system model to a semester model, which is currently used (WPA 6). The comp faculty at CSU also changed the PIE structure to be a more regular occurrence, meeting over lunchtime (12-1pm) every other week as a way for CO150 instructors to gain valuable professional development and have more time designated for pedagogical and theoretical discussion (WPA 2, WPA 6 and WPA 7). This model is almost identical to the one CSU currently uses some thirty years later, and continues to be viewed as a highly distinguished training program, nationally.

In the 1980s, many of the sections that Dr. Kiefer taught were those audited by GTAs as part of their training. Dr. Reid and Dr. Kiefer spent much of their time conducting observations and trainings for the GTAs. A responsibility they shared equally. Together, they did all of the GTA classroom visits for CO101 and CO150, a task that continued until 1984 when CSU hired the first individuals to hold the contingent faculty positions of Composition Administrative Lecturers. At that point, the newly hired contingent faculty took over the CO150 training while Dr. Kiefer and Dr. Reid continued doing the CO101 training (WPA 3 and WPA 6).

Through the 1980s the curricular emphasis at CSU continued to be modes and process focused using readers to supplement the rhetoric (*Steps to Writing Well*, a book written by Dr. Jean Wyrick, was utilized through much of the decade). Curricularly, and technologically from the 60s through the end of the 80s things changed radically. Students did not have computers, they could not play around with their organization like is possible now. They were not able to

simply cut and paste a paragraph if it made more sense elsewhere. It was much more labor intensive to rewrite or retype something.

Likewise, researchers were just starting to realize that students had different learning styles and even the notion of conducting research studies in composition was a whole new idea. Many of the people who had gone into teaching writing were very linear thinkers which is why most writing teachers at that time were outliners but so many of the students who did not do well on placement exams were free thinkers, free writers. The whole notion of free writing and looping from the likes of Peter Elbow and Donald Murray were new and groundbreaking. That is why WPA 2 said s/he used to tell the secondary teachers that the composition faculty worked with in the grant-funded summer programs, that their students hated high school English teachers. The teachers came into their classes and said outright, or worse, did not say or did not realize they were saying, "Write like me; diagram this sentence; outline this argument" (WPA 6). There were no computers, no playing around, there was no looping or bubbling; there was no such word as prewriting when all of this started in the 70s.

As a result, high school teachers would come in and tell students that they wanted a sentence outline of a paper because that is how they were taught to compose, how they still composed and much of the reason for students hating English and doing poorly in it. It was focused on forms and, while critical thinking was promoted, many of the students at the time had no way in to the academic realm and had been completely turned off of writing. The curriculum reflected how the program was trying to combat that distaste for and fear of writing. In a way, that was critical thinking in the sense that the faculty wanted the students to think about their own composing processes, to recognize how they learned and how they thought about something and how they could articulate it. Teachers wanted their students to recognize ways that someone

might think about and discuss writing but it was not articulated in exactly those words at the time (WPA 1, WPA 6).

In 1980, Dr. Kiefer began doing special presentations/workshops as a way to incorporate writing into other classes across university departments. She did not call it an official WAC program because it really was occasional and in response to departments or faculty members whose interest she was able to garner (WPA 4 and WPA 6). She and Dr. Wyrick would actively try to get departments to integrate writing into their different classes or to pick a class and try to make it a writing class. When they would go to departments they discovered, not surprisingly given the view of composition as a ‘service’ course and English as a ‘service’ department especially at land grant universities, that faculty held the view that incorporating writing meant assigning a twenty page research paper with footnotes.

This perception that writing courses, in sixteen weeks will be able to get students to a place where they can write well for any discipline, and thus, that writing need not be incorporated into other courses, is problematic. Instead, writing courses should offer opportunities for critical writing and thinking in a focused class that not only assigns writing but teaches writing (WPA 2). Consequently, Dr. Wyrick and Dr. Kiefer felt it was their ‘job’ to try and explain that there were ways that students could actually learn content material better through writing activities like Write-to-Learns. Further, they showed faculty that this kind of journaling or formative assessment could assist them in knowing if their students were confused about a point or concept. Dr. Kiefer made herself available to do the presentations; and she and Dr. Wyrick, who was the Comp Director during this time, put out notices every semester. Several departments took them up on it and often Dr. Kiefer would ask for course-specific materials from the other discipline’s classes or the kinds of classes that they thought writing

might fit into and she would actually try to personalize/individualize the professional development sessions (WPA 2 and WPA 4).

These informal professional development sessions were always in addition to their 'normal' workloads, and, as with the summer professional and curricular development for new CO150 instructors, garnered no extra pay or time (WPA 4, WPA 6 and WPA 7). On the whole, Dr. Kiefer and Dr. Wyrick reached nearly thirty departments at CSU with Dr. Kiefer doing the bulk of the presentations. They, as a model for effective pedagogy, always asked for feedback from these sessions, and the feedback received was often positive. As a result of these efforts, what began essentially as one-woman 'dog and pony shows' grew into a full-fledged WAC/WID program, which Dr. Kiefer directed from 2000-2001. The program was officially ended in 2009 due to budgetary constrictions. The choice came down to cutting staffing or cutting the WAC program, a decision that had to be made immediately and thus, the WAC program was excised (WPA 4, WPA 6 and WPA 7). However, the program still has visibility. It was ranked 22nd nationally in 2012 and 19th nationally in 2013 (WPA 7), reflecting the presence of the WAC Clearinghouse, a vigorous Writing in the Disciplines course selection and the integration of writing across the common core curriculum through the gtPathways initiative which stipulates that all core courses in the social sciences and humanities integrate writing to 25% of the overall course grade.

The program's demise also did not stop the requests for writing across the curriculum nor did it curb the efforts to continue its mission. Dr. Mike Palmquist, who served as Comp Director twice before leaving the English department in 2006 to run CSU's The Institute for Teaching and Learning (TILT), was able to fund several initiatives in order to maintain something like a WAC presence. But the bulk of the WAC work during this time of turmoil came from Dr. Sue Doe

(through 2011). She was instrumental in putting the gtPathways program together and managed to administer it even as she was earning tenure (WPA 3 and WPA 7).

The roots of the WAC/WID program and gtPathways grew amidst the Expressivist movement of the mid-1980s, where assignments like personal narratives and character sketches were popular first-year writing assignments. At this time, the CSU tenure-track faculty moved to a 3/2 load, and while Dr. Kiefer continued to teach CO150, it was usually only once a year, and not the case for all tenure-track faculty in the department (WPA 1 and WPA 3). That pattern continued through the end of the decade. In working with the CO101 or the CO150 syllabus, the tenured composition faculty always discussed how the range of teachers for the first-year courses might feel about particular topics. They attempted to provide choices for the instructors, an approach that continued into the 1990s and beyond.

CSU's English Department has always had the policy that except for first-semester GTAs, any experienced teacher could bring the Comp Director an alternative syllabus and textbook to talk about as a substitute for the syllabus/textbooks commonly in use. Since teachers often feel most effective using their own materials, the department always tried to give teachers room to make their own choices so long as the course and program goals were clearly met (WPA 1, WPA 3 and WPA 5). The decision-making for the composition program often evolved from discussions among Dr. Wyrick, Dr. Reid and Dr. Kiefer but the acting Comp Director served as the major speaker for the composition program.

The exception to this notion of full curricular freedom did not apply to 1<sup>st</sup>-semester GTAs, however, since GTAs need experience, guidance, and support in order to successfully teach their own courses as instructors of record. As a result, the composition faculty members have consistently incorporated an array of professional development requirements into the

CO150 preparation plan. One of the goals of this training is to assist new teachers (GTAs) in ways to respond to questions that students might raise. As a result, most GTAs in the program have chosen to stick with the department syllabus and textbooks rather than develop their own materials to save some course preparation time and to avoid potential issues that might arise from creating one's own course materials. That said, there have been numerous alternative syllabi over the years and the composition program has tried to honor and support those choices made by experienced teachers (WPA 2 and WPA 3).

In 1989, when the CCHE mandated that four-year institutions could no longer teach a course labeled “basic,” CSU was forced to dismantle the developmental writing program, although they did try to create some supports for less-prepared freshmen (WPA 4). By 1990, the “basic writing” program was gone. That same year, Dr. Kiefer’s title was changed to Director of the Writing Center, which was a new position only in name since she had founded that very program and run it since 1979. Dr. Kiefer later served as Comp Director from 1991-1994. While the individual who serves as Comp Director always brings his/her scholarly and pedagogical interests to the position and can shape things based upon available time and support, at CSU, only tenure track faculty with a specialization in rhetoric and composition can direct the program. Since at least 2002, the WAC program, the gpathways, the composition program and the upper division comp program have all been coordinated by people who have PhDs in rhetoric and composition or a closely related field

The 1980’s and early 1990’s were a very dynamic period in composition studies with several key movements changing the paradigm of teaching writing. By this time, the process movement had begun to take hold nationwide. The process movement was accompanied by an interest in teaching revision. Second, an interest had developed in the cognitive dimensions of

teaching writing. Third, WPA's began creating rhetorical emphases and contexts for assignments. Fourth, an ongoing interest in teaching critical reading and critical thinking became an increasingly prominent part of the paradigm. These national changes were reflected in local philosophies, in the syllabi and curriculum created for CO150, and in the *Prentice Hall Guide* (PHG), the textbook used for CO150 for several years (WPA 7). Teaching the modes and strategies was no longer the dominant teaching paradigm. In addition, teaching correct style was no longer a prominent goal, and handbooks such as the *Harbrace Handbook* were no longer required (WPA 4 and WPA 5 and WPA 7).

Towards the end of the 80s and into the early 90s, technology became evident in the composition classroom. Both Dr. Kiefer and Dr. Mike Palmquist, who joined the department in 1993, were interested and schooled in how technology could be implemented into and used pedagogically in composition classrooms at a time when such ideas were just beginning their ascendancy across universities nationally. Dr. Kiefer was one of the first composition professors at CSU to begin using computer support in her classes (WPA 3) and Dr. Palmquist, who did his PhD at Carnegie Mellon, a program known for its focus on technology-based teaching and learning, had substantially more experience than many faculty members in regards to the ways that technology could be used in a classroom, and in a composition classroom specifically.

In the late 90s, early 2000s Dr. Palmquist began to utilize more intentionally an assignment he'd attempted a few times previously, in which students repurposed an argumentative source-based essay for another publication venue. Students had to make their essays fit the new publication so they learned how to use textboxes and columns, how to sort images and make something look like a magazine article or design a website, write a journal article or create a brochure. All of these efforts reinforced the main objectives of a first-year

composition course whilst incorporating technologically based skills that students might need for careers later on. Despite this nod to both the traditional comp purpose and to students' real lives, Dr. Palmquist was subjected to push-back from graduate students and some faculty because they were unwilling to teach technology when, from their point of view, they were hired "to just teach 'em how to write." From Dr. Palmquist's perspective, faculty who opposed technology applications as a general principle failed to recognize that things they already taught, such as the MLA standards, had already been strongly conditioned by printing press technology from the 1930s.

The issue with the rise of technology was that some faculty felt they were experimenting with ideas and approaches on the far fringes of what it meant to be writing something. At the other extreme was over-utilization of technology. For instance, when chat programs were becoming popular in the late eighties and early nineties instructors attempted to run entire classrooms over a whole semester using only that mode of communication (WPA 7). That is, students would come into class, sit down at their computers and chat for an hour and leave, every single day. Dr. Palmquist points out that this was not a particularly useful pedagogy and exemplified quite explicitly why some of the faculty and graduate students had a valid point when they raised concerns about technology usurping their writing classrooms (WPA 6 and 7).

Arguably, however, such types of invention and composition challenged traditional notions of print, of what it means to write, invent and compose, which is a useful direction for pedagogy when one objective of a course is to think critically. The instructor can utilize those types of assignments and say, "writing doesn't have to look like this; it can look like that," which is an important message but not necessarily something on which to base an entire semester of

composition (WPA 7). This was a particularly important delineation to make for new GTAs or other teaching faculty who were inexperienced in utilizing composition pedagogies.

Technological advances aside, it was rhetorical and genre awareness that became the most compelling and sustained change to composition instruction and the approach that most composition faculty would add to the basic goals for composition courses at land grant institutions. These changes helped to make WAC and WID programs even more popular and important to foster (WPA 3). This was reflected in 1993 when the choice of the textbook for CO150 shifted from using Dr. Wyrick's book *Steps to Writing Well* to Dr. Reid's book *Prentice Hall Guide*. In another nod to the trend toward a rhetorical approach, rhetorical goals also were officially and explicitly set forth as outcomes at CSU in the gtPathways guidelines (WPA 6 and WPA 7), starting in the early 2000s.

In 1999, after two years of work, the English Department instituted an undergraduate major in writing (WPA 3 and WPA 7) which signaled that a curriculum around writing as a subject area worthy of study had arrived. According to WPA 5, since the creation of the writing major and rhetoric and composition graduate concentration, whose first MA graduate was in the Spring of 2002, the majority view of composition faculty at CSU is that a curriculum firmly anchored in rhetorical studies and perspectives is appropriate and necessary. This point-of-view is current in the academy—as well as officially within the state of Colorado as codified by the Colorado Department of Higher Education

This shift toward a more rhetorically-based, critical thinking, post-process model gave credence to CSU's next CO150 focus, which took a cultural studies approach. Driven largely by then Composition Director, Donna LeCourt's own background as a race/class scholar, the cultural studies common curricula was focused more on civic purposes than on academic roles of

the rhetorical situation. That is, it did not focus so much on academic writing as on grammar, the rhetorical situation, audience analysis and exigencies as they relate to broader publics.

Nevertheless, consistent with a rhetorical focus, it required students to figure out how to ask the kinds of questions that would get to forms and norms via a more meta-awareness of contexts. It assumed that it was an impossibility to teach the forms/norms for every potential situation and thus that CO150 should instead try to teach students that there are certain ways to approach and think about writing processes, genres and audiences so they can respond to a variety of situations. Importantly, however, the course framed this discussion within a critical examination of issues of popular culture, asking students and faculty to undertake the difficult work of critiquing features of life within popular culture while using skill sets associated with rhetorical understanding.

This shift to a cultural studies approach was negotiated among the composition staff which included both the tenure-track faculty and the four lecturers who trained TAs at the time. According to several of the WPAs interviewed, curriculum is almost always discussed and negotiated. When one becomes WPA/Comp Director s/he is asking others to inhabit a curricular vision, his/her curricular vision, which is only workable if enough instructors can approach it differently. Without this kind of collaborative model, any curriculum could become problematic because curriculum is being handed down from on-high and it is a constantly changing thing (WPA 1, WPA 2, WPA 3, WPA 4, WPA 5, and WPA 6). Because of that, the program has always understood that TAs need to have input and NTTF need to have input. It is important to reevaluate, pilot, get feedback, make changes, and have a constant dialogue with people who are actually teaching the course. In short, one must empower those who are enacting the course

(WPA 1). At CSU, this ongoing conversation, discussion and collaboration helps to prevent curricular turnover from becoming jarring (WPA 1).

During the cultural studies focus this type of constant conversation resulted in a change to the course reader and the approach to assignments differing: the summary response was kept but instead of responding to literature, students responded to an analytic essay and wrote a pop culture analysis.

Being able to write about what they knew allowed for student engagement. Incorporating writing from personal experience and using critical pedagogy to understand how that experience fit into larger cultures, worked well (WPA 1 and WPA 6). One WPA recounted that the course started with “I like and I do” and asked students to think about those in terms of “Why do I like them? My age? My ideology?” Then, they had to examine how they were producing and/or resisting these cultural norms (WPA 6). The idea was that students can intervene in culture and make a cultural change if they are asking the right types of questions. The semester ended with students writing an argument paper that took a more critical look at a specific cultural situation/artifact in order to see what was involved and demonstrate their understanding of the rhetorical and cultural messaging behind it.

When Dr. Palmquist returned to the position of Comp Director after Dr. LeCourt, he re-instituted a more writing-about-writing (WAW) approach to CO150, which focused on utilizing composition theory-based essays as the content for the writing course, instead of utilizing culturally or politically-minded readings. Dr. Palmquist also noticed that there was a new lack of technology in the composition program curricula (WPA 6 and WPA 7). When he questioned the rationale, thinking perhaps it had been a deliberate move due to technology’s potential for confusing the articulation and accomplishment of course goals, he realized in fact that this was

not the case. As a result, he spearheaded a surge of technological use within the department from 2002-2006. His beliefs about technology were that:

technology can become invisible if you're thinking of it as a tool for accomplishing things but it can also disrupt the status quo and allow new change and new things to come into place and it changes our goals, it changes not only how we accomplish a set of predefined goals but also it challenges what those goals are. The idea that technology is a set of tools for pursuing 19th century curricular goals is kind of foolish. There's a lot of wisdom that says 'don't let technology drive your teaching' but there's a lot of foolish[ness] in ignoring the fact that technology has fundamentally changed what it means to write and be a writer. But pencils are a technology and there was a huge pencil arms race in the 19th century as the U.S. and Europe were fighting over who was going to have the best pencil. Thoreau wouldn't have been able to go to Walden if his Dad hadn't been the Bill Gates of his time and if Thoreau himself hadn't been working in those factories and been amassing a pretty sizeable fortune. So, it was all built off technology.

Largely due to Dr. Palmquist's and Dr. Kiefer's understanding of technology, the first smart classrooms were instituted around 2001 as part of a larger university-wide initiative, the budget of which was approved June 14, 2000 (CSU News and Information). Technologically-based assignments also became more prevalent, which reinforced the rhetorical situation and were implemented into composition classrooms. Additionally, the use of online threaded discussions became more widespread. It was also during this time that CSU instituted its online Writing Studio, a medium for instructors to post readings, assignments and syllabi and be more constantly connected to the students in their classes (WPA 6 and WPA 7).

These advances in technology, however, did not change the overarching goals of the first-year writing classroom, which were to help students understand how to write for a purpose to readers who have needs and interests. All of these parties, in this model, are working within various social, cultural, historical and technological contexts and there are things that hinder or help the accomplishment of those goals. In such a context of writing, it is well understood that genre matters and yet also that technology effectively challenges the way invention is viewed. Shifts in technology integration also impacted how the field of rhetoric and composition defined

composing and the ways in which the rhetorical situation could be taught and explicitly connected to students' lives.

The topic for the 2008 CO150 curriculum, climate change, was suggested by Dr. Steve Reid, the Composition Director in 2007, because of the efforts of two colleagues in the English Department who had masterminded a university-wide, highly acclaimed lecture series on climate change. Dr. Reid did the substantive work creating that syllabus, and then Dr. Sarah Sloane, who became Composition Director in 2008 following her sabbatical, inherited this curriculum.

The political context at the time was infused by debates about the reality and causes of climate change. This was occurring within a pedagogical context infused by discussions of difference (the growing of disability studies, work with prisoners, writing in the disciplines, e.g.), the development of critical pedagogies, and renewed interest in bringing pop culture and contemporary texts into the classroom, including visual and digital rhetorics. Additionally, in 2009, the Colorado Department of Higher Education determined that all students had to take an upper division writing composition class in addition to the already required first-year writing course. This dramatically influenced the work load of the composition faculty and the Comp Director. It also offered a curricular opportunity for continuing the rhetorical emphasis of the first-year course. Simultaneously, enrollment at CSU was climbing and had been for nearly eight years.

In retrospect, given the political and pedagogical context, Dr. Sloane believes that “I should have thought much more about [the course topic] when I stepped into the Rhetoric of Green curriculum [because] I have a dual responsibility to [GTAs] as a professor and administrator—in other words, as their teacher and their boss. There are topics I absolutely would not use because of the untenable position it would put GTAs as well as vulnerable,

temporary faculty in.” Dr. Sloane's willingness and ability to recognize the plight of untenurable faculty and GTAs further illustrates the awareness of CSU's local context by tenured faculty members in positions of influence.

Typically first-year composition direction reflects the professional stamp of the Directors. For example, one WPA mentioned that s/he came into the role wanting to unionize the contingent faculty at CSU, create adjunct professional development retreats and foster contingent faculty positions that allowed for promotion. S/he succeeded in doing the latter of the two but the unionization of the contingent faculty never occurred (WPA 1 and WPA 2).

Other thorny issues also challenge the work of composition directors. For instance, Dr. Sloane, who specializes in the area of copyright as it pertains to writing, decided to initiate doing a reader for CO150. Her reasons for doing so included:

1) [She] was worried about copyright issues since the whole CO150 curriculum relied on a particular set of articles (yes, freely available through the CSU library, but nonetheless problematic because of their long term use) and used the same ones year after year. [She] became concerned that such repeated use might not fall under the “fair use” doctrine and that, although it would be unlikely, [the department] could be sued.

(2) The department was feeling a huge budget crunch, and faculty lines, travel funds, and even the copier service contracts were being slashed, and new sources of revenue were needed.

With the help of contingent faculty members, Dr. Sloane developed a FYC reader with Fountainhead Press, an arrangement that has continued through the present. Such efforts suggest the range of complicating issues, concerns, and factors that all WPAs negotiate. These issues might seem to be tangential to political curricular choices, but they are not. They are part of those choices, and they both confound and complicate those choices, which suggest the amazingly difficult work of the WPA in constructing a program that is simultaneously relevant, ethical, and workable. Also, the sheer range of decision-making that a WPA makes in the local context gave this researcher pause.

As many WPAs point out, given the often difficult and sometimes even controversial nature of a Comp Director's role, it is absolutely vital that individuals holding the position be tenured because this person is often making decisions that have a university-wide impact (WPA 2, WPA 5 and WPA 7). Similarly, there remains considerable misunderstanding across the curriculum about the role of writing and its instruction, although work in WAC-like outreach within the local setting, by people like Dr. Sue Doe and Dr. Kate Kiefer, has gone some distance at CSU towards challenging some of these misunderstandings. Nevertheless, one WPA pointed out that there are still instances every year when somebody sends the Composition Director a blue, examination book via campus mail with an attached note saying, "Our students can't write. How did a student get to be a senior and have all these mistakes?" For that faculty member, writing clearly means grammatical and sentence-level issues rather than the rhetorical issues that CSU privileges in its first-year writing courses (WPA 2 and WPA 5).

That perception, that writing is equivalent to simple grammatical mistakes is a common one and one that the composition faculty and especially the Comp Director must work to dispel. In order to do that, s/he needs to be in a stable, secure position so that s/he can make an impact without being worried about losing his/her job. The role of the WPA thus virtually defines the rationale for academic freedom.

It is worth stating that academic freedom is not merely the ability to have a job forever, nor is it the ability to say whatever one wants. Instead, it is the opportunity to take the research and informed intellectual perspective that the Composition Director has earned through years of academic work and put it into action even if that research is in opposition to or fails to align with popular and/or common perceptions. Dispelling these myths is one of the key purposes for the WPA or Comp Director (WPA 2 and WPA 5). This is particularly important at CSU, where the

program has over 8000 students a year taking composition courses and some 30 NTTTF teaching professionals leading those courses. As one WPA pointed out, it is really important that activities are informed not by “Monday morning practice” exclusively but by solid research and experience and understanding of programs across the states (WPA 2). That is a very difficult thing to do at such a large program that also has a Master's program in rhetoric and that also oversees GTAs<sup>4</sup>.

Around 2012, Comp Director Lisa Langstraat and the special administrative faculty (all contingent) started talking about using Dr. Palmquist's book, *Joining the Conversation* as the new textbook for CO150, which would coincide with the newest of CSU's CO150 course topics: Ethics in Higher Education (WPA 7). These materials would take the place of the current CO 150 textbook, Dr. Steve Reid's the *Prentice Hall Guide*, and the course topic Internet and Social Media, which had been in place since 2010 immediately following *The Rhetoric of Green*. This made sense in many ways because it is very much a CSU-developed book unlike Dr. Jean Wyrick's book, which was used in the 70s and which she wrote while at the University of Florida (WPA 6 and WPA 7). Instead, Dr. Palmquist's book stemmed from all the teaching that had been done during his time at CSU and the assignments that had been developed. When he started writing the book, he had been at CSU for about twelve years and all the experiences that he had had as Comp Director and as a writing teacher were incorporated into the book (WPA 6 and WPA 7). Likewise, Dr. Sue Doe wrote the teaching companion to the book. Thus, Dr. Palmquist says that “the textbook is a reflection of the CSU program,” one that took him seven years to write. Interestingly, Dr. Steve Reid's book, which was utilized for nearly twenty-three years, was also indicative of the CSU program and it is very unusual to have three people from

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to the thirty non-tenure track faculty at any given time, CSU also has thirty-two GTAs teaching writing in its program (WPA 2).

one department offering textbooks that are all successful on a national level. According to Dr. Palmquist, “that’s pretty rare, actually; I don’t know of any other program that has that kind of thing going for it in terms of that many textbooks that are top sellers. They’re all different books, but in a way they all come out of CSU's program.”

Dr. Palmquist’s book is currently being utilized in concurrence with the new Ethics of Higher Education reader, which was compiled by a group of contingent faculty and GTAs. Such a collaboration between tenured faculty, contingent faculty and graduate students is unusual on which to base a university required curricula, but it is another of many examples, demonstrating that the CSU composition program has managed to exemplify, at least since the late 1960s, the type of space that fosters, encourages and breeds Foucault’s "specific intellectual." Foucault says that "specific intellectuals" are individuals who, by their very natures, are able to focus simultaneously on their own academic specializations, the local environments they inhabit and the ways the two interact. In this way, CSU’s composition program is a space for resisting the status quo as it repurposes, redefines and reevaluates what it means to be a writer and critical thinker and how best to create them.

## CHAPTER 5

### SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

#### *Context*

Since 1960 Colorado State University has had eleven Composition Directors or Writing Program Administrators. The titles are used interchangeably at CSU. Of those individuals who have acted as Composition Directors since 1960, seven of them agreed to be interviewed for this project or to answer questions via email when an in-person or phone interview was not possible. I did not contact the remaining four WPAs as I was unable to obtain contact information for two of them and did not get the names of the other two until much too late in this project's progression.

I did contact 35 individuals consisting of GTAs, tenure-track faculty (TTF) and non-tenure track faculty (NTTF) via email and requested that they participate in an online survey. Of the total number emailed, thirteen completed the survey. I attribute this to the realities of being a graduate student, contingent and tenured faculty member and imagine that many people who responded via email and/or sent in their consent forms but who failed to fill out the survey intended to do so but forgot. In fact, I got this very reason when individuals responded via email or in person to my reminders.

Likewise, because I was a GTA at CSU only a year ago, I was able to take advantage of that personal capital when asking for participation. I imagine, had I not been asking peers to volunteer time and thoughts to this project, I would have gotten even fewer responses than I did. This reality is reflected in the tiny number of NTTF who responded to my query, especially given the controversial nature of my inquiry and the insecure status in which they find themselves. Such a low response is not altogether surprising in this case, and in fact, represents a

high learning curve by those in the NTTF position since often marginalized groups are "used" or "tokenized" without gleaning any personal or collective reward for the effort. This reality is problematic insofar as researchers continue to exploit those they find most interesting for their own aims without much concern for the individuals or groups they are studying (and I include myself and my own research in this condemnation).

### *The Respondents and Their Teaching Backgrounds*

Ten of the respondents represent current or recent GTAs while only two identified as NTTF members and one as TTF. As such, the survey's data sample is small and should not be generalized. However, it does give interesting initial insight into a composition program, the types of individuals who teach first-year composition in the local setting, and how the GTAs and some NTTF and one TTF view their roles within it.

Of the survey respondents, all of them had prior teaching experiences before taking the role of GTA or NTTF at CSU. The experiences ranged from one year (nine respondents) or 2 years of teaching experience (1 respondent) to ten or more years of experience (3 respondents) in such areas as Adult Education , Secondary Education, ECE, Elementary Education, Postsecondary experience and International experience (Figure 2). Because a few of the respondents had experience in more than one area, the number of respondents for each type of teaching experience reflects the multiplicity of that experience.

Those who had taught first-year comp at other institutions were asked to indicate if those courses were politically focused. Two said yes, that the other courses focused on civic discourses, the book *Freakonomics* or were at institutions that had specific political and/or cultural foci; the other said no, that the course was centered on modes.

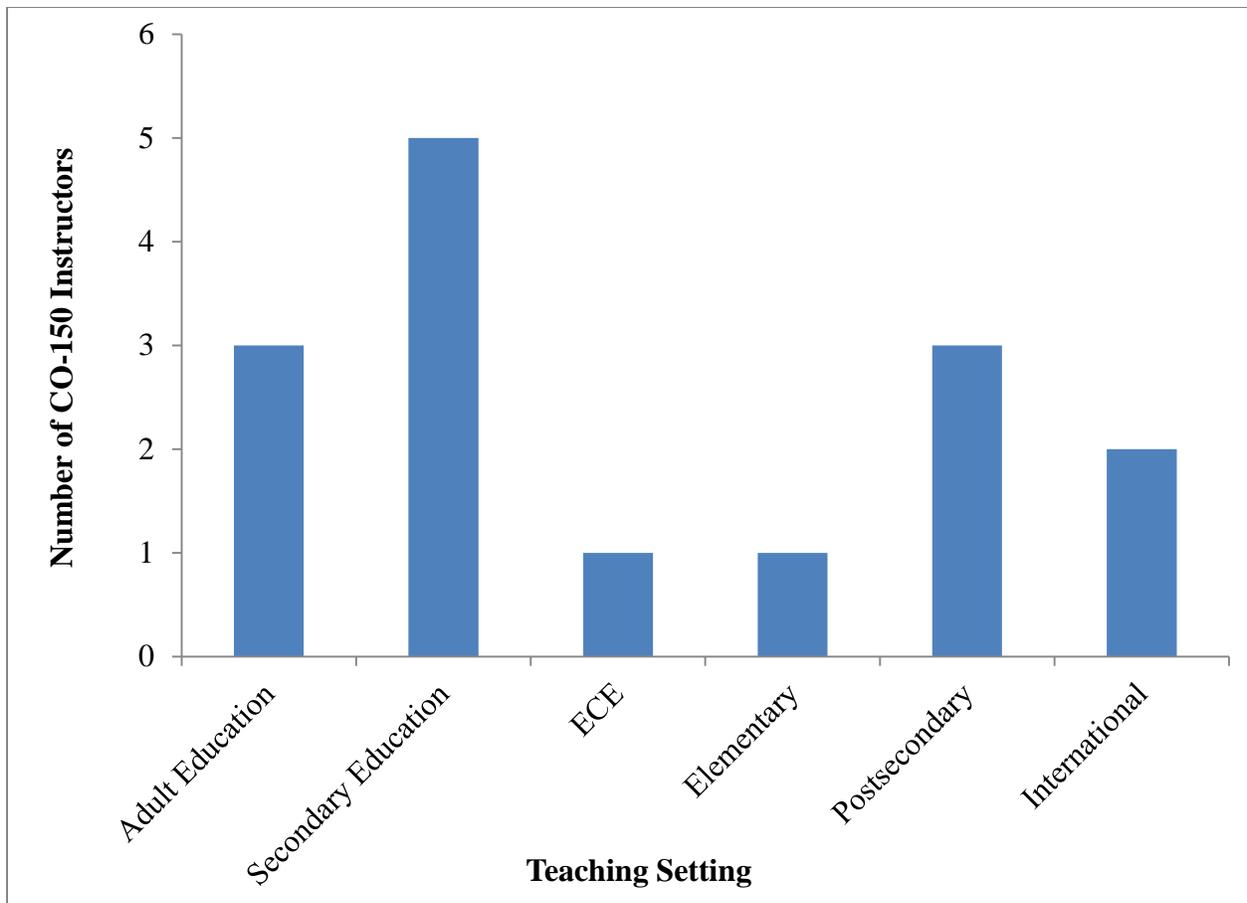


Figure 2. Number of FYC Instructors with  $\geq$  One Year of Teaching Experience in Specific Settings

Those who had taught in other settings also answered a contextual question about the alternate situations and four said they were politically-charged due to student populations and course topics, two said they should have been culturally or politically focused, also because of student populations but that they had chosen to "not step on toes" and the last one said s/he would "have liked it to be" because s/he felt it would have been more engaging for students.

*Teaching CO150*

The length of time spent teaching CO150 at CSU was fairly consistent among the respondents. One had taught two semesters at the time the survey was given, eight had taught three semesters, two had taught four semesters, one, seven and one, eleven. Likewise, the range

of CO150 topics taught by the respondents reflected that those who answered the survey were mostly recent teachers of the course. Ten of the respondents taught Internet and Social Media, eight are currently teaching Ethics of Higher Education, four taught Rhetoric of Green and/or Cultural Differences (there were two versions of Rhetoric of Green) and two taught Climate Change (Rhetoric of Green's predecessor). Of the topics they had the opportunity to teach, four respondents favored Ethics of Higher Education because they felt it was "more relevant" to students' lives; three preferred Internet and Social Media because they felt "comfortable teaching it and that they could relate it to students' interests"; and three preferred cultural differences because they felt it was "useful and relevant" to their students.

#### *Being a GTA and Vulnerability in the FYC Classroom*

Five respondents said they felt vulnerable in the classroom as a result of the chosen course topic, but only three said they felt it was due to academic rank rather than personal experiences. By personal experiences, the GTAs mentioned specific traumatic situations they had endured which they felt affected their ability to feel safe when discussing some topics. When asked how they dealt with those feelings, one said s/he "just did." The other three said they did not mention such feelings to students and instead spoke to colleagues or friends or simply reflected and jotted notes about how better to handle the situation next time. Of the three respondents who felt that their vulnerability was due to academic rank one mentioned a lack of training in dealing with sensitive topics, another the desire to do a job well in an environment that s/he felt did not accentuate her/his teaching or research expertise and the third that s/he did not want to "step on toes" or "jeopardize her/his position." One indicated that while s/he did not feel that the vulnerability was due to academic rank, "in retrospect, [I] probably should have." S/he did not choose to elaborate on this comment.

Those who answered that their academic rank did not affect the way they chose to handle sensitive issues in class referred to a personal ability to be culturally and ethically sensitive or offered their lack of experience as a reason not to be concerned about it. The average rating out of ten (where ten is completely comfortable and one is not at all comfortable) in response to how comfortable the teachers were treating these issues in class was 6.2.

### *FYC Course Topics and Class Climate*

Many stated that course topic has a "huge", "immense" or "substantial" effect on the classroom climate. Responses indicated that the topic of the course can engage or alienate students immediately and contributes to cohesion and focus even if it allows for disparate perspectives by giving students a common theme to discuss and question.

Four of the respondents had been part of creating and/or overseeing the curricula for CO150 and while they all seemed to agree that the course topic was important, not all of them agreed that it influenced their pedagogical strategies or styles. Four respondents said it did not have much impact on the strategies they used in the classroom. One did not respond. One confessed to not knowing what a first-year composition course is. The other seven gave specific examples about how various CSU CO150 topics had altered the way they taught, the style they used (student-centered v. teaching centered etc.) or how they approached subject matter. Three indicated that course topics confined student choice, which they allowed made it easier for them as new instructors but they felt also impeded student participation and hindered engagement. One mentioned that course topics had altered her/his way of speaking, dressing and moving around campus such that s/he "dresses up," has stopped "meandering" and asks to be called by a formal title. Another said that the new topic of Ethics of Higher Education made him/her feel more able to converse about his/her current status as a GTA without that position being viewed in a

negative way. Three respondents said that course topics directly impact their enthusiasm for teaching writing and thus, positively or negatively impact their pedagogy in that way.

### *The Effect of Politics on FYC Pedagogy*

While a few respondents made links between pedagogy and politics when asked about the contexts that surrounded their time as GTAs at CSU, half of them confessed that they did not pay close attention to pedagogical trends, felt unable to identify any current political or pedagogical moments/foci and claimed not to be well-versed in political issues, even those that directly and locally impacted their own situations. One called attention to CSU's "conservative political context," another to the fact that "there seems to be a small movement of those who are trying to make better conditions for the GTAs but it doesn't seem to be loud enough or enough people pushing for the change."

On the other hand, when the WPA interviewees, along with at least four survey respondents, answered the question: "What was the context, pedagogically and politically around your time as a faculty member at CSU?" the information was much different. I learned that there are upwards of 200 sections of CO150 (first-year composition) taught at any given time at CSU and nearly all of them are consistently taught by GTAs and NTTF members. Further, the political climate currently indicates that the topic of contingent faculty is front and center, at least at CSU, given that President Tony Frank emphasized the equity of adjunct labor in his Fall 2013 address. This stated commitment to improving the status and working conditions of NTTF renewed enthusiasm just in time for the 9th annual Campus Equity Week event. As one faculty member pointed out:

Now that HB1144 (a bill sponsored by State Rep Randy Fischer and enacted into law April 12, 2012) officially allows for multiyear contracts, up to three years in length, it is time that our department and program offer these to our NTTF members.

Two GTA respondents also specifically mentioned labor concerns in their "additional comments." One professed a love of teaching but a concern that it would be hard to continue teaching if it did not pay more and/or offer better job security, particularly as s/he ages. The other spoke of an experience with a mentor who "didn't want to give undue attention to ignorance" and so, simply chose to ignore problematic issues in her first-year composition classroom, which the respondent felt was "the complete opposite of what we should be striving for as FYC educators."

### *FYC as a Space for Developing Critical Thinkers*

One GTA mentioned the belief that the current CO150 course topic, Ethics of Higher Education:

strikes the perfect balance because GTAs and FYC students are all new(ish) to the university, so we can ask questions and build critiques together. We can still do critical work, and it is grounded and responsive to the context in which we live and work.

This sentiment was echoed in other GTA, TTF and NTTTF's responses about first-year composition classrooms being spaces for developing critical thinkers. Many said it was a collaborative space where students have choices in what is taught and how; a space where students talk "as much if not more than the instructor" and where "expectations for individual responsibility and contributions are high."

A few respondents mentioned that fostering critical thinkers requires a space that "pushes students out of their comfort zones and [allows for] consideration of these ideas through discussion, low stakes writing and group work." It is a space where "knowledge is critiqued, frameworks are denaturalized and multiple perspectives are considered" and where "systems of power are questioned and ideals of citizenship, the world, and patterns are wondered about." Such a space must be "respectful and privilege everyone's voices equally and safely, not simply

the teacher's voice or outspoken students' voices. It must be egalitarian and create room for everyone to have a voice."

One respondent expressed concern that s/he did not know how to foster such a space but that it would require "more diversity and liberal politics than CSU has;" another, that individuals are too different for any one space to adequately develop critical thinkers. S/he did qualify that the classroom was an important place to start and that to do so would be to give "students information and see how they analyze and interpret it and then guide them through the process."

#### *FYC's Purpose and the Role of its Instructors*

Despite these very specific ways that first-year composition classes might be made spaces that create critical thinkers, when asked about the purpose of a FYC classroom and the role of the instructor in that class, many of the respondents reverted to more traditional ways of seeing and thinking about classrooms, pedagogy and the teaching of writing. This was especially evident when GTA responses were juxtaposed with the NTTF and TTF responses.

Common GTA responses included:

- to reinforce basic college-level writing skills
- to give students time to improve their close and critical reading skills
- to introduce freshman to general college expectations
- to help them learn rhetorical concerns that professors throughout the university will expect them to be competent in
- teachers should help students succeed in the class
- introduce students to college life (time management, writing styles, ways of arguing)
- transition the student from high school to college
- introduce shared vocabulary

- solidify expectations and procedures of college learning
- the instructor should facilitate learning college procedures and expectations accessibly
- ensure that all students are writing at a baseline level
- helping students identify expectations of writing in specific situations, gain clarity in their writing, and identify organizational patterns

Two respondents had slightly different takes on FYC (one a GTA and the other a NTTF):

- It serves as an intro to academic discourse, critical thinking and rhetorical analysis such that students develop critical awareness of audience, purpose, context, texts, themselves and the flexibility to tailor their rhetorical choices to differing rhetorical situations. The instructor then helps students develop critical thinking and writing skills, engage respectfully and ethically with one another and develop lifelong writing habits. At CSU, given the small classes especially for GTAs, the instructor also builds community and gives students personal attention that they may not get elsewhere.
- The comp classes are essential for the connectivity of the campus and its students.

It is not altogether surprising, given the expressed purposes for first-year composition that the stated implications of the GTA and NTTF titles at CSU were subsequently discussed in this way:

*NTTF and TTF Responses*

1) The biggest implication of being NTT is that I am an "at-will" employee. The implication of being an "at-will" teacher is that I may not have a job to return to the following year. The result of this implication is that I am constantly job-searching, while

trying to maintain focus on the job currently being done. Attention is split due to lack of job security.

2) One implication of being NTT is that I am supposed to be in a 100% teaching role. However, to make yourself a competitive asset as an NTT, you HAVE to make yourself noticed, which means that you are serving on various committees, participating in as many professional development opportunities as possible, attending a variety of meetings, writing letters for students and colleagues, and bending over backward to make sure they won't overlook the hard work you put in. In short, the implication is that if you are NTT, you will be 100% teacher PLUS all the extras.

3) As a NTT faculty member I will be perpetually living paycheck-to-paycheck. If any kind of catastrophe happens, I will be bankrupt. So, in addition to having no job security, there is no "life" security either. I think CSU offers better conditions than other universities around the country, but that is not to say that these conditions are humane or sustainable.

#### *GTA Responses*

1) I can only speak to my experience in the English Dept. I would say that we definitely get more training and materials for lesson planning than other universities. I also think we have a much larger workload, considering the number of students and classes we teach. That is frustrating. We also get paid the same as TAs in other departments though they do a considerably smaller amount of work.

2) I believe that being a GTA at CSU was a generally positive experience for me, which was mostly due to the support of the English department faculty. I will also say that I do

not think that everyone who is a GTA at other universities are quite so lucky to have a positive experience (plenty of support, training, etc) from stories that I have heard.

3) GTA-ship seems to be different for English majors here at CSU than it is for other majors; we create our own lesson plans, teach the classes, grade everything, etc., while other GTAs work with a faculty member and grade papers, and maybe they have other tasks too, I don't know. I think it's similar to other universities.

4) Being a GTA at CSU implies a certain degree of expertise, training, and familiarity with university course expectations and student needs. It also implies that there is a support system in place. It seems as though other universities are not as invested in the training and support process.

5) The GTA title implies that we are not instructors of record; that we are assisting full professors with grading rather than teaching classes ourselves. I think that other universities assign fewer responsibilities to graduate students who have "assistant" in their job titles. I am sure, though, that there are other large universities where GTAs teach multiple sections, as we do, and have the same title.

6) I think the implications are different in different departments. However, I think part of the implications is that there is a certain amount of work that is expected and little room to negotiate that. In our program, I believe that more work is expected than in some other programs. However, I was also a GTA at CU Boulder and the work load was roughly equal to our workload.

7) As graduate teaching assistants, we have the full responsibility of teaching and managing two classes completely on our own. I know in other departments or on other campuses this is not usually the case often GTAs are just expected to assist a professor

with grading or doing some classroom management, but usually never total responsibility.

8) In my graduate program at a different state university, we were also called GTAs. Because the title was the same at CSU as it was in my graduate program, I did not think much of it. I do think confusion arises for people outside the department about whether GTAs are actually the instructor of record for the class. For example, at my graduate school, philosophy GTAs only assisted the instructor of record with student reading groups and by grading papers. In the English department, of which I was a member, however, GTAs were the instructor of record. It might be helpful to use a different title that more accurately conveys that GTAs are the instructors of record.

9) We are instructors of record for two sections of college comp. At other universities, GTAs teach only one section, or shadow a professor and grade papers, hold office hours / discussion groups, etc. So I guess you could say the implications of the GTA title are misleading. We should be referred to as Instructors of Record.

While there are some discrepancies, most of the comments reflected similar misgivings, concerns or fear about having the title GTA or NTTF member at CSU. Not surprisingly, those who hold GTA-ships are less concerned with job security and more concerned with how workload impacts their schoolwork than those who are NTTF, as a GTA-ship is often viewed, like being a graduate student, as a temporary lifestyle.

### *WPA Interview Results*

#### *Coding*

Many of the WPA interview responses, indicated concern for their GTA and NTTF counterparts, as well as showing a highly congenial attitude towards other composition

department faculty members. This was so universally true that one of the qualitative categories that emerged from the interviews was that of Collegiality, which took into account any positive mention of other colleagues (GTAs, NTTF and/or TTF) and/or work done collaboratively within the department. The responses suggest that it is not simply teaching experience or a foundation in composition theory and pedagogy that makes individuals comfortable in a teaching environment but also the day-to-day implications of that environment on other aspects of their lives such as job security, stress, workload, personal interactions, collegiality etc.

The other categories that emerged from the WPA/CD interviews were, as is typical of an open emergent coding system, highly observable within and across interview transcriptions: CSU Program, Curricula, Publications, Technology, Pedagogy, Universities Writ Large/Other Universities, Finances and Theory/Belief.

The CSU Program category delineated any discussion of CSU's composition program and/or the English department's role in creating or altering it. Curricula referred to any discussions or mentions of various composition or English-specific curricula topics pertaining to the history of rhetoric and composition, to CO150 specifically or when comparing different courses with similar objectives (i.e. Women's Studies courses, Communications courses etc.). Publications referenced textbooks or articles that were part of, came directly from and/or were written by those interviewed. Technology focused on the uses of technology within the CSU Composition program and/or English department, which were a prominent feature at CSU during the 80s and 90s and continue to be a focus as the potential for multimodal writing enters the discussion for potential CO150 assignments. The majority of the CSU Program, Technology and Publications information provided by respondents is accounted for in the "Specific Intellectual..." section of this thesis. Pedagogy encompassed any discussion of how to teach

writing or train GTAs to teach writing, as the GTA program at CSU is a prominent feature of the English department and also one of the key responsibilities of the Composition Director.

Universities Writ Large/Other Universities came out of alternate examples that many of the interviewees gave to explain specific topics of discussion or to give comparisons. Finances covered any mention by interviewees of money either within the department or across the university that related to funding for the English department, WAC/WID programs, composition courses, faculty positions and the like. Lastly, the Theory/Belief category highlighted those comments that had theoretical underpinnings and/or were predicated upon the individuals' scholarly opinions.

### *FYC Teaching Experience*

Not surprisingly, all of the Comp Directors at CSU over the last few decades have had experience teaching first-year composition; in every case but one, they have taught first-year composition both at CSU and elsewhere. Likewise, most of them have been graduate teaching assistants or contingent faculty at one time or another and thus, the individuals running the composition program at CSU understand both the abstract, theoretical side of composition theory and pedagogy as well as the practical side of being a composition instructor.

### *Defining FYC*

Despite the vast experience and knowledge they collectively brought regarding FYC, four of the seven interviewed WPAs explicitly mentioned that their personal beliefs surrounding the purposes of FYC (CO150) may be “in the minority”, did “not align with the overall departmental view” or were “not the popular views” of FYC’s purpose. How they defined the purpose of FYC, however, was not altogether dissimilar. All of the WPAs felt that FYC should have some rhetorical element to it, that it was an imperative course for student retention and that it was

useful for fostering its objective of teaching critical thinking skills. They each had their own elaborations on the purpose of FYC, however, as is noticeable in their responses.

For example, WPA 5 said that the purpose of a first-year composition class is "to educate students in how to be successful student writers—and to become skilled writers in their lives beyond college. Students should also be taught the *enjoyment* of writing and that we need to work with a whole range of writing, not just academic and workplace writing" (WPA 5). Thus, a FYC class might "not only study rhetorically effective texts and learn how audience, purpose, and message (including style, form, content, and visual rhetorics) shift and cohere in different writing performances, but it would also include learning how to write a good letter to the editor, a travel blog, a personal journal, a collage of image and word, or a self-guided exploration or reflection on an idea that matters only to the student" (WPA 5). In some sense, s/he felt that the FYC course could align the expressivist ideas of writing with the notion of the rhetorical situation.

In his/her dream FYC course, "students would not only be learning rhetorical terms and approaches to writing, and ways to rhetorically analyze text, genre, discourse, language, and purposes; but they would also be given time to play with writing and reflections and ideas that were *not* overtly considering audience" (WPA 5). Instead, FYC would address students in every discipline not only in terms of how to perform rhetorical analysis, but to give students a place to play with words, discover meanings, and enjoy putting together writing that has no overtly defined audience at all (WPA 5).

Another WPA agreed that FYC should not simply prepare students for academic writing in their disciplines nor should FYC introduce freshmen to literature or writing about literature (WPA 4). WPA 4 felt that the CCHE goals for the course: to give students frameworks and tools

(rhetorical and process) to become more critical thinkers, readers, and writers at a reasonably sophisticated level, "are important ones and should be supported." S/he continued that because FYC (at CSU) is not the final opportunity to help students develop their writing skills, it does not have to encompass every writerly skill they might need. Nonetheless, s/he asserted that FYC is "a crucial course in the sequence of students' coursework for the ways that we can help foster lifelong learning and writerly habits" (WPA 4).

Further, as students develop these writerly habits, FYC has the potential to prepare them to do writing as an educated citizen, something another WPA thought was necessary but acknowledged that such a perspective "does not usually fit with institutional guidelines or FYC objectives/expectations" (WPA 1). Another WPA added that, instead, FYC offers opportunities for critical writing and thinking in a focused class that explicitly teaches writing, which is a monumental difference from a class that requires writing assignments as part of the course (WPA 2). FYC tries to teach students that there are certain ways to approach and think about writing processes, genres and audiences so they can respond to a variety of situations (WPA 1).

#### *A FYC Instructor's Role*

In many cases, what composition instructors do, according to WPA 2, is slow the process down; teach the writing process and rhetorical theory in the hope that students will develop more sophisticated habits of thinking and writing.

S/he adds that there is a lot going on in supporting first year students. Teaching writing is very different than teaching a math class because students write about issues that are important to them and their lives no matter what the curriculum's focus. Some students need faculty to know what they are going through and will certainly talk about personal issues in a smaller, writing class in a way that they do not do in a math course. This is just one example of how literacy, learning and acquisition differ from other kinds of learning and acquisition. First-year

composition exists, in part, to help students develop their ability to critically think about the world and their place in it and it's the teacher's role to help them navigate this difficult time (WPA 2).

Another WPA states that an instructor (no matter the course) facilitates learning—focuses on learning rather than teaching and that the purpose of the instructor in FYC is to help students see how the course concepts, particularly rhetorical context, give writers meaningful ways to make writerly decisions. S/he continues:

teachers model writing and response strategies, reading practices and strategies, critical thinking strategies. Teachers select and organize materials and activities so that students can practice the critical skills and techniques they will draw on later in other academic and public communication settings. (WPA 4)

For this reason and others, WPA 5 asserts that the best teachers of writing "are themselves practitioners of writing—someone who herself or himself struggles to put words together and make some form of meaning (whether for herself or for others). That teacher might be an academic writer, a writer of poems and stories, or a nonfiction writer or journalist, but a teacher of writing should be one who writes." S/he explains that "this is more important than having a solid grounding in rhetorical theories or stances" (WPA 5). Despite this, when GTAs are hired for the Composition Program, students who are the best prepared to teach writing in a rhetorically-based curriculum are the ones that are chosen rather than those who are writing practitioners (WPA 5).

These individuals are hired over authors, according to WPA 5, because one of the key objectives of first-year composition at CSU and elsewhere is to develop critical thinking skills in students. Thus, all things being equal, it seems to be assumed that a potential GTA with a rhetorical background will do a better job teaching first-year comp, including critical thinking skills, than one who is a seasoned author.

### *Defining Critical Thinkers*

WPAs defined critical thinkers as those capable of understanding the rhetorical strategies that inform communicated messages, weigh and evaluate different perspectives about that message and position themselves in an informed way (WPA 2). Likewise, many said that critical thinkers are those who have the ability to see outside of cultural norms, think beyond what is normalized and partake in cultural critiques (WPA 1, WPA 2, WPA 6). Another WPA mentioned that s/he teaches critical thinking skills in every class, and so, has not abandoned thinking about these skills because s/he no longer teaches CO150. This WPA offered an analogy:

Each October I open up the drawer where I keep my cotton and wool sweaters. I take out all the sweaters and closely examine each one to see if the last laundering missed any stains or if I've snagged the fabric on something. I try some on to see if they've stretched or shrunk (or, alas, I've stretched). I ask myself if some of them would keep me warmer than the sweatshirts I usually grab as my default cold defense. I question whether my very favorite sweater isn't looking too worn and shabby and I always argue with myself about whether I should indulge in buying a new sweater. (WPA 4)

This analogy exemplifies the critical thinking skills drawn upon as the WPA painstakingly examines every sweater in the drawer. The process portrays the critical thinking that first-year composition instructors want their students to apply when they hear or read an argument (or ad or blog or any other text). The instructor wants the students to closely and critically 'read' the text, see where the holes are and determine how well the text actually fits the context through which it is designed to communicate. The instructor is asking the students to question their own assumptions about the topic as well as the assumptions of the individual making the argument or creating the text. Most importantly, s/he is asking the students to apply thought, solve problems, and make decisions based on a conscious thought process rather than a mindless reflex (WPA 4).

As such, a critical thinker is someone who "has been educated to analyze texts, synthesize meanings, and express or represent those meanings in lucid, thoughtful prose that uses the conventions of Standard Written English" (WPA 5). Here, almost everything can be

considered a text—not only anything that is representative, but virtually anything that can be seen, heard, or contextualized. From his/her perspective, the whole world is a text, and the critical thinker is one who can parse out what she or he sees, and then make reasonable and well-founded conclusions about that information. If analysis is taking things apart, and synthesis is putting them back together in a new way then, critical thinkers are adept at both analysis and synthesis. “They are educated in how to understand the world in insightful, creative, and often new ways; not tethered by the old nor seduced by the new” (WPA 5). As such, the first-year writing classroom is an ideal space for cultivating critical thinkers.

### *Navigating FYC as a Space for Developing Critical Thinkers*

All of the WPAs interviewed felt that classrooms in general were useful spaces for developing critical thinking skills. Further, writing classrooms, given their small size, can support small group conversation, which allows for more individualized pacing; something that is impossible to achieve in a large lecture hall. However, not all of them felt like critical thinking skills could be developed only in one class by one instructor but rather that it had to be part of a larger movement (WPA 1).

One WPA said, "What we know about the act of writing is that it is a cognitive skill, an episteme, an epistemological process that is different from any other way of thinking, of making meaning. Thus, the act of composing offers opportunities for critical thinking that listening to music or watching a TV show do not cognitively mimic" (WPA 2). As a result, according to WPA 4, "classrooms make sense as a venue for helping students develop critical skills – reading, writing, thinking and talking all help students engage with ideas, so small-group discussions allow students to try out ideas with each other—to practice the critical thinking activities of 'sweater assessment.'" Then, s/he elaborates, "Those activities can be followed by larger group discussions and more writing. The use of peer review and metacognitive writing activities further

perpetuate self-awareness of thinking and decision making" (WPA 4). Likewise, because the writing classroom allows for practice together in a contained learning community, the students are more willing to engage their critical thinking skills outside of the classroom (WPA 4).

In this way, the writing classroom is an “absolutely appropriate and perhaps even necessary” space for fostering critical thinking skills (WPA 5). Unfortunately, WPA 5 continues:

There can be a risk when people interpret teaching the skills of critical thinking to mean teaching the skills of political and cultural analysis. That is, it is fine and good to give students texts that are familiar to them, for example, popular culture texts, to show them how to analyze and understand them in their social, cultural, and economic contexts. Such unpacking of the familiar and naturalized or normalized is very important.

However, teaching specific theoretical perspectives that allow only particular outcomes may serve to perpetuate norms in ways that are detrimental to the students in the classroom. For instance, because all theories are really just ways of looking; they provide a lens and indicate a direction that both draws the eye to a particular set of experiences or ways of knowing and deflects the eye from seeing other experiences or ways of knowing. Kenneth Burke makes a point much like this when he talks about terministic screens, and the ways in which they direct and deflect attention.

Consequently, the instructor, WPA5 states, must carefully craft the discussions of texts such that s/he might say, “Given a text’s perspective and the body of knowledge on which it is grounded, and its way of perceiving through these specific lenses...etc.” S/he should never direct her/his conclusions, only attempt to teach students a range of ways to look, to reason, to create (WPA 5).

According to WPA 6, statistically, because most academics have very liberal politics, they have a hard time being objective when they get into controversial or politically or culturally-charged conversations (WPA 6). Similarly, since pedagogies are never neutral, nor language benign, part of teaching critical thinking skills also requires “showing students the man behind the curtain, a step that is often left out of some critical pedagogies or ways of teaching critical thinking” (WPA 5). After one has taught for a while s/he knows better how to play devil's advocate, how to walk certain minefields or at least tiptoe through them. However, it is less

simple to teach the TAs those nuances while also trying to teach them so much else about being in the classroom (WPA 6).

This is potentially why a radical pedagogy or a critical pedagogy is less present in many first-year writing classes, because so many of them are taught by GTAs and NTTF. According to WPA 3, "trying to generalize something as complicated as Freire's pedagogy, whose classroom context was so radically different than the context faced by students at CSU or in other American public schools, would just complicate an already difficult situation. The conditions under which people are entering the classroom are different, the conditions in which things go on are different, and when people just theorize to the point where they are not recognizing the social and cultural realities then it may be [more than] simply a waste of time" but in fact, detrimental to students' learning. Too often, as WPA 3 states, teaching a critical pedagogy is more about:

pat[ting] ourselves on the back about how progressive we are as opposed to saying, "we've got students with real problems, we've got issues of poverty in this country, what do we do about that?" Is it all radical pedagogy or does the critical thinking have to go out in the community in more fundamental ways and reshape what's going on there? Is it a case of poor preparation of teachers, is it an oppressive system, or are the teachers actually working to make these kinds of changes already? What's standing in their way if it's not? Radical Pedagogy wasn't particularly nuanced in the 90s. It was more like, "Woohoo! We've thought of a new idea; this is really cool, let's push it." Now, like every other aspect of theory, it has become increasingly well-grounded and increasingly well-informed but at the time it was promising way more than it was delivering and it was unable to account for all kinds of realities that students were facing."

Too often when pedagogies are adopted, they are adopted wholesale from a context that does not align culturally or economically with the one to which it will be applied. Thus, it is sort of like, "Look this worked at Yale let's use it at Larimer County Community College. It is imperative that when adopting pedagogies, the rhetorical situation, which we are teaching, is taken into account. (WPA 3)

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

When I first started gathering consent forms for this project and sending out emails requesting participation in my surveys and interviews, I was surprised by the reluctance of people to participate. I received a few responses regarding the wording of my consent form and others expressing concern and fear about just how anonymous a survey or an interview could be given the small number of participants in such a localized setting. I also had individuals flat out tell me they were not comfortable answering the questions I posed, anonymously or not.

Similarly, during the interviews most participants told me which stated information was not "on the record" and why it should be left out of transcriptions and the final document. Others said that certain things could be utilized if they were not attached to their names or identifying information. Still others asked to be consulted about chosen quotes and recorded information that made its way into the final thesis. The concerns GTAs and faculty expressed suggest reasons for the small survey sample I ended up analyzing. More importantly, their concerns educated me about the very real challenges associated with curricular choices undertaken within contexts of contingency. Such contingency is not limited to laboring faculty but to programmatic health under circumstances of limited resources and multiple, overlapping audiences. These audiences range from local ones to tertiary ones, including state curriculum standards.

Perhaps most importantly, I learned through the difficulty of obtaining willing and enthusiastic participants that writing curricula is difficult to develop and difficult to enact. It is never neutral, even when topics seem benign. Rather, because we ask students and teachers to undertake original thinking and to risk their own ideas and response to those ideas, we undertake processes that are inevitably political and challenging. When we add to these challenges the

additional goal of making writing instruction relevant and timely, WPAs and faculty of all ranks, in addition to students, assume risk at many levels since they risk the articulation of ideas and making those ideas susceptible to critique. Additionally, faculty and WPAs make decisions based on their theoretical and pedagogical preparation, which differ substantially.

Thus, the development of curricula for first-year composition involves a complex web of opportunities, limitations, and circumstances in which the overall attempt to deliver sound instruction is always constrained. If I was unsure of the importance of the topic prior to embarking on this project, I have been convinced by those who participated and educated me as to my own naiveté regarding these issues. Ultimately, it's not a simple task to undertake a curriculum, whether it is seen to involve a politically charged topic or not. In the end, the aims and purposes of first-year composition, like the aims of writing itself, will always be constrained by context. No one can be said to be the "author" of a curriculum; rather, a curriculum is authored by the historical, social, and cultural moment in which it is situated.

Today's curricular focus on the Ethics of Higher Education is both informed by contingent labor and constrained by it. It is similarly informed and constrained by issues relating to tuition and access since only some students-- today a dwindling number due to unprecedented tuition increases--will ever see the light of a classroom as it becomes increasingly out of the realm of economic feasibility for many students. By the same token, an earlier topic for first year composition in the local setting, "The Rhetoric of Green," was itself a function of its time and place, reflecting the university's commitment to "green" policies, its acclaimed lecture series on climate change, and an ongoing hot, local dispute on the university campus as to whether climate change was actually real.

These considerations evoke Pratt's contact zones, Peter Elbow's need for personal voice, Dewey's call for language to communicate, create and confound, and students' and teachers' increasing demand to share power in ways Foucault would probably say was difficult but not impossible.

Given Foucault's belief that resistance must be extremely specific and focused, it makes sense for it to be locally-driven which is why Colorado State's recent adoption of the first-year composition course topic: Ethics in Higher Education works. For, while the topic may be pedagogically charged or sterilized as the instructor sees fit, the space for resistance regarding all matter of issues--whether academic labor, tuition and access, diversity, academic honesty, or campus safety--is most assuredly in a first-year composition classroom at a public, land grant university, where these issues are most prevalent, most identifiable and most likely to be subverted. They are also the places where the effects of such a resistance would likely have a tangible impact.

The survey results showed a wide range of experiences and sophistication with which GTAs approach the teaching of CO150 and the way they view the topics they teach. While a few are hyper aware of their contingent roles, the implications of that role for CO150 topics, students and teachers and the pedagogical, curricular and political realities that go along with them, many others do not show similar levels of awareness. Some are not even interested. As one respondent said, "I just want to get my Master's and get out."

Other graduate students see their GTA-ship as having special responsibilities pedagogically, curricularly and societally. There seems to be a core group of GTAs who genuinely enjoy teaching, want to learn to do it well and see the value of CO150 as a space for creating critical thinkers and for showing students how to view the world differently. For

example, all of the GTA survey respondents mentioned words like, "analyze or closely examine," "multiple perspectives", "observation," "consider," "avoid manipulation," "reflect", "be informed" and "evaluate" when giving the definition of a critical thinker. It is possible, given their context as CO150 instructors at CSU that they have learned these terms specifically through the teaching of the rhetorical situation and the conversation model as CSU has conceived it. Nonetheless, the GTAs' similar views regarding the definition of critical thinking are even more striking when one considers how vastly different their answers were to the survey questions: Do you see FYC as a space for developing critical thinking? What is the purpose of FYC? Of the instructor in that class? Does being a GTA carry special responsibilities when it comes to curricular or pedagogical choices?

Conversely, the NTTF sample was tiny and thus, not generalizable. However, as one might expect from contingent employees, the two who did respond focused fairly closely on their status as "at-will" employees and neither answered the question "Will you be teaching at CSU in the future?" In response to the follow-up question, "If you will be teaching at CSU in the future, what will you be teaching and in what context," one NTTF member summed up the likely answer for all contingent faculty: "I don't know. I'd like to continue teaching [...] but as an NTT instructor, I cannot say for certain what the future holds."

Educational institutions should not encourage contingent faculty to abandon their culture as teachers and scholars but instead allow them to operate dialectically with the specific epistemological and cultural characteristics of their group without being subjected to wage, status and professional subjugation.

If the above quote holds universally true for contingent faculty (or at least, for the duration of their one, two or three year contracts, in states that allow them) then how can

"institutions of higher education [be] conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depend[ing] upon the free search for truth and its free exposition," as the AAUP 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure claims?

I recognize that this statement was posited in a different historical moment than the current one, where far more than half of the full-time faculty were in tenured or tenure-track positions. Nonetheless, the AAUP, and universities, via their ideologically founded mission statements seek what Foucault has announced has the potential for resisting the status quo: the creation of ordinary individuals who have knowledge of their own circumstances (the exact points where their material life conditions created by the larger system are fostered within specific sectors) (Foss et. al. 356). Such individuals, like the NTTF member quoted above are "able to articulately express these situations within (but not beholden to) the larger universal system" (356). As such, instead of blaming the system and trying to take the entire thing down at once, s/he/they will instead choose to chip away at it from their various points of expertise within their applicable contexts (Foss et. al. 356).

For example, a tenured faculty member might engage an activist theatre troupe through which a contingent faculty member or undocumented campus facilities worker might have his/her voice heard. Or, a contingent first-year composition instructor might make the leap and fully engage highly contested articles on *The Ethics of Higher Education* or *The Rhetoric of Green*. A GTA teaching *The Ethics of Higher Education* might choose to 'out' him or herself as a graduate student in order to more authentically engage students in the realities that come with being a graduate student, a contingent faculty member, and someone who could be considered a peer. Similarly, GTAs or contingent faculty might choose to have students partake in Bob Kegan

and Lisa Lahey's Four Column work to help students identify their own assumptions and how they are implicated in the systems of which they are an integral part (See Appendix D). Further, a WPA could complicate the university's way of viewing writing as a service course, GTAs and contingent faculty as 'disposable' and rhet/comp as less academic through WAC/WID outreach, explicit professional development and increased involvement and visibility in contingent faculty on-campus projects.

The purpose of such efforts would be that students and educators directly address the warrants and assumptions on which their ways of life, their day-to-day interactions are predicated. Such a direct address might be undertaken with the hope (but not the expectation) that some of those who learn to see and name their own cultural contexts might also choose to partake in resistances to their own life contexts. In this way, issues become more than academic concepts. Instead, they become real ways to question dominant forms of self and world understanding. They turn critical thinking into critical living. They undertake the very tasks that Lincoln, Jefferson, and Morrill imagined were the focus for a land-grant education aimed at developing a critical citizenry.

Interestingly, within the current context of nationwide fiscal belt-tightening, as state support for higher education continues its downward spiral all across the country, university systems, as a result of their employment practices, risk sacrificing the academic freedoms on which their missions are based and on which the international acclaim of American universities rests. At the same time they are also creating exactly the types of "specific intellectuals" that Foucault believes are able to redirect relations of power and resist hegemonies. The future of higher education in the United States is of great interest but is also, as these trends suggest, much in question and much in transition.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

When I began this project, I was sure that I was going to be doing research on the ways in which the “new” (or perhaps more accurately “old”) majority of contingent faculty across universities were negatively affecting instructors’ abilities to utilize “radical” and/or “critical” pedagogies in their first-year composition courses and likewise, sterilizing composition curricula. I was ready to argue that the first-year composition class should offer an ideal space for such curricula and pedagogies because it is a required course, one that creates interesting contact zones university-wide and offers a space that is more intimate than many (if not all) others in which a student finds herself, especially in a larger public university. This small, intimate space makes it more likely that the courses’ overall goals may be met, and simultaneously that students in such courses will be more engaged, more often retained at the university, and more likely to become “specific intellectuals” themselves. I planned to show that contingent first-year composition instructors are unable, due to lack of job security, to engage in this type of ‘important’ work and that this reality is detrimental to building civic-minded, critical thinkers, to the creation of “specific intellectuals” and to student retention. Thus, a “new” majority of contingent faculty, I planned to argue, is detrimental to a university but also, and more importantly, to society.

However, after I compiled the survey data and analyzed the responses, conducted the interviews with Composition Directors from across the better part of four decades at my local institution, transcribed and read them all, I synthesized the information and recreated a history of the composition program. After the process was finished and I had time to step back and analyze what it said, I began to realize that my original thoughts were not necessarily what my research was showing.

Of course, this is the point of conducting emergent, open, qualitative research in the first place, to create a theory rather than simply to test a hypothesis. As such, what I thought was going to happen was that this contingent faculty majority was going to be shown to adversely affect or at least threaten the curricula and pedagogy of first-year composition and also of universities more generally. What I actually found was that, at least at my home institution, it is the curricula and the pedagogy, carefully articulated and crafted by 'specific intellectuals' in positions of authority (i.e. Composition Directors/WPAs; Department heads etc.) who have the potential to impact the role of contingent faculty in a positive way. Consequently, my own local institution, whether (intentionally or not) is a site for specific intellectualism. And while it still has work to do in regards to the equity between TTF, NTTF and full-time special and temporary faculty, it began the process literally decades ago. As such CSU has begun to capitalize on its own potential as a subversive space through recent intentional consciousness-raising activities around contingent labor issues via the deliberate and thorough training and development of all of its faculty and through the hiring of individuals (both contingent and tenure-track) who fit the definitions of "specific intellectuals." These individuals are activists and educators to the extent that they are able to recognize the importance of thinking critically and are able and willing to teach others to do the same.

## CHAPTER 8

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## APPENDIX A

### GTA SURVEY QUESTIONS

How long have you worked at Colorado State University?

What years?

What roles have you filled?

What are the implications of the GTA title at CSU?

How do you think this differs elsewhere (in other universities)?

In your opinion, what is the purpose of a First-Year composition class?

Of the instructor in that class?

How do you define the term ‘critical thinker’?

What are your thoughts on the classroom as a space for developing critical thinkers?

What does that look like to you?

Had you taught CO150/FYC prior to teaching at CSU?

How long and in what context?

What were those courses like?

Would you describe them as culturally or politically engaged?

If so, in what ways?

Did you have any teaching experience prior to your GTA position at CSU?

If so, how long and in what context?

Would you describe them as culturally and politically engaged?

If so, in what ways?

How many semesters of CO150 have you taught at CSU?

Which years were they?

What topics did you teach, create and/or oversee for the CO150/FYC curricula?

Did you have a favorite FYC topic? What was it and why?

Will you be teaching at CSU in the future?

If so, what will you be teaching and in what context?

In what ways does the topic of a FYC comp course influence your pedagogical strategies/style?

Or does it?

To what extent do you feel the course topic affects the classroom climate?

Have you ever sensed that students have felt vulnerable as result of a course topic? Please Elaborate.

If so, how did you deal with those feelings?

Have you ever felt vulnerable in the classroom as result of the course topic itself? Please Elaborate.

If so, do you think your academic rank and lack of job security play into these feelings of vulnerability around teaching complex or controversial subjects?

In what ways?

How did you deal with those feelings?

Do you feel that national events impact the FYC curricula?

If so, in what ways?

How comfortable, on a scale of 1 to 10 are or were you with treating these issues in the classroom?

Do you feel that pedagogical trends impact the FYC curricula?

If so, in what ways?

Can you provide examples?

What was the context both pedagogically and politically around your time as a GTA? Specifically, as a CO150 instructor (if you also taught E210)?

In your experience, does being a GTA carry special responsibilities when it comes to things like pedagogy? Please elaborate.

Does it carry special responsibilities when it comes to things like curriculum choices? Please elaborate.

Is there anything you would like to add?

## APPENDIX B

### TTF SURVEY QUESTIONS

How long have you worked at Colorado State University?

What years?

What roles have you filled?

What are the implications of the TTF title at CSU?

How do you think this differs elsewhere (in other universities)?

In your opinion, what is the purpose of a First-Year composition class? Of the instructor in that class?

How do you define the term ‘critical thinker’?

What are your thoughts on the classroom as a space for developing critical thinkers?

What does that look like to you?

Had you taught CO150/FYC prior to teaching at CSU?

How long and in what context?

What were those courses like?

Would you describe them as culturally or politically engaged?

If so, in what ways?

Have you taught CO150 at CSU?

If so, how many semesters of CO150 did you teach? Which years were they?

What topics did you teach, create and/or oversee for the CO150/FYC curricula?

Did you have a favorite FYC topic? What was it and why?

In what ways does the topic of a FYC comp course influence your pedagogical strategies/style?

Or does it?

To what extent do you feel the course topic affects the classroom climate?

Have you ever sensed that students have felt vulnerable as result of a course topic? Please Elaborate.

If so, how did you deal with those feelings?

Have you ever felt vulnerable in the classroom as result of the course topic itself? Please Elaborate.

If so, do you think your academic rank plays into these feelings of vulnerability around teaching complex or controversial subjects? In what ways?

How did you deal with those feelings?

Do you feel that national events impact the FYC curricula?

If so, in what ways?

How comfortable, on a scale of 1 to 10 are (or were) you with treating these issues in the classroom?

Do you feel that pedagogical trends impact the FYC curricula?

If so, in what ways?

Can you provide examples?

What is (was) the context both pedagogically and politically around your time as a faculty member? A CO150 instructor (if applicable)?

In your experience, does being a TTF carry special responsibilities when it comes to things like curriculum choices? Please elaborate.

Is there anything you would like to add?

**APPENDIX C**  
**NTTF SURVEY QUESTIONS**

How long have you worked at Colorado State University?

What years?

What roles have you filled?

What are the implications of the NTTF title at CSU?

How do you think this differs elsewhere (in other universities)?

In your opinion, what is the purpose of a First-Year composition class? Of the instructor in that class?

How do you define the term ‘critical thinker’?

What are your thoughts on the classroom as a space for developing critical thinkers?

What does that look like to you?

Had you taught CO150/FYC prior to teaching at CSU?

How long and in what context?

What were those courses like?

Would you describe them as culturally or politically engaged?

If so, in what ways?

Have you taught CO150 at CSU?

If so, how many semesters of CO150 did you teach? Which years were they?

What topics did you teach, create and/or oversee for the CO150/FYC curricula?

Did you have a favorite FYC topic? What was it and why?

In what ways does the topic of a FYC comp course influence your pedagogical strategies/style?

Or does it?

To what extent do you feel the course topic affects the classroom climate?

Have you ever sensed that students have felt vulnerable as result of a course topic? Please Elaborate.

If so, how did you deal with those feelings?

Have you ever felt vulnerable in the classroom as result of the course topic itself? Please Elaborate.

If so, do you think your academic rank and lack of job security plays into these feelings of vulnerability around teaching complex or controversial subjects?

In what ways?

How did you deal with those feelings?

Do you feel that national events impact the FYC curricula?

If so, in what ways?

How comfortable, on a scale of 1 to 10 are (or were) you with treating these issues in the classroom?

Do you feel that pedagogical trends impact the FYC curricula?

If so, in what ways?

Can you provide examples?

What is (was) the context both pedagogically and politically around your time as a faculty member? A CO150 instructor (if applicable)?

In your experience, does being a NTTF carry special responsibilities when it comes to things like curriculum choices? Please elaborate.

Is there anything you would like to add?

**APPENDIX D**

<b>1</b>  <b>MY IMPROVEMENT GOAL</b>	<b>2</b>  <b>THINGS I DO (OR FAIL TO DO) THAT WORK AGAINST MY IMPROVEMENT GOAL</b>	<b>3</b>  <b>MY COMPETING COMMITMENTS</b>	<b>4</b>  <b>MY BIG ASSUMPTION</b>  <b>I assume that...</b>
		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: auto;">WORRY BOX</div>	