WRITING MAJORS

Eighteen Program Profiles

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CONTENTS

Forward
Sandra Jamieson vii

Introduction
Jim Nugent 1

PART I: WRITING DEPARTMENTS
1 DePaul University’s Major in Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse
Dorrie Bouslen 11

2 Reshaping the BA in Professional and Technical Writing at the
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Barbara L. Eplettener and George H. Jensen 22

3 The University of Rhode Island’s Major in Writing and Rhetoric
Libby Miles, Kim Hensley Owens, and Michael Pennell 36

4 Reforming and Transforming Writing in the Liberal Arts Context:
The Writing Department at Loyola University Maryland
Peggy O’Neill and Barbara Mallone 47

5 Fifteen Years Strong: The Department of Writing at the University
of Central Arkansas
Cory E. Smithers, Lisa Magagna, and Scott Payne 62

6 Oakland University’s Major in Writing and Rhetoric
Lori Ostergard, Greg Giberson, and Jim Nugent 73

7 Embracing the Humanities: Expanding a Technical
Communication Program at the University of Wisconsin–Stout
Matthew Livesey and Julie Watts 85

8 Building a Writing Major at Metropolitan State University: Shaping a Program to Meet Students Where They Are
Laura McCarten and Victoria Sader 98

9 Writers among Engineers and Scientists: New Mexico Tech’s Bachelor of Science in Technical Communication
Julie Dyke Ford, Juliane Newmark, and Rosario Duran 106
THEM COULD BE OUR STUDENTS
The Writing Major at Texas Christian University

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Charlotte Hogg, and Jody Murray

INTRODUCTION
As a cohort of faculty in rhetoric and composition, we share here our
experience in shaping a writing major at Texas Christian University
(TCU), a secular, private university of about 10,000 students in the coun-
try’s fourth-largest metropolitan area. Our experiences were marked
by both serendipity and strategy as we built upon existing resources,
made the most of opportunities, and listened to our students—all the
while respecting our colleagues and our own limitations. Beyond sim-
ply sharing our story, we hope that our insight can assist others who
want to develop a major that accounts for, and emerges from, local
contexts. Established in 2007, the TCU writing major has grown within
our English department, alongside the literature-focused English major.
And, though our path wasn’t straightforward, we take pride in a major
that deliberately reflects the culture of TCU: emphasizing the values of a
liberal arts education in tandem with pre-professional study. While some
new programs might require a large infusion of funding and faculty, we
built our major with existing resources, adapting to changes in the cam-
pus climate and expanding the reach of our department by situating
writing as a liberal art.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE:
OUR OWN RHETORICAL TRADITION
From the start, we have been lucky to have history on our side. Unlike
many English departments, where writing courses—and too often,
The English major that replaced the two-concentration system was designed according to a traditional period-and-coverage model that immersed students in literary study. In place of the five-course writing concentration students could once choose, only one writing course was required in the new major. Even with electives, English majors could take only a few writing courses. These constraints, however, ultimately helped our case for a separate major, rather than a return to the concentration.

Fortunately for us, existing courses in writing and rhetoric had not been eliminated with the writing concentration. The university catalog preserved a broad selection of courses, ranging from rhetorical history and criticism to technical and professional writing to magazine writing and creative writing workshops. By having this rich pedagogical resource, we could generate interest in a variety of writing courses simply by offering them—we did not have to justify their creation or shepherd them through several levels of curricular review. At first, these courses simply gave us teaching options, and we didn’t consider them components of a coherent major. However, when we began designing a BA in writing, we saw that their very variety reflected the department’s, and our own, commitment to a broad liberal arts mission. Thus, we did not consider the major as distinctly separate from English, nor did we imagine narrow definitions of writing that placed it in an exclusive category or defined it by instrumental ends. Rather, with the creation of a writing major, we hoped to expand our purview beyond composition courses and promote writing (symbol use) as a means of knowledge making. Our philosophy was this: writing is everywhere, belongs to everyone, and should be explored and practiced in as many forms as possible. Given our own broad training in rhet/comp, and the prospects for a major that could embrace writing in all of its forms, the exact shape and design of the curriculum was always secondary to our shared interest in promoting a culture of writing, reaching out to students beyond the English department, and preparing for the changes and challenges we knew were ahead of us.

TEACH IT AND THEY WILL COME

Long before seriously considering a major in writing, we were laying the groundwork to make a proposal feasible. We referred to our group as the rhet/comp “cadre,” but we were not defined by a program affiliation or recognized as a department committee. Nevertheless, we met regularly to discuss course rotations, the needs of our graduate students, and ways to strengthen rhet/comp and its reach. Looking back, we might
describe the years before the advent of our major as a period of strategic investments at opportune moments, a time when we concentrated on increasing the cadre's numbers and stimulating demand for writing courses, not just within the department but across the university.

We all shared an interest in being "program people," which inevitably led to our willing (albeit disproportionate) service to the department in administrative positions. During the period of strategic investment, three rhet/comp faculty in succession served as the director of undergraduate studies. The preponderance of rhet/comp faculty in administrative positions is widely acknowledged, but, in the context of building an undergraduate major, the costs of such work also come with benefits not so widely recognized. We garnered goodwill among our colleagues by demonstrating our commitment to the department as a whole. Perhaps more important, this service revealed ways that writing could play a larger role in the department. As the primary contact for students inquiring about the major, we had a clear sense that demand for writing was growing, especially from students in journalism and education, where changes in state certification requirements had led to some dissatisfaction. When we asserted that students wanted to take more writing courses, we could support their claims with enrollment patterns as well as comments students shared with us.

More writing courses would require more faculty, and our efforts to increase faculty lines in rhet/comp were aided by a number of circumstances. While only three strong in 2000, we have since grown to a cadre of seven tenure-track positions in rhetoric and composition (of twenty-three in the department), with six already tenured. This growth has resulted from steady increases in the graduate population at TCU, our dean's goal of having tenure-track faculty teach core curriculum courses, and our willingness to do so. In a typical five-course load, rhet/comp instructors generally taught two or three required composition courses. Another opportunity presented itself when our core curriculum went through a complete overhaul, designed primarily by the university's faculty, and we successfully advocated for retaining the requirements for both first- and second-year composition courses, along with two "writing emphasis" courses from any discipline that offered them. The new core curriculum thus reaffirmed the importance of writing at all stages—and potentially in all areas—of undergraduate study.

As new rhet/comp faculty joined the department, we began to offer a regular rotation of the writing and rhetoric courses that had, years earlier, supported the writing concentration. Our strategy was simple: if we teach it, they will come. And they did. Surprisingly, a number of these courses became requirements for other majors (e.g., education, political science), and, while it was a delicate balance to schedule these courses to meet other departmental needs, we were encouraged because we were making ourselves necessary—our courses had to be taught because they were in demand.

Beyond course offerings, we expanded our influence—and drew attention to writing on campus—through the creation of a New Media Writing Studio (NMWS). Funded by a university-wide grant initiative to promote innovation, the NMWS supports multimodal composing across the curriculum for all students and faculty willing to learn. As a program, the NMWS was independent of the English department, but it was created and managed primarily by faculty with rhet/comp backgrounds. By offering professional development workshops for faculty, ongoing consulting and lab support throughout the year, and opportunities for transdisciplinary exchange, the NMWS heightened not only the visibility and viability of writing, but also its central role in emerging technologies. Indeed, the very presence of the NMWS prompted questions from colleagues across campus as to why English faculty were facilitating new media endeavors, which, in turn, provided opportunities to tout our broad definition of writing. The rhet/comp cadre's investment in the NMWS inevitably influenced how we both taught existing courses and developed new ones, giving us the opportunity to redefine writing within, and beyond, our department. For example, in the English department, a capstone seminar for seniors included the creation of a digital portfolio as its major assignment, and new media assignments were increasingly naturalized in our writing instruction at all levels as well as emerging in courses across the university. With the rising demand for our writing courses, as well as a surge of interest and activity surrounding the NMWS and multimodal composition, many of our colleagues recognized that the digital tide was inevitably turning their way, and they saw us as capable of navigating these new waters.

LEAD, GROW, UNITE: COMMANDING RESOURCES IN THE LIBERAL ARTS

In the years leading up to the writing major proposal, we shared a constant worry with our colleagues about the number of English majors, especially given the decline of undergraduate English majors nationally. This decline was noted specifically by an MLA committee, who introduced their 2003 report with this blunt opening sentence: "An academic field’s ability to attract students affects its ability to command
institutional resources” (Schramm et al. 2003, 68). Although our department courted prospective English majors by showcasing famous English majors and sending out personalized invitations to our best students, we saw no significant change in numbers. Many students, we learned, were reluctant to declare an English major either because they defined it narrowly (often based on secondary-school experiences) or had serious reservations about job prospects (reinforced, of course, by parental concerns about the return-on-investment for tuition costs). But these students loved to write, and, as we listened to them explain why they chose “practical” majors such as journalism or advertising, we realized that a major in writing could offer an attractive balance of the liberal arts and professional practice. This hunch was confirmed when, in a 2002 assessment survey of English majors, we learned that—while most were satisfied—students wanted more writing opportunities within the degree program.

Our students’ calls for more writing mirrored a national trend. Rhet/comp was hitting its stride with the expansion of undergraduate writing majors and the affordances of new media composing championed by Kathleen Blake Yancey (2004) in her CCCCC address. In addition to student interest and this national initiative, we found precedent for a writing major not only in the early curriculum models at TCU, but through a range of published scholarship. In 1973, and again in 1981, our predecessors at TCU—Tate, Tate, and Corder (1973), and Arthur Shumaker (1981)—argued for a writing major in the pages of College Composition and Communication and the Journal of Advanced Composition. Rhet/comp Review documented the rise of writing concentrations through the mid-1990s, and the CCCCC compilation of Writing Majors at a Glance in 2006 provided descriptions of forty-five different programs. Because TCU was the editorial home for Composition Studies in 2006, it was a pleasure to welcome guest editors from Eastern Michigan University, who prepared a special issue dedicated to “The Writing Major.” Drawing from such scholarship and documenting the disciplinary landscape of rhet/comp, we could easily argue for the validity of a BA in writing, at least to our college- and university-level curriculum committees. Our challenge, however, was to make the case to the entire English faculty—and to do so with care, respect, and a genuine motivation to strengthen the department.

Because we were six faculty members trying to persuade a group twice our size, we wanted to avoid being threatening or divisive by emphasizing that the new major would not detract from the current undergraduate program or require additional resources—in fact, it could benefit the entire department. Consolidating our message, we prepared a handout, setting forth our rationale and a program of study for both a major and a minor. The rationale asserted that the department should "initiate a leadership role that emphasizes the liberal arts in writing instruction," should “provide an option for students who would not otherwise declare an English major,” and should rest assured that the benefits from the new major would be realized by the department as a whole. (“The B.A. in Writing in the English Department” 2006)

In an effort to overcome resistance, we provided elaborations for the rationale, allowing us all to be literally on the same page: (1) no changes would be made to the existing BA in English; (2) existing writing and rhetoric courses would be enough to satisfy the major; (3) perhaps the focus on both the liberal arts and professional practice would highlight the critical difference between the English department and other fields that “do writing” on campus; (4) the writing major would require some literary study, just as the English major required some advanced writing and rhetoric courses, and (5) the college limit on courses in any one discipline was unfairly preventing students from taking more writing courses. (“The B.A. in Writing in the English Department” 2006)

We anticipated challenges via counter-proposals for a minor, a certificate option, or, most likely, a concentration or “track” within the English major (a return to the previously-eliminated model). With ample and fully-enrolled courses, and enough faculty to staff them and advise students, we argued for growth. Mindful of the students from other disciplines who loved our courses but were reluctant to major in English, we stood behind a basic assertion: they could be our students. But, if we wanted to bring majors to the College of Liberal Arts, anything short of a major called “Writing” would not appeal to those students—or their parents. In other words, if the new major still included “English” in its name, we were not likely to attract new students, nor command the institutional resources that would come with an increase in majors. Although we maintained that the new name of the degree would represent a more encompassing view of writing beyond the literary, we did concede that courses for the new major would retain the “English” course prefix (ENGL), thereby reassuring colleagues that the two majors would share a disciplinary home.

We likewise shaped the curriculum to emphasize the parallels between a major in writing and a major in English. In other words, by design, we presented a familiar structure for the curriculum, one that allowed students to choose within broad categories, thereby reinforcing
the liberal arts dimension of the major. The English major required courses in four categories: American literature, British literature, theory, and writing. In turn, the writing major required courses in four categories: craft, rhetoric and culture, practical arts, and advanced study.

The categories themselves served both theoretical and practical purposes. From the beginning, we avoided the distinction of creativity implied by “creative writing” and opted for the broader term “craft” (a term inspired by Tim Mayers’s (2005) ReWriting Craft: Composition, Creative Writing, and the Future of English). The second and third categories provided a tidy classification for existing rhet/comp courses: “rhetoric” with the added “culture” distinction to accommodate literacy and language-oriented classes, and “practical arts” to include advanced writing courses that complemented the offerings in craft. We avoided the term “composition” altogether to limit confusion with the two composition courses required in the core curriculum. The final category of “advanced study” included any coursework that looked beyond undergraduate classroom experience: directed studies, writing internships, or entry-level graduate courses available to seniors.

To ensure that students would have a broad foundation in the major, they are required to take one course from each category, then choose concentration electives (i.e., a student wanting extensive creative writing experience could take several “craft” courses). All writing majors are also required to take two upper division literature courses and two more electives in either literature or writing, allowing up to four courses in literature within the ten-course major. The English department voted to add a one-credit senior seminar as a requirement for both English and writing majors. Intended to provide students both a space for reflection on their work and an opportunity to prepare for graduate study or careers, Senior Seminar currently focuses on the production of a digital professional portfolio, thus showcasing the shared mission of these two majors within the English department.

IMPLEMENTATION NARRATIVE: THE ROAD SOMEWHAT TRAVELED, AGAIN

The writing major and minor were approved in March 2007, and, by December, two English majors had changed to writing majors just in time for graduation. We began attracting majors early and, at the time of this writing, have roughly one-third of the total number of majors in the department. TCU increased its undergraduate population by 7.85% from 2006-2010, despite a period of enormous economic downturn. Proportionate to the total undergraduate enrollment, then, the Department of English increased its overall number of majors (English/writing) by 25% over a four-year period. In terms of students in the College of Liberal Arts, English generated a proportionate increase of 41% over a four-year period. These numbers were undeniably in favor of the department’s decision, and former skeptics became supporters.

This steady increase of writing majors affirmed that we were on the right track. From our perspective, the original structure of the major was working, requiring a broad writing experience while also allowing students a creative, academic, or professional specialization—or a combination—that they could easily translate into future goals. Our classes were filling, students were tracking through the writing major and graduating, and our faculty reported positive experiences in the sections they taught.

However, in the context of a department that considers its curriculum flexible and responsive to changing research, teaching interests, and student needs, we never intended for the major to remain static. Mindful of the initial structure’s success, especially in recruiting writing majors from areas such as communication and business, by 2010, the rhet/comp cadre agreed that it was time to modify the major based on student feedback, faculty input, and institutional realities.

Through listening to our students and noting their questions about the curriculum, we learned that our categories of courses were not translating as well as we initially imagined. Identifying courses as “craft,” “practical arts,” “rhetoric and culture,” and “advanced study” made good sense to us, but we recognized that more accessible categories would help students—and our colleagues—better understand the major. Further, the fourth category, the de facto “grab bag” of courses that comprised advanced study, presented a staffing challenge, and some students were disgruntled because the limited courses filled up quickly or were too narrowly focused to connect to their interests. Students often chose the internship because it was the only advanced study course offered every semester and had no enrollment cap—thus, it was always available, making long-term planning or last-minute enrollment easy. Ultimately, this curricular restraint proved to be yet another opportunity for change: as more students participated in increasingly diverse internships, our writing majors—and we—came to see the internship as an important capstone experience.

As a consequence, in 2010 we revised the writing major to require the internship and galvanized the remaining coursework into three
categories. First, we eliminated the "advanced study" category and replaced it with one simply titled "internship," including the original class but also adding a new course called Publication Production that focused on editing and production work on campus (e.g., TCU Press, the department newsletter, and an undergraduate creative writing journal). With this new category, students were now required to have some work experience related to writing, with options both on and off campus. We then reassigned the remaining classes in "advanced study" to the category that would be the best match based on subject matter rather than course level.

In reassembling course lists, we renamed two other categories accordingly. "Craft" became "creative writing," and "practical arts" became "design and editing." ("Rhetoric and culture" remained unchanged.) The new names resonated with students and faculty as more familiar, clear, and specific. The current, (slightly) revised major maintains our liberal arts orientation and a broad conception of the teaching of writing and rhetoric, and we expect to maintain such breadth as we add more courses that account for multiple genres, changing modes of production, and community engagement. As we do so, we also expect to continually negotiate which aspects of the major to expand: do we offer more creative writing, more new media, more of something else? That is, the very categories that together make up a liberal arts approach can, at times, seem to compete. Further, when students choose to concentrate their studies on "creative writing," "rhetoric and culture," or "design and editing," they also begin to customize the major to their own particular goals. And, as they do, they—and we—must navigate a perhaps inevitable tension between professional concerns and liberal arts objectives for our students, for us as faculty, and for our colleagues within and outside our department.

**Reflection and Prospection: We Built It, They Came—Now What?**

As we reflect on the creation and revision of the writing major, our biggest challenge remains in maintaining our current success with existing resources. We have to offer enough courses in each category to ensure that writing majors can enroll in the courses they need. Because many of our courses meet core curriculum requirements, and sometimes requirements in other departments, demand typically exceeds our offerings. Additionally, with three of our seven rhet/comp faculty members partially diverted by administrative appointments, we are limited in the numbers of courses we can teach. Given such limits, the need to prioritize our teaching means we are unable to regularly teach required composition courses. This lack of opportunity to contribute to lower-division core courses is at odds with our professional commitment to those required courses, and is a source of tension within the department. Still, we continue to consider how to add new courses as the major grows in popularity, and we pursue structural adaptations that consider the institutional, cultural, and economic changes that are perennially part of a vibrant curriculum.

Looking forward, we aim to continue navigating the space between working within the constraints of current resources and presenting new initiatives to meet fresh opportunities. In doing so, we hope to foster growth that will, ideally, result in more resources for continued development (i.e., growing programs are generally the best positioned to add faculty). Outreach is one of our primary means for growth—for instance, increasing the major's visibility via our student journal of the arts (eleven4seven 2014), which showcases our students' work at the annual Undergraduate Research Festival; increasing internship opportunities; providing career information for prospective majors; and sharing efforts between our major, the NMWS, and programs such as study abroad and service learning. In hopes of recruiting interested students earlier in their careers, we have introduced new sophomore-level courses: Protest and Power, Writing Games, and Reading as a Writer. Ultimately, of course, our plans reflect a liberal arts ethic that we hope can be made stronger during a time when the national conversation on higher education among politicians, pundits, and management seems to be focusing for a more vocational approach. To be responsive to these forces and the challenges yet to come, a flexible major—grounded in rhetoric and composition, with a broad understanding of writing—offers the best chance for its continued health and enduring strength, with the liberal arts as the cornerstone of undergraduate education.

**Curricular Summary: The Writing Major at Texas Christian University**

Writing is offered as a BA major and either a BS or BA minor. To earn the BA in writing, students must complete thirty-one credit hours in English; of these, at least twenty-five credit hours must be in lower-division English courses. All writing majors with senior standing and at least twenty-one hours in the major are then required to take a Senior Seminar course.
Each writing major forms a program of study in consultation with a faculty adviser in English. Students choose fifteen hours (six credits of electives) of course credit from the categories of creative writing, rhetoric and culture, and design and editing. In addition, students take six credit hours in literary and language studies and another six elective hours in any English course. A semester-long internship is required, along with completion of the senior-level seminar.

**MAJOR REQUIREMENTS (31 CREDIT HOURS)**

**Core courses:**
- ENGL 10803: Introductory Composition: Writing as Inquiry, or ENGL 10853: Introductory Composition: First-Year Seminar
- ENGL 20803: Intermediate Composition: Writing Argument, or ENGL 20853: Intermediate Composition: Sophomore Seminar

**Creative writing concentration (one course):**
- ENGL 10203: Introduction to Creative Writing
- ENGL 20103: Reading as a Writer
- ENGL 30253: Creative Nonfiction Workshop I
- ENGL 30345: Fiction Writing Workshop I
- ENGL 30553: Poetry Writing Workshop I
- ENGL 30663: Digital Creative Writing
- ENGL 30973: Drama Writing Workshop I
- ENGL 40153: Creative Writing Workshop II
- ENGL 40203: Fiction Writing Workshop II
- ENGL 40213: Poetry Writing Workshop II
- ENGL 40223: Drama Writing Workshop II
- ENGL 50253: Studies in Creative Writing

**Rhetoric and culture concentration (one course):**
- ENGL 20313: Power and Protest
- ENGL 20333: Language, Technology, and Society
- ENGL 30203: Urban Rhetorics
- ENGL 30213: Advanced Composition: Writing Genres
- ENGL 30245: Rhetorical Practices in Culture
- ENGL 30253: Rhetorical Traditions
- ENGL 30273: Argument and Persuasion
- ENGL 30283: Cyberliteracy
- ENGL 30665: Women’s Rhetorics
- ENGL 30983: Theories of Cinema
- ENGL 40253: Propaganda Analysis and Persuasion
- ENGL 40333: Language, Rhetoric, and Culture

**Design and editing concentration (one course):**
- ENGL 20303: Writing Games
- ENGL 30223: Technical Writing and Information Design
- ENGL 30253: Style
- ENGL 30813: Books and the History of Print Culture
- ENGL 29103: Reading as a Writer
- ENGL 40163: Multimedia Authoring: Image and Hypertext
- ENGL 40253: Writing for Publication
- ENGL 40243: Professional Writing
- ENGL 40253: Multimedia Authoring: Animation and Film
- ENGL 40285: Editing and Publication

**Additional requirements:**
- ENGL 40278: Writing Internship, or ENGL 30996: Publication Production
- Two courses (six credit hours) from any of the concentration courses listed above
- Two literary and language studies courses (six credit hours) from any ENGL 30xx or ENGL 40xx not listed above.

**References**


