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Arguing that narrative serves as a powerful tool for university administration, my dissertation provides new rhetoric and composition professionals with an analytical framework for understanding how to navigate university life. Because our current academic climate of accountability requires universities and their individual academic units to offer narrative accounts that demonstrate institutional effectiveness, narrative is a useful lens for navigating the intricacies of institutional relations among individual academic units and among units within the university at large. On a practical note, most of the work we do in the institution, from grading to annual reports to faculty governance, relies on narrative. Narrative shapes our understanding of the institution and also comprises a majority of the artifacts we associate with it. However, unlike these artifacts, narratives are not static; they are living, changing entities, just like people. From this perspective, writing program administrators can understand the institution and their role within it in a synergetic way and begin to imagine how to direct and redirect the consequences of narratives. I term this process *narrative logic*, and I offer classical pragmatism as a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between narrative and consequences. Through a case study of a mid-sized liberal arts school in the South, I isolates narrative's role in institutional assessment, programmatic change, and disciplinary identity in order to show how narrative effects material change.

WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND

INSTITUTIONAL NARRATIVES

by

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Approved by

_____

Committee Chair

In memory of Dr. Dorothy Perry Thompson (1944-2002)

Her words still linger:
"Write what you know."

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee members of the Faculty of the Graduate School of The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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PREFACE

After completing my doctoral coursework in rhetoric and composition, I accepted a full-time administrative position at a mid-sized comprehensive liberal arts university. While groomed for the job market and knowledgeable on effective interviewing skills, I had little to no training in navigating the personalities and politics of university life. No doubt, I was an active graduate student in a Right to Work state. I attended faculty meetings regularly (when possible), served on departmental committees, and organized with fellow classmates for better representation and wages. In addition, I listened carefully to the subtexts of my professors' lectures and attended as many conference presentations and professional meetings as I could on the "state" of the field in order to develop an informed understanding of how the university works. I knew I wanted to direct a writing program and eventually chair a department, but I was clueless about the day-to-day life of these positions.

With regard to my identity as a rhetorician, I considered myself something like a Marxist pragmatist with a structuralist bent and a feminist hue. Influenced by the Birmingham tradition, motivated by rhetorical pragmatism, and disheartened by the postmodern movement, much of my research developed ameliorative methodologies that provided ways to reconcile polarized positions on topics such as disciplinarity, institutional action, academic freedom, political judgment, and feminist theory. While researching these issues, I was introduced to a variety of perspectives on institutional structures and disciplinary formation, and I believed firmly that oppressive structures

could change. The university, for example, was not a fixed set of relations but an unstable, dynamic set of relationships that merely needed a researcher with the right analytical framework to change its behaviors. As a result, I believed, like many graduate students, that my research was important and that my *ideas* would be the catalyst inciting others to action. Plain and simple: my academic *telos* was action; discourse was the means. The particulars of its implementation were simply unimportant.

Unsurprisingly, my graduate student idealism and attendance at professionalization workshops did not adequately prepare me for the experiences I would face as a university administrator and instructor. I never imagined institutional participation to be unpredictable. I thought, if you have the right argument and the right ethics, you could wield institutional power to obtain the ends you desired. I thought, if you mobilize your colleagues and build solidarity, your demands for institutional change would be delivered. What I eventually learned, however, is that, if one knows the right people, if it's the right time, and if the stakeholders overseeing funding are complicit, one has the power to change parts of the institution, at least superficially.

This perspective is a far cry from the activist agenda guiding the teaching assistant courses that oriented me to the writing classroom and to the field of rhetoric and composition. Because, as many believe, the teaching of writing is inherently political, the development of writing skills inherently civic, and the interplay of the two inherently ethical, many graduate educators train teaching assistants (TAs) to consider writing instruction and administration as activist enterprises that work locally to change the

institution globally. Although many new rhetoric and composition instructors might not

be able to recount James Berlin's taxonomy of rhetorics in full, most will be able to recite

at least one quotation from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* or *Teaching to Transgress*. In

fact, my own personal keeper is bell hooks' notion that, in a classroom where education

is the practice of freedom, "I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not

take" (21).

   As many scholars have noted, this approach to TA training offers future educators

and their students a false sense of daily institutional life.[1] More importantly, this

perspective distracts TAs from what happens behind the scenes. Let's face it: not all

students want to learn, not all administrators support writing, not all universities value

education. Moreover, only in recent TA training syllabi has writing program

administration (WPA) literature carved out a distinct niche. There are several reasons for

this. To begin, the course material necessary for any good introduction to rhetoric and

composition pedagogy and theory is so vast—covering a range of topics both theoretical

and practical—that articles on how writing programs operate within institutions do not

always make the cut. Second, one primary purpose of these courses is to help TAs

develop the practical materials they need to enter the classroom. Syllabi and course

activities take precedence because there is a pragmatic need for their development. Third,

professionalization for the job market is a key concern in training courses; as such,

statements of teaching philosophies and teaching portfolios are essential components of a

successful course. As any rhetoric and composition professor teaching these courses can

attest, there is simply too much to do. Assisting TAs in the process of developing a teaching persona and a pedagogical philosophy, then, provides one coherent solution.

"Too much to do" is a familiar state of being for most graduate students, no matter the discipline. In my experiences as both a graduate student and a graduate educator, "too much to do" preempts institutional naivety. Expected to excel equally in teaching, scholarship, and student-hood, graduate students are limited in the level of participation they can accept with regard to institutional and departmental decision-making. These expectations, combined with the transient nature of the position, keep graduate students at the gates of the institution, able to see inside but with no clear point of view. When I was in grad school, many of my colleagues enjoyed this position. After all, if you believe that you can make a difference in students' lives by teaching writing, secure a tenure-track and eventually a tenured position, gain institutional power by demonstrating your right to belong, then you will finish your dissertation, publish it, and establish yourself in the field. If you believe none of those ideas, the gated perspective gives you two options: get lost or break and enter.

When I accepted my new writing center position, I found myself somewhere in between. For every professor who gave me a "reason to believe," I had another take it away.[2] French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would say that I experienced a loss of *illusio*. According to the theories he develops in *Pascalian Meditations*, working for the university (which belongs to the "field" of education) is similar to playing a game. Necessary for participation in the game is *illusio*, the mechanism by which participants

remain unaware that they are playing a game. This belief allows them to play the game specifically in accordance with the field's self-regulating rules (151). Under the influence of a field's illusion, participants cannot understand the field except as a member of the field and thus within the confines of the field. In this model, participants are responsible for the field's self-preservation and continuity.

When illusions are broken, participants have choices: recognize the game qua game, agree, and continue. Recognize the game, disagree, and retreat. Or, recognize the game, take a position, and play consciously with the intention of influencing the rules of the game itself. I respectfully blame Jean Baudrillard for breaking the illusion of rhetoric and composition and sincerely thank Pierre Bourdieu for helping me understand why the illusion needed to be broken. The sentimental and empowering narratives offered in my TA training courses allowed me to believe in the game before developing full knowledge of the game's rules, the actors who play it, and how the winner(s) is determined. Although I maintained an invested interest in writing program administration, disciplinary critique, and labor studies alongside my required courses, I was paralyzed when I attended my first faculty meeting as an insider. I did not know who to listen to, what institutional history was necessary to know, or how to claim rhetorical space among such disparate voices. As an administrator, I did not know the direct and indirect channels for acquiring more resources, developing persuasive internal reports, or disciplining staff effectively. Like most people, a handful of dedicated allies and experience were my teachers. Consequently, the empowerment narratives that underscored my graduate

experiences proved antithetical to the administrative savvy I needed to be a successful member of a university.

Although I am grateful for my experiences, the frustration accompanying them led to the development of this project. The theories I embraced as a graduate student provided cursory assistance at best when I became a "professional," and I had to develop my own tentative theories on the ground, in the messy space of practice, while abandoning the sentimental narratives provided in the field. As a writing center administrator, I learned very quickly that I needed to develop institutional literacy outside of my skill set in order to advocate for my academic unit, and I learned that the most useful currency at my institution took narrative form. From assessment to faculty governance, university change hinged upon the degree to which an individual or an individual unit's narrative aligned with the university's narrative in the joint purpose of advancing the university's agenda. In my experience, how you told your story, to whom, and when determined success more so than the event and/or subject the narrative represents.

It took a couple of years for me to draw these conclusions. As pragmatist John Dewey reminds us, "the institutional life of mankind is marked by disorganization" (*Art as Experience* 20). I had to experience this disorganization to understand, on a limited basis, some of the ways in which the university is organized, and I consider myself lucky to have received a job whose primary responsibility was administrative rather than

pedagogical because, as our comrades in K-12 have learned, the line the between two is faint in the age of standards-based accountability.

This dissertation illustrates my journey toward institutional literacy, and in the chapters that follow, I describe the analytical framework (termed "narrative logic") that enabled me to navigate the structures at my university so that I could be an active participant. For new instructors entering the university (both contingent and tenure-track)—instructors who might not have developed a perspective on university politics, disciplinarity, and university membership—this dissertation offers only one perspective. And while materialists such as Marc Bousquet or Nancy Welch might argue that my framework is simply a self-constructed illusion, once I was able to name the game I was experiencing, I found ways to participate in the university game with the deliberate intention of influencing decision-making processes toward equitable ends.

I share this dissertation not to advance a closed, abstract system but to offer a method for testing belief against experience. My basic premise is this: to change the way universities are organized, one has to identify the underlying principles guiding the organization. At my institution, narrative proved an invaluable lens for understanding the ethics (i.e., the answer to the question "How do I act?") relating universities and their varied constituents. I encourage all newcomers to the field to pose the same question to their universities: How does this university act in the game of education, and how does my role specifically as adjunct/faculty/administrator/staff need to act in order to actively participate in the game?

NOTES

1. To understand how this narrative developed, one need only look at the pedagogical trajectory of the 1980s and 1990s in which liberatory/critical pedagogy resituated student-writers as ideologically oppressed cogs in need of a radical professor who would, like Moses, set them free. While I particularly value the work of Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Ira Shor in his or her own political context, I do not believe that "radical pedagogy" is the panacea to student oppression. For a wonderful explication of the activist narrative inspired by critical pedagogy, see Anne Bramblett's "My Imagined Community" in *What to Expect When You're Expected to Teach* (2002). See also Stanley Fish's *New York Times* op-ed piece "Tips for Professors: Just Do Your Job" (October 22, 2006), Marc Bousquet's *How the University Works* (2008), and Kelly Ritter's *Who Owns Schools: Authority, Students, and Online Discourse* (2010).

2. I take this phrase from Kate Ronald and Hepsie Roskelly's publication of the same name. I had the privilege of studying with Hepsie who believes in the institution of education with such profound conviction that I spent much of my time at the University of North Carolina Greensboro believing in her power to believe.

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INTRODUCTION: BUILDING A NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK

1. From Story to Agency

This dissertation examines the relationship between institutional narratives and writing program administration (WPA), and I offer new WPAs a framework for analyzing institutional structures. My argument is straightforward: narratives underpin university governance and function as cognitive structures by which individuals make decisions and develop institutional identities. Narratives are both institution and discipline-specific. In order to set the scene for this investigation, I begin with a literary example that presents, simplistically, the kinds of questions I explore in my analysis of institutional narratives. This example serves to frame the reader's mind on the relationships among narrative, action, agency, and consequences.

In the fictional memoir *An Arsonist's Guide to Writers' Homes in New England*, protagonist and narrator Sam Pulsifer has just finished serving a fifteen-year sentence for accidentally burning down the historical Emily Dickinson house and thereby killing two young lovers who were hiding there. Shortly after he returns home to live with his parents, he recounts his trial, during which the judge asked him a series of questions about the relationship between stories and action in order to consider precisely who (or what) is responsible for the deaths of the young lovers. The judge questions,

1

Can a story be good only if it produces an effect? If the effect is a bad one, but intended, has the story done its job? Is it then a good story? If the story produces an effect other than the intended one, is it then a bad story? Can a story be said to produce an effect at all? Should we expect it to? Can we blame the story for anything? Can a story actually *do* anything at all? (Clarke 71)

The judge poses these questions to Sam after listening to the attorney's defense. We are informed that, when Sam was a child, his mother told him stories about the Dickinson house, including one in which Dickinson's corpse rose from the dead on the night of a full moon. Further, we are told that at fourteen Sam, driven by his curiosity about the house's lore, decided to break in to the Dickinson house during a full moon. While there, he lit a cigarette and began recounting the stories his mother had told him. He had not been at the house for very long before he was startled by an unfamiliar sound coming from a nearby room. The combination of his mother's stories and the strange noise sent Sam running from the house, inattentive to the fact that, during his panic, he dropped the lit cigarette, causing a fire that led to the killings.

During his trial, Sam does not tell the judge about the cigarette. Instead, Sam shares information only about his mother's stories, which is why the judge questions whether or not stories can produce consequences; that is, whether or not the stories are to blame for the deaths. As a reader, we can consider the judge's questions. Yes, the stories produced an effect: they caused Sam to visit the house, where he became petrified by a noise and, consequently, neglected a burning cigarette as he fled in fright. Because Sam was thinking about his mother's stories precisely when he dropped the cigarette, we can

suppose that the stories are, indeed, responsible. But, we can also argue that other variables are to blame. We can blame Sam's mother since she shared the stories and struck Sam's curiosity in the first place. We can blame the cigarette since its flame actually caused the fire that led to the deaths. We can blame Sam for making all of the events come together. In the courtroom, however, the judge blames Sam, and while interested in how the stories influenced Sam's actions, the judge poses the questions purely for philosophical purposes, not for legal ones—the questions are not meant to affect the outcome of the trial.

Despite their merely illustrative function during the trial, Sam does not consider the questions seriously until after he serves his sentence. While eavesdropping one afternoon on a conversation at the Book Warehouse, a local bookstore near his parents' home, Sam decides that

> books were useful, they could produce a direct effect—of course they could. Why else would people read them if they could not? Was it that some books were useful and some were not and weren't doing anyone any good and so why not get rid of them? Clearly mother had read the wrong books. But I would not make that same mistake. (87)

With this declaration, Sam advances several claims about stories: they produce effects, good and bad, intended and unintended. Furthermore, a story's value is determined by its usefulness—its ability to produce an effect. When a story is useless, it should be discarded.

By suggesting that his mother had read the wrong stories, Sam points to a familiar human experience: sometimes, the stories we encounter do not help us to make sense of our current world; that is, they do not provide useful knowledge for the conditions we might face. In these circumstances, we should give up the useless stories in favor of ones we can use. Otherwise, we stagnate. These useful stories come to us from a variety of sources: obviously books, but they also come from family and cultural lore, official documents such as laws and statutes, and even news and other popular media outlets. As receivers of these stories, we have a variety from which to choose the ones we find the most useful.

Although Sam's reflections on stories are speculative and the stories he discusses are themselves fictional, I present his realizations here because they articulate, with simplicity, a key premise underlying the arguments I develop in this project: *stories produce consequences*. In Sam Pulsifer's case, his mother's stories enabled the conditions that led to the accidental crimes, and the stories actively influenced the material world constructed within the novel. Without his mother's stories, Sam may have never visited the Dickinson house, but because of his curiosity and his desire to know whether or not the stories were true, Sam unintentionally committed arson and manslaughter, which, in turn, led him to reflect on the relationship between stories and consequences in the book he writes for us to read. His mother's stories, then, proved useful, allowing him to write *An Arsonist's Guide*.

2. The Web of Agency and Consequences

As a literary example, *An Arsonist's Guide* offers a theoretical perspective on agency that takes into account the complexity of identifying the "agent" and, consequently, the "act." However, I would modify the judge's questions in this fashion: the question is not, "Can stories act?" Of course they can. The important question, I suggest, is "How has a story acted?" We can answer this question only after examining a story's consequences and then considering the process that led to those consequences. When we consider Sam's crime, our backward gaze suggests that, although his mother's stories did have agency, they were not sole agents in the crime. We have to take into account, Sam, his mother, the cigarette, the full moon, and even the young couple. All of these agents influenced the consequences. In this way, the "agent" of the crime is not easily identifiable and is better understood as a nexus of people, events, and chance.

From this analysis, I derive two important premises for this dissertation: (1) stories have agency because their telling produces direct effects/consequences, but (2) this agency cannot be located solely within the stories themselves because a number of factors, events, and actors enable stories to produce consequences. In this way, agency is not a concrete thing to be examined. Instead, it is a nebulous, emergent process that can be fully theorized only by its complicated web of actors, an understanding I take from organizational theorist Barbara Czarniawska.

Even though a story has agency because it produces effects, its agency is dependent upon the story's interactions with other agents, both human and non-human.

Let us consider a benign example to anchor the reader's frame of reference. Rhetoric and composition (RC) administrators are likely to agree that stories matter. When requesting resources for programmatic development, for example, the stories WPAs offer upper-level administrators influence whether administrators decide to honor or deny WPAs' requests. Typically, WPAs present their case in a similar form: Because of X, my unit cannot function optimally; therefore, I need additional resources. (Here's the situation; we can improve it; grant my request.) Obviously, the key variable here is X. If X refers to additional staffing in order to cover courses, the extension, more than likely, will be granted, whereas if X refers to funding for a staff retreat in an exotic, secluded location, the request will most likely not be granted.

In the case of a WPA requesting additional funding for professional development (i.e., a visiting scholar or funding for conferences), however, the outcome is less predictable, depending upon the institution's expectations for faculty performance and competence, the institution's timeline for granting such funding, and institutional priorities for writing programs particularly. For example, if an upper-level administrator has the flexibility to allocate funding to various academic units for activities such as professional development, a WPA will have more success securing funding if the administrator values the institution's writing program(s). Sympathetic to the importance of writing on campus, the administrator may allocate the funding with little pause for thought. In this instance, the WPA's story produces a favorable consequence.

Of course, unfavorable consequences could occur just as easily if the conditions change. An administrator who does not value the institution's writing program, for whatever reason, might not consider the WPA's request a priority and could thereby deny funding, especially if the administrator felt certain that other programs are more lucrative to the institution's success. Or, a university code stating that teaching and service are the primary responsibility of full-time faculty could lead upper-level administration to deny the request even if they were sympathetic to the WPA's request.

Should the administrator grant the request for professional development funding, then, the WPA's success cannot be pinpointed to the story, the administrator, or to the WPA. Instead, the story is contingent upon the administrator, WPA, and the university's policies, the latter of which is contingent upon the accrediting body and that upon federal guidelines. The consequences—the granting of the funding— emerge from the interactions among the WPA's story, the administrator's story, the university's story, the accrediting body's story, and the nation's story. In the instance where faculty's primary responsibility is teaching and service, as opposed to scholarly development, the WPA's failure to obtain an extension is not the result of university policy alone, even though it appears to be upon first glance. Since policies are effective only when they are enacted, they cannot be said to have agency aside from the actors who either uphold or go against them. In both cases, the "agent" does not exist as a single entity. To speak of "agency," then, proves difficult until we consider the effects of the WPA's story and work backward to identify how they were produced. From there we can generate the web of

actors, events, and other variables that led to the administrator's deliverance of a "yes" or
"no."

I raise this point for an instructive purpose: we can ascribe agency to the WPA's
story insofar as the story acts as an agent alongside other agents (i.e., university policy,
upper-level administration, etc.). Oftentimes rhetorical and philosophical speculations
about agency (i.e., the ability to act) divorce agents (i.e., those who act) from the
networks in which they are embedded and fail to take into account the people, conditions,
and other variables that coordinated the agent's actions in the first place. A philosophical
perspective of this kind promotes an unrealistic vision of agency, one that is free from
social and temporal influences and thus one that is free of context. This project takes a
different approach by acknowledging foremost that agency—the ability to act—cannot be
ascribed to one particular actor but to many, all of which are grounded in a particular
time and place. Put simply, agency is not pre-determined, nor is it self-determined.
Agency is a consequence of action.

Now, we may arrive at the conclusion of this project:

(1) Stories produce consequences.

(2) In this way, they have agency, but the contextual web in which the stories
arise limits this agency.

(3) In addition to agency, stories have value, which is determined by their
usefulness.

(4) Therefore, the stories we believe, circulate, and act upon affect our material world; they are useful if they produce favorable consequences. When the consequences are not favorable, we should seek new stories.

3. Narratives and Human Agency

Keeping in mind that stories, which I will refer to as *narratives*, do not act in isolation, my goal in this dissertation is to develop a limited theory of how narrative influences human action. I consider narrative just one of many factors guiding human behavior and, thus, one of many sources that allows us to conceptualize human agency. I view narrative as a tool we use for making sense of our world and consequently for knowing how to act in our world. We create meaning from our experiences through the stories we tell ourselves about our lives. In these stories, we often reach for closure; when something unexpected happens, we work to make the situation adjust to our previous narrative so that we can put our world back together and carry on as normal—however we perceive "normal" to be. In this sense, our narratives change so that we can adapt to our experiences. This change is usually sparked when narratives no longer prove useful.

For example, as a writing teacher, I formulate a way of thinking about developmental writers—a narrative based upon research that I believe to be true about that particular demographic. These beliefs derive from a variety of sources: from my experience as a teacher, from theoretical texts that I have read on basic writing, from the guidance I was given by professors who trained me as a teacher, and from the lore that circulates about these students.

But, if I work with a student who does not exemplify the narratives I believe to be true about basic writers, I am placed into a position where my narratives have to change: even though most basic writers share X features, *this* writer is different. Therefore, I cannot rely on Y techniques, which have proven useful for other basic writers. Instead, I must develop Z techniques so that I am an effective teacher. In other words, I have to reformulate my relationship with basic writers, change the stories that I tell myself about who they are and how I can help them improve as writers, in order to adapt to the teaching moment at hand.

The problem is that too many educators deny experience in order to maintain grand narratives that have reified over time. This refusal is often rooted in humans' resistance to change, for change unsettles belief. When faced with new experiences, changing my story—my narrative—enables me to respond to a situation and to develop new beliefs. In order for me to believe something that I consider "true" about basic writers, I develop a story to attach to it, a story that provides justification for the belief so that the belief makes sense to me. In this way, my beliefs dictate my actions, and I make my beliefs useful to myself by crafting narratives to support them. These narratives guide my interactions with others as well, and when I dialogue with other writing teachers, I compare my narratives with others' narratives in order to ascertain whether or not we share the same beliefs about teaching.

These narratives, then, have agency; they influence my actions and produce consequences. If the consequences prove useful, in the sense that they help me to act

competently in a given situation, then the narratives are valuable. If they prove useless, they must be reformulated so that they have use.

4. The Narrative Turn and A Story's Use

The key terms examined throughout this project—*agency*, *consequences*, *narrative*, and *story*—are familiar to most readers in RC. Story, for example, is obviously a fictional literary mode often used synonymously with *narrative*. Beginning in the late 1960s, however, rhetorical and critical theorists alike developed an interest in the term *narrative* aside from its strict literary usage. French theorists Roland Barthes and Paul Ricoeur extrapolated *narrative* from the written text to the (not always written) texts of everyday life, weakening narrative's association with literature proper. For many fields, this shift is known as the "narrative turn," and I explore its implications fully in Chapter II.

In the humanities more broadly, historian Hayden White adopted the term *narrative* to describe the actual substance of historical accounts, which influenced communication scholar Walter Fisher as he developed an entire schema for human communication, termed the "narrative paradigm," in 1987 (Fisher 62). Cultural theorist Jean-François Lyotard simultaneously denounced and defended narrative for its epistemological value when he published *The Postmodern Condition* in 1979. Organization theory, which includes disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences, began developing narrative methodologies to study organizational behavior in the 1980s, a growing body of literature that continues to grow in the twenty-first century. In the mid-

1990s, postcolonial theory embraced narrative for its analytical value, as it provided a way to demonstrate how discourse, both written and spoken, advanced the nation-state. Finally, in the twenty-first century, RC scholars recognize the inherent role that narrative plays in accounting for writing program administration and, especially, in effecting programmatic and institutional change.

For this dissertation, I use the term *narrative* in instances where other RC scholars choose *story*. Partially because "to tell a story" means to "to tell a lie" and partially because "story" has etymological roots in "history," I prefer the term *narrative* because it captures its nominal, active, and cognitive implications. As a result, I do not reject narrative's common definitions, the retelling of events and the structure of literary/extra-literary texts, but I extend narrative's meaning to include the cognitive structures that shape our beliefs. Beyond a literary mode, narrative is a tool we use for making sense of our world, and narrative guides our behaviors.

We can think about mainstream media in this way, particularly: one of the reasons major media outlets are so powerful is because they circulate short, quick narratives about events or people, narratives which viewers understand, internalize, and act upon. For example, when then Senator Barack Obama ran for president in 2008, the narrative pundits circulated was that he was too inexperienced to make foreign policy decisions. This narrative, "Obama is inexperienced," led to a widespread belief that he should not be president because he would make uninformed presidential decisions. As conservative media outlets repeated this Obama narrative over and over, many voters began to believe

that Obama was, indeed, too inexperienced. This belief swayed people's minds. For

example, a poll published by the Pew Research Center just three months before the

election reported that 43% of voters who supported Obama "moderately" were most

concerned about his "personal abilities" and "experiences," compared with 32% who

strongly supported Obama. In both populations of voters, "experience" was undoubtedly

a concern, despite the fact that only 22 previous presidents had more experience than

Obama when elected to office (Wilson). In the end, the narrative about Obama's

inexperience fell short of causing an effect, as he is now our president; at the same time,

the narrative persuaded many people to vote for John McCain simply because, in a

chronological sense, McCain had more "experience."

The above example demonstrates that narratives serve a logical purpose. The

narrative that "Obama is inexperienced" does not appear to be a narrative because (1) it

does not recount an event (i.e., tell a story), (2) it does not name a textual genre, and (3) it

does not appear to be a belief but instead a fact. However, if one agrees with the

statement "Obama is too inexperienced," one agrees with the following syllogism:

> Successful presidents have significant foreign policy experience.
> Senator Obama has very little foreign policy experience.
> Therefore, Senator Obama will not be a successful president.

With the declaration of a simple statement such as "Obama is inexperienced,"

conservative media outlets created an entire belief system about what makes successful

and unsuccessful presidents. Even further, voters who believed the narrative during the

2008 campaign used it to make their voting decisions. In this way, the narrative offered such convincing logic that it influenced voter actions. I refer to this linguistic phenomenon as *narrative logic*, which, for now, the reader should consider the process by which people use narratives to make decisions and to justify their beliefs.

Journalists make good use of the power of narrative communication (Bird and Dardenne 335). It is commonplace to hear reporters discuss "the circulating narratives" and even more common to hear reporters argue against news outlets that advance or control particular narratives (MSNBC and Fox News come to mind, particularly). For this project, I am interested in the logical underbelly of narratives, particularly how they reveal insight to people's beliefs and interpretive processes. I am also concerned with the exchange and circulation of narratives, especially those that express syllogistic relationships, because they offer, in many cases, shallow lines of reasoning that, when believed without reflection, supplant sophisticated and/or well-researched ideas.

I firmly believe that, when pushed to consider the narrative logic that guides action, people can begin to recognize how their narratives operate and how they contribute to decision-making. This contemplation enables us to make conscious decisions about which narratives we should believe and which narratives we should give up. However, this choice is not always available.

5. Narrative as an Analytical Framework

Narrative logic is a mechanism by which people can be persuaded to make decisions, one that provides a framework for analyzing our world. Further, narrative logic

is a cognitive process during which we juxtapose various narratives in our minds to determine which narrative is ultimately better for our present circumstance. In everyday discourse, this process appears natural and intuitive—it is invisible.

Often, when we are placed into a situation where a decision needs to be made, conscious deliberation is unnecessary. In these circumstances, narrative logic acts in the place of our conscious deliberation, as we saw in the example above with the WPA's request for additional funding. In fact, often we are aware of narrative logic only in processes where we are able to invent narratives of our own or when we see narratives break down, and because of this fact, my project investigates narrative of invention and change. That is, narratives that must be created in response to unfamiliar situations and narratives that must be revised in order to adapt to a set of circumstances.

My analysis of narrative focuses on the twenty-first century university. I use for my main example the University of North Carolina system. In my experience, almost every form of communication in the university takes narrative form. From grades to departmental policies, decision-making to student feedback, assessment documents to course proposals: universities use narratives to "carry out the daily work of the institution" (Linde, "Narrative" 518). For example, as a professor, when I respond to a student's text, I am guided by a series of concurrent narratives: the narratives of my discipline, the narratives of the institution, the narratives of the state, and the narratives of my personal experiences. These narratives influence the way I structure my feedback, conditioning what I write. This process is cognitive.

When a student reads this feedback, he is also guided by a series of concurrent narratives that affect his interpretation of my feedback. Ideally, our narratives overlap, and we communicate effectively. The reality, though, is that, when I write a statement such as "Do you need this phrase?" on a student's paper, he, not understanding that the question is a sincere request for consideration, undoubtedly omits the phrase in his future draft. Why? Because, when a teacher calls attention to a selection of writing, no matter what, the writing must be wrong. In this case, competing narratives result in a student's unnecessary revision.

The question, "Do you need this phrase?" relays a particular logic to the student: "You do not need this phrase" (despite my original intentions). The student internalizes this logic and, most likely, will choose to omit the phrase. This example captures the essence of how narrative logic works. Narratives are cognitive structures that mold our interpretations, but they have a semiological function because, when presented in speech or text, they emit a logical expression, such as "I am asking you if you need this phrase because you obviously don't need this phrase. At the same time, I want you to think the decision to change the phrase is yours." The semiological and cognitive elements of narrative are explored in Chapter II because these elements help explain how narratives are constructed, who participates in their construction, and how they can be redirected.

To understand narrative as something that can be redirected is to understand narrative as pragmatist. American Pragmatism argues that new, or novel, experiences challenge us to confront our beliefs. When we experience something that goes against our

beliefs, we have to reform them, based on the experience, and change our approach to that experience in the future. This perspective implies that beliefs and experiences are not static, but open to revision. We can apply this view to narrative logic: our narratives change as our experience changes, and thus our beliefs (which are justified by narrative) also change.

Many people do not view the institution this way, and I understand why. Sometimes, institutional change, no matter how hard we fight for it, does not happen. Rigid structures stay in place, preventing change. At the same time, institutional structures are living, changing entities, just like people. We fall into an educational institution's narrative when we enter it as a student, educator, or administrator. This narrative is variegated and textured, with many mini-narratives organizing the overarching narrative. The challenge is figuring out how to construct the institution at the same time it constructs us. I argue that narrative is our primary means for doing so. A pragmatist view of narrative helps us to understand this possibility because central to the philosophy is deep-seated belief that, through persistence and commitment, exclusionary narratives can be challenged.

VI. Chapter Summaries

The institution as an object of study is ambitious. In order to make my arguments tangible, my analysis starts small and then grows. First, I define my terms, examining the ways in which postmodern thought anchored narrative as a foundational medium of knowledge. From postmodernism, I derive narrative logic. To illuminate its import and

application for the twenty-first century, I examine narrative logic alongside American

pragmatism in order to create a cohesive methodology for institutional participation. I

term this methodology *pragmatist narrative*, and I apply it to writing center assessment in

order to investigate the narrative relationships among an individual institution, its

academic units, and accreditation standards. This investigation frames an important

discussion about the interconnections among an individual institution, its smaller

academic units, and academic disciplinarity—interconnections that, when examined,

reveal an institution's fragility and instability. I offer pragmatist narrative as a way to

isolate this fragility and to recognize possibilities for change.

      To support my claims, I develop a case study of Appalachian State University,

focusing on two very different sites of exploration. First, I examine an assessment

initiative developed by the University Writing Center in order to map out the narratives

affecting any given academic unit within a university setting. Second, I investigate a

departmental proposal to relocate a university program from one academic unit to another

because the proposal captures the confluence of university, departmental, and disciplinary

narratives that influence decision-making processes. Admitting that I am a former

employee of the university, these cases are what we might consider "Open

Ethnographies." All of the information presented in this dissertation is considered "public

knowledge," available for anyone to see. I deliberately chose this approach so that my

readership can, if prompted to, investigate the issues on its own. In other words, my

dissertation methodology models the kind of information gathering available to anyone

seeking the same questions. In this way, my ethnography attempts to by-pass the typical

insider-outside dichotomy that plagues most ethnographers, although I realize the

impossibility of objective observation and assessment.

In Chapter II, "Narrative, Logic, and Pragmatism," I explore the aftermath of the

postmodern devastation on academic thought at the turn of the century, arguing that

narrative is the most important development of postmodernism. Although postmodern

philosophy is devoid of functionality, as its *telos* provides no guidance on everyday

interactions, it sutured a credible relationship between narrative and knowledge.

Expanding these developments through the lens of pragmatism, this chapter develops a

theory of *narrative logic*, which I define as a cognitive mechanism that guides our

everyday actions, telling us how to act. Specifically, I consider narrative logic as a

descriptive term for understanding how narrative influences our decisions by providing a

logic or "rule of conduct" for action. Narrative logic is one way we create knowledge

about the world, others, and ourselves, and we enact narrative logic when we consciously

select facts/events and put them in narrative form. Narratives serve to justify our beliefs;

consequently, we make choices as we develop them, choosing some facts over others. In

this way, the presentation of a narrative reflects our perception and gives it a logical

structure. It is a means for describing how we discern available choices for action in

relation to their consequences so that we are actively participating in our world.

I apply this framework to the university setting in Chapter III, relying on scholars

from rhetoric and the social sciences. I outline scholars' contributions to the current

debate on institutional narratives and then offer pragmatist narrative as a way to navigate and understand the kind of narrative work required by institutional life. I argue that, if narrative drives the work of the institution, then narrative is the most transformative tool we have for acting in the institution.

After all, from postmodernism we learn that even seemingly hegemonic narratives are coupled with counter-hegemonic narratives. As linguist Charlotte Linde states, "hegemonic discourse is rarely if ever successful" ("Narrative in Institutions" 531). I explore the relationship between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourse in order to consider the possible points of entry into institutional narratives. Furthermore, I discuss the function of agency as it applies to institutional participation. Drawing on the works of C.S. Peirce, Barbara Czarniawska, and Linde, particularly, this chapter focuses on a pragmatist narrative approach to agency that teaches us how to act with institutional structures so that we understand institutional structures as dynamic processes that construct the individual but are also constructed by the individual. To make this leap in logic, though, requires a pragmatist approach, à la Peirce, in order to consider when we might interact with institutional structures differently.

To demonstrate what a narrative understanding of the institution looks like, Chapter IV, "The Narrative Logic of Assessment," explores how the development of an assessment plan forces a narrative understanding of institutional relationships, as well as disciplinary and national relationships, all of which influence the execution of a simple assessment plan. Turning my focus to debates among RC scholars such as Brian Hout,

Linda Adler-Kassner, Brent Fabor, Jim Porter, Peggy O'Neill, and Marc Bousquet, I argue that writing assessment is significantly responsible for shifting WPAs' perspectives on institutional change from a possibility to a reality. Bousquet, particularly, critiques RC for naively assuming that institutional change can occur from a top-down administrative model. Rather than agree with Bousquet or disagree with Adler-Kassner and Porter, particularly, I offer pragmatist narrative as a way to accomplish institutional change from the top-down and bottom-up simultaneously. In others words, narrative offers a generative possibility for understanding institutional change, and by studying assessment, I show, first, why RC WPAs advocate for institutional change and, second, how this change is possible. But, I do not end up on one side of the debate. As a pragmatist, ameliorative solutions constitute the *telos* of debate.

Using Appalachian State's University Writing Center's assessment plan to show where these changes are possible, I offer a conceptual map of the narratives at work within the institution. Appalachian is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and School (SACS), which requires universities in the University of North Carolina system to develop strategic and assessment plans. In addition, all individual academic units on campus must develop their own plans, and these must align with the overall plans of the university. SACS' initiatives were influenced by the Spellings Commission's final report from 2006. The intricate web of mandates, regulations, and requirements, all in an effort to promote university transparency, crafts a complicated web of relationships. To me, these relationships are best understood as narratives, and I articulate the narrative

logic of Appalachian State through the lens of assessment. My intention is to re-direct the major arguments that many in RC have begun in order to focus our understanding of institutional change.

Chapter V, "The Narrative Logic of Institutional Change," moves from a particular university initiative on assessment to the university organizational structure of academic units. My primary concern in this chapter is to develop a cohesive perspective on how change becomes possible with in the university. Focusing on Appalachian State's Composition Program's initiative to re-locate from the English Department to University College, a structure that houses academic support services and inter-disciplinary programs, I investigate the role of narrative logic, creating a typology of the narratives that emerged from the institutional game of change. For example, narratives of history, resistance, procedure, and disciplinarity came into play when Appalachian State's English Department debated the change. These kinds of narratives are important to anticipate if one wants to actively engage in institutional debate because they influence people's perspectives, as well as their tendency to agree or disagree with particular initiatives. Analyzing the seventy-page report released by the Rhetoric and Composition Task Force in 2010, I develop a schema for understanding the narrative logic of institutional change.

Of course, once the narratives are laid out, and once the analytical framework is constructed, like a good researcher, I must begin the process of deconstruction. If narratives are extractable—able to be analyzed—when do they misbehave? In other

words, how do narratives exceed the limits of conceptualization? This question is taken in the conclusion "Understanding What Narratives (Un)Do." Pragmatist narrative, as I develop it, provides a different way to think about the interpretive nature of policies and law, which, upon first glance, seem nonnegotiable. Because laws are typically understood as "concrete," we have seen over and over again how they can be manipulated for one's own purposes. Given the means through which narrative is used to legitimate laws and other forms of discourse, as we see in our standards-based accountability systems in education, there is much work to be done. Through narrative, institutions have the power to control public perceptions of its work through the dissemination of narratives that serve, on the one hand, as external signifiers supporting the structure's mission and also serve, on the other hand, as empty referents. The ability of institutions to hide the emptiness behind these narratives rests in the institution's ability to mask the fact that the narratives are only narratives, not transcendental truths or accurate experiential observations. In other words, a structural hermeneutic posits itself; narratives both "conceal" and "do," and they garner legitimacy if they are believed. I call this process *discursive legitimacy*, which captures the direction in which I would like my project to go. I rely on Jean-François Lyotard to make this claim and offer directions for future research.

For now, let us keep in mind that narrative is a cognitive tool for granting significance to our world. When we make meaning, we craft stories. Every time we engage with new situations or learn new information, we add more details to our stories.

If the information does not fit in with our existing story, we must either reject it or reframe our original story to make space for the new information. This process is narrative logic. When we externalize our stories to others, our narratives convey a particular kind of logic—a web of associations—and this logic guides our actions and interactions in the world. As a result, the narratives we believe matter. They influence material conditions.

CHAPTER II

NARRATIVE, LOGIC, AND PRAGMATISM

> Narrative organization is causal; in narrative accounts it is not only sequence that is important but, crucially, consequence. Indeed, causality is what distinguishes a plot from a mere story. –Haridimos Tsoukas and Mary Jo Hatch, "Complex Thinking, Complex Practice" (1001)

> The stories (or narratives) that circulate among writing instructors ... often emanate from different interpretations, different frames, than those circulating outside the field.
>   Furthermore—and probably most importantly—these stories have consequences.
> –Lisa Adler-Kassner, *The Activist WPA* (18)

Derived from the Latin word *gnārus* "knowing" and most commonly defined as to "give an account of," *narrative* is a critical term that has attracted scholarly consideration from disciplines in both the sciences and the humanities (Ayto 360). The term's trajectory is anything but linear. Different fields at different times have appropriated, re-appropriated, or reinvented the concept of narrative, sometimes advancing new ideas and sometimes repeating old ones. As a result, mapping narrative's history either as an object of study or as an epistemological framework forces scholars to recognize its trans-temporal dimensions and to resist confining it to one school of thought. For this project, it is precisely narrative's service to multiple fields that underscores its value as a site of critical inquiry. Narrative is a literary mode in English studies, a means for identity construction in psychology and linguistics, an organizational structure in management

theory, a cognitive process in communication studies, an analytical framework in history, a political tactic in postcolonial studies, a mechanism of ideology in postmodern theory, and, most profoundly, an essential quality of human constitution in philosophy.[1] In short, narrative is endemic to most academic disciplines.

In the second half of the twentieth century, particularly, the scope of narrative's focus expanded uncontrollably, leading French theorist Roland Barthes to claim in 1966 that narrative "is present at all times, in all places, in all societies" (237). For Barthes, narrative is a historical underpinning of human development, and "[l]ike life itself, it is there...." Upon first glance, Barthes' assertion demands a furrowed brow: if narrative is as natural as life itself, then it is not a product of humanity but an ontological given: "In the beginning, there was narrative." As such, narrative achieves the platitude of familiar terms like *being*, *language*, *communication*, or even *oxygen*, all of which most people would say, with conviction, are existentially verifiable. Furrowed brow aside, I think Barthes' argument is also dead-on, for narrative is as intrinsic to human communication as communication is to thought as thought is to consciousness, and as consciousness is to evolutionary life. My objection to Barthes' grand statement is not the dispute of narrative's centrality to human organization as much as it the simplification of narrative as *everywhere*. Such a move casts narrative as an imprecise term. If narrative is everywhere, it is nowhere. We are always located within a *story*, a collection of events, people, and temporal locations; however, we selectively construct narratives to give meaning to our experiences. We also interpret others' narratives. In this way, narrative is

not just "there" in the world waiting to be found. Instead, narrative is both an ends and a means for cognition; as a result, narrative requires an agent.

I raise this point to demonstrate how we, as critics, tend to over-apply our concepts to a point where discerning what they are becomes impossible. My project seems to be on the same path, as I make claims about narrative that are particular and universal, historical and a-historical, temporal and a-temporal, unique and everyday. My theses, however, are very simple. Narrative is a form of knowledge through which humans make sense of the world; narrative guides our everyday actions. It has a logical structure, defined later as *narrative logic*, which is the use of narrative to justify beliefs; and finally, it is a tool for understanding our communication with others.

For writing program administrators (WPAs), narrative is a vehicle for articulating a program's history, defining its development, and recognizing its potential for growth. Narrative is also the most powerful tool WPAs have to share their lived experiences with their peers. As a principle mode for rhetoric and composition (RC) scholars, narrative enables WPAs to participate in shaping the discipline's future and to rethink its history.[2] Because RC's origins are dependent upon whose perspective one considers, be it Aristotle's, Gerald Graff's, or Louise Wetherbee Phelps', metadiscourse on narratives and counter-narratives innervates the field, stimulating scholarly desire for disciplinary identification. Working beside and against narratives of disciplinary identification are institutional narratives, which contextualize writing programs and steep WPAs in a

particular institution's values. The narratives influencing WPAs, as a result, are within and beyond the institution.

How to ascertain and synthesize these narratives, however, is rarely a key emphasis in RC graduate programs that serve to introduce and indoctrinate PhDs into the academic club. This study attempts to correct this problem. I explore how narrative provides insight into the way we engage with institutions because narrative develops a useful lens for navigating the intricacies of institutional relations among individual academic units and among units within the university at large. This chapter draws connections between narrative and logic by connecting classical rhetoric with postmodern rhetoric. My intention is to develop a richer theory of narrative-as-knowing by first explaining narrative's logical function and then by demonstrating how postmodernism created the possibility for my concept of narrative logic. Though postmodernism presented a specific set of problems with regard to agency and epistemology, it cultured a landscape for narrative to thrive. After observing narrative in a postmodern context, I argue for *narrative logic* as a necessary tool for understanding institutional engagement.

1. The Case for Narrative Logic

Narrative originates in classical rhetoric through the work of Corax of Syracuse, who developed the first taxonomical approach to rhetoric within a legal context (Corbett and Connors 492). Concerned with the ability of ordinary citizens to plead their cases in court, Corax set the stage for Cicero's later identification of six parts of a compelling defense: *exordium* (introduction), *narratio* (retelling of events), *divisio* (outline),

confirmatio (logical arguments), *confutatio* (refutation), and *conclusio* (conclusion). This taxonomy influenced rhetoricians, including his student Quintilian, who deemed narratio "the most important department of rhetoric in actual practice" (2.1.10). Because narratio prepares an audience for the presentation of logical proofs and delimits which arguments are possible, effective orators must be skilled in its delivery.

For Quintilian, narratio and confirmatio are inseparable; one depends upon the other, with the varying degree located in the actual order of presentation. In *The Institutio of Oratoria*, Quintilian asks the reader, "[W]hat difference is there between a proof and a statement of facts save that the latter is a proof put forward in continuous form, while a proof is a verification of the facts as put forward in the statement?" (4.2.79). In this formulation, narratio and proof cohere in the process of persuasion. Proof confirms narratio, at the same time narratio conditions proof. The two depend upon each other. As rhetorical theorist John D. O'Banion asserts, Quintilian viewed narratio and proof as "two modes of instruction":

> Proof was the "congruent" or logical version of the narratio, and narratio was the "continuous" or narratival version of the proposition (to be defended in the proof). Narratio was one's case proffered in the form of a story, a continuous form that emphasized the sequence of events constituting the case; confirmado or probado was one's case proffered in the form of logically organized facts, a series of coherent "proofs" that emphasized the logical implications more or less embedded in the narratio. (328)

The distinction in this quotation between narratio and proof lies in the function of each. Narratio is inherently logical in the sense that it presents a series of events as a

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continuous story for a particular reason. The logical proofs that follow narratio allow for the congruency of the narratio—the proofs serve as justification for the presentation of events. The converse is also true: logical proofs, when paired with a narrative series of events, are granted continuity. Proofs are given a context in which they can be rendered logical. Without a narrative structure present, proofs are simply a collection of arguments disconnected from time and space. Narrative provides the means through which logic assumes purpose (O'Banian 351).

This view, combined with the term's etymological history, grants narrative epistemological value. To narrate is to present our understanding of the world through the recounting of events, either to ourselves or to an audience. This process, while appearing utterly subjective to the individual, is bound to logic, in the sense that a series of logical proofs, which we make explicit or not, serves as a basis for our narrative constructions. As Quintilian makes clear, narrative sets the conditions for which arguments are or are not possible in the courtroom—that is, for what we can or cannot prove. A lawyer cannot develop arguments outside of the facts presented to the court; if so, she runs the risk of committing a rhetorical fallacy, *petitio prinicipii*. With this in mind, the presentation of narrative serves a logical function. If narrative conditions the possible interpretations that follow from it, it simultaneously expresses the logic that allowed its presentation in the first place. As rhetorical critic Martin Kreiswirth argues, "[n]arrative … is both presentation and [the] presented," in the sense that narrative is the telling of events as well as the actual event *as told* (303). To examine narrative *as told* is to examine the

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mental frameworks that construct the narrative's telling—to discern the narrative's logic. Communication scholar John Rodden develops a "logic of narrative" to highlight the connection between narrative and logic. Rodden distinguishes grammar, meaning "right order," from logic, meaning "right order *with significance*" (150). From this perspective, logic underpins narrative because the speaker deliberately selects facts and presents them. By examining the facts presented in a narrative, the audience gains insight to the frameworks shaping a narrative's development—that is, to the speaker's view of significance with regard to the arrangement of events.

For example, if I were to recount the story of how RC emerged as a discipline, I have several options. First, I could begin with an origin story: *Rhetoric was first theorized in Ancient Greece, most notably by Plato, Isocrates, Gorgias, and Aristotle*. Then, I could detail the evolution of the field: *Throughout the Middle Ages, rhetoric served an important function for understanding the persuasive power of biblical texts, which was challenged during the Renaissance. Throughout the Enlightenment, rhetoric's importance waned in the face of poetics, but its importance was reified in the eighteenth century by Hugh Blair and George Campbell, who renewed rhetoric's connection with Ancient Greek philosophy and added a psychological component to rhetoric's persuasive power. Blair and Campbell's theories influenced the development of rhetoric in the US, which begin in 1806 when Harvard created the first chair of Rhetoric and Oratory*. The underlying logic in this explanation reveals a great deal of information about my view of rhetoric's disciplinary origins. By focusing on the lineage solely, I align the

contemporary field of RC directly with Ancient Greece, indicating that RC today is a seemingly natural evolution of rhetoric as Greek philosophers theorized it. However, I could tell the story in another way and reveal a different view of RC's disciplinary origin. For example, I could begin with the actual development of RC proper in the United States: *Rhetoric and composition as a discipline emerged from literary studies in the 1950s after the first Conference on College Composition and Communication was held in 1949 in an effort to meet the demands of changing student demographics that resulted from the GI Bill. Throughout the 60s and 70s, many literary scholars turned their attention away from poetics to student writers/texts, a trend that continued well into the 80s and 90s, during which degree programs for RC were developed.* In this version, lineage is still present, but it is attached to literary studies, as opposed to Ancient Greece. Further, the story, as it is constructed, reveals a different logical progression: RC is a very new field that is devoted to the study of student writers and was developed from the study of literature. The way I explain the origin of RC determines how my narrative may be interpreted and also reveals my own sense of rhetoric's disciplinary origins.

In each of these accounts, the telling of the story reveals the logical progression I attribute to rhetoric's development. In the first instance, I link rhetoric to a reputable lineage that garners institutional authority and respect. After all, although Plato is often contested, his authority as a philosopher remains unchallenged. In the second instance, I divorce RC from its ancient roots, positing the field as a new development. The way I tell

the story of RC, then, reflects my disciplinary understanding of the field. In the act of telling the story, I reveal the logic that led me to draw a conclusion.

By relating this history to an audience, I offer a glimpse into the logical processes that shape my understanding of it. To be sure, audience largely determines how I relate the history, but through the act of telling of the narrative, I assemble a logical formation that dictates my telling. I do not simply string together the exact details of rhetoric as a concept; instead, I select the key details that support my logical assumptions in order to direct my audience's interpretation. The selection of names and facts in each case, however, changes the narrative entirely. Even though I present a similar format in both versions—how RC was developed in the US—I end up telling two very different narratives.

For an audience, the retelling of history offers the same logical exercise as it does for the speaker. As an audience listens to an interlocutor's narrative, it faces the opportunity to be persuaded. For example, in the first instance, when I link contemporary RC to Ancient Greece, my interlocutor has the opportunity to reconsider her view of both contemporary rhetoric and classical rhetoric. If she found my narration enlightening and did not realize that contemporary rhetoric has its roots in Ancient Greece, she is able to reconstruct her own narrative understanding of rhetoric's history, and, based on the presentation of new information, she could revise her understanding of the field. If my interlocutor found my narration credible, she would be able to conclude that contemporary rhetoric is, indeed, a viable field of study that should continue to have

influence on college curricula. In this process, my interlocutor is internalizing my narrative, reconciling my logical understanding with her own, and so expanding her overall understanding of her field, her teaching, etc. The second instance works the same way: my interlocutor has the opportunity to compare my narrative with her own narrative construction of RC. Thus, in the telling of the narrative, she is given the chance to reconcile my particular narrative account with her developed narrative account, which allows her the opportunity to construct a new way of knowing. In this way, my narrative affects hers, and together, we determine the effects my logical construction of RC's history has on each of our understandings of the field. If I did not tell the narrative, my interlocutor would not have the opportunity to revise her narrative. Her narrative revision is contingent upon my telling of the event.

Of course, events are not always narrated to an audience. Sometimes, we choose not to share our experiences with others. Sometimes our experiences, especially those that occur in isolation, do not prompt us to verbalize them. This scenario happens often, especially because we do not have the privilege of sharing our experiences all of the time. To relate a different example, imagine that, every semester, I assign students a rhetorical analysis paper. During this unit, I always teach students the rhetorical triangle, Aristotle's appeals, and Burke's pentad. Every semester, students learn the information, choose a relevant text, and draft papers. Some students exceed my expectations, while others do not attempt to reach them. The typical spread for grade assignment ends up following a

bell curve. As an instructor, I take note of the curve and plan my future classes accordingly, since my results are consistent.

Now, during one particular semester, for a reason I do not know, a majority of my students fail the rhetorical analysis paper. When this happens, I make assumptions: I did not teach the concepts well; my expectations were too high; students struggled to find good texts. I decide on a tentative solution: I did not teach the concepts well. I make this decision because I am convinced that the anomaly is my teaching, rather than the students. Because students have consistently received grades according to a bell curve in the past, the problem must be my methods. In this formulation, I draw logical conclusions, and I develop a narrative account in my head of what caused my students to perform poorly on the rhetorical analysis assignment. I choose the account that seems most probable, and I base it on the way I relate my previous experiences of teaching to myself so that I have some kind of understanding of why my students failed during this particular semester.

If the next semester arrives and I have changed my teaching style but my students still fail, my narrative will change again: My students are not putting forth the appropriate effort to complete the assignment competently. When I consider this option, I develop a new way of thinking about my students, one that focuses on their performance, as opposed to my teaching. As a result, I change the narrative account of the assignment and develop a logical understanding of students' failure. I give the anomaly a narrative. I explore this process more thoroughly in a later section and demonstrate that we are

motivated to fill in narrative gaps when our expectations are disrupted, a process

pragmatist C.S. Peirce describes as the "irritation of doubt" ("Fixation" 16). I do this

because, as William James makes clear in *Principles of Psychology*, I actively desire to

fit the students' performance into a logical schema so that I no longer have to consider it

("Habit" 62). That is, I do one of two things: I become irritated by the failure and thus

give it a story or I give it a story to avoid irritation so that I can continue with business as

usual, so to speak. These mental processes underlie our everyday interactions.

The narrative above is not fictional, though it appears to be. Instead, it is a

transitory formulation of causality. When I determine this causality, however

inaccurately, I am engaging in the process of cohering narrative with logic. I see the

events; I make them logical. The logic, however, comes after the fact, with the sequence

of events determining the logical possibilities. In this example, I utilize narrative as a

means of knowing, and my narrative is supported by causal logic. But, I do not need to

share this narrative with an audience in order for it to occur. It is perfectly fine for me to

withhold it from others, without discounting the actual process I engaged in to create it.

In this way, I am suggesting that the relationship between narrative and logic does not

necessarily depend upon a verbal/written moment. Instead, the coherence of narrative and

logic occurs regardless of whether we share it with others. It is a mental process we use to

make sense of our world and others. It is a way of knowing, and in order to know, we

have to have a reason for believing we know. Logic helps formulate these reasons

because it generates the connections, causalities, anomalies, and disconnections that

allow us to transform a sequence of events into a sequence of events that have structure, significance, and continuity—that is, into a narrative.

To return to Quintilian: if logic and narrative are inter-dependent faculties that condition one another, it is fair to postulate that, where there is narrative, there is also logic (and vice versa). Taken further, if narrative is a way to make sense of the world, and if we utilize logic as we create narratives, then the separation of narrative and logic as two distinct processes reveals a misconception about the relationships among narrative, knowledge, and logic. One way we understand our world is through narrative. Narrative has an inherent logic; logic is made explicit through narrative. In this way, we operate according to *narrative logic*, a term I will develop more fully in the next section. Narrative logic is means for creating knowledge about the world, others, and ourselves, and we enact narrative logic through the conscious selection of facts/events in the narrative process. These narratives, then, serve to justify our beliefs, and consequently we make choices as we develop them, choosing some facts over others. In this way, the presentation of a narrative reflects our perception and gives it force.

2. Postmodernism's Influence on Narrative

As rampant as rhetoric, narrative has carved out a space in almost every discipline, sometimes rejected, sometimes embraced, sometimes abused, and sometimes glorified. Yet even though narrative is endemic to all academic fields, it is considered a lesser form of knowing. Partially because of its association with literary fiction and partially because of its subjective qualities, some scholars raise objections to narrative's

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capabilities for producing knowledge (Czarniawska, *A Narrative Approach* 7; Kreiswirth 312). As philosopher and narrative proponent David Carr writes, for some, "[Narrative] leaves too many questions open," providing explanations that are temporary, at best, and empirically unverifiable (23). In contrast, scientific knowledge assumes objectivity and provides empirical means for explaining processes (Lyotard xxiii; Fisher 244-245).

Scholars' tendency to view the two as divergent paradigms with opposing agendas stems from the misconception that narrative is fiction and scientific knowledge is truth. The development of narratology in the sixties and seventies set the groundwork for this perspective, as the field confined the study of narrative to the formal features that shape a fictional text. Narrative as an analytical tool for disciplines outside of literary criticism or for texts that are narratives in the non-literary sense has been a recent development in the fields of management theory, historical studies, and the social sciences broadly (Rimmon-Kenan 13; Kreiswirth 312). The relationship between narrative and knowing, then, is worth exploring, as it has prompted academic inquiry to operate according to a false binary whose mediation has been a slow progression.

Psychologist Jerome Bruner fully articulates the relationship between narrative-as-subjective and science-as-objective in *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986). In this work, Bruner positions logico-scientific knowledge and narrative knowledge as two modes of thought that are not mutually exclusive. For Bruner, logico-scientific knowledge "attempts to fulfill the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation" (12). In other words, formal processes that are empirically verifiable

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and testable characterize logico-scientific knowledge. Narrative knowledge, however, is an imaginative process that grounds the particular without elevating them to universal status (13). Narrative knowledge is not a means for applying "principled hypotheses" to observable experience; instead, it is a means for describing human intention and action through "good stories, gripping drama, believable…historical accounts" (13). Bruner argues that in narrative hypotheses are still tested, but the end goal is believability, not empirical verification (14). From this perspective, narrative serves a vital function in knowledge production, and Bruner focuses specifically on quantum physics as a site where logico-scientific knowledge is complemented by narrative knowledge. As a result, the binary collapses.

Bruner's work makes a significant contribution to the narrative debate, but he does not articulate fully how both narrative knowing and logico-scientific knowing come together in the knowledge-making process. In order to accept his claims, we must contextualize the larger problem of narrative by turning our gaze back to the advent of the postmodern scene in which narrative took center stage in debates about the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Postmodern perspectives in the 1970s and 1980s recast knowledge as transitory at best, and combined with a scathing critique of capitalism and knowledge dissemination, the turn to narrative offered scholars a new (but old) way to confront the limits of modernist thinking. Two primary influences of this shift are French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard and American theorist Thomas S. Kuhn, both of whom questioned the assumed objectivity of scientific discourse and its linear

development. Though neither writer advanced narrative as a form of knowledge to replace scientific knowledge, their works prompted theorists to investigate new understandings of how knowledge is formulated; narrative provided a vital framework for doing so.

Lyotard's seminal text *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) challenged academic perspectives on scientific discourse, as well as the relationship between narrative and knowledge. Disavowing the Enlightenment roots of modernist thinking, Lyotard took science to task, arguing that science is not a total system because it relies on the work of philosophy or history; seemingly objective, science depends on narrative to do its work (29). For Lyotard, modern science, "in conflict with narratives," utilizes a metadiscourse of "grand narratives" to legitimate its own usefulness (xxiii). Citing the "dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth" as examples of grand narratives that warrant scientific discourse, Lyotard argues that science appears to be an objective form of knowledge because it aligns with socially acceptable ideological narratives that support its development rather than call into question its legitimacy.

Put this way, Lyotard's work both departs from and contributes to Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). For Kuhn, the development of science has not been a linear quest with instrumental implications for knowledge. Instead, Kuhn argues that changes in scientific development occur when anomalies "subvert the existing tradition of scientific practice" (6). These anomalies shift "professional

commitments" and restructure the conception of prior facts, sometimes allowing for an entire scientific revolution in which pre-existing paradigms are reformulated to respond to new data, similar to Peirce's "irritation." Because scientific communities are organized according to a set of "received beliefs," shifts in paradigms reflect a break in consensus among communities (4). These breaks, for Kuhn, are necessary, and he cites the transition from Newtonian to Einsteinium mechanics as an example of how paradigm shifts actually advance a new "world view" through which the world must be reinterpreted (102). In this way, science gains authority through consensus, which shifts according to scientific discoveries and their ability to displace or replace prior knowledge.

This view of scientific knowledge helps contextualize Lyotard's work. The legacy of science itself has it own grand narrative: traditionally, science is a totalizing system that advances true knowledge on the basis of fact, observation, and discovery. However, Kuhn's discussion of paradigm loosens science from its own grand narrative; in his configuration, science is authorized on the basis of consensus by a group of individual scientists who ascribe to the same set of received beliefs, and these beliefs are open to change when new paradigms challenge previous assumptions and offer a different set of facts from which to develop new interpretations. Lyotard's claim that "[s]cientific knowledge is a kind of discourse" supports Kuhn's work because it aligns scientific communities with other academic communities that are equipped with their own investigative rules, linguistic expression, and shared values. In his 1969 postscript to *The*

Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Kuhn leaves the reader with a final thought:

"Scientific knowledge, like language, is intrinsically the common property of a group or else nothing at all. To understand it we shall need to know the special characteristics of the groups that create and use it" (210). By connecting scientific truth with practice and by focusing on the ways in which received beliefs condition scientific consensus, Kuhn's work exposes the relativity of scientific knowledge to its practitioners and, in the process, questions how beliefs are formed and legitimated.

On a similar path, Lyotard argues that the linear nature of scientific progression is fallacious, and he contrasts scientific knowledge with narrative: "scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with … narrative" (7). The conflict rests in the fact that narrative and science are typically viewed as unrelated entities, but Lyotard advances narrative as a form of "customary knowledge" that legitimizes scientific knowledge (19). The inseparability of the two is evident, as narrative provides the means for scientific knowledge to be intelligible. Expanding the definition of narrative from a literary text to a social mindset or "story" that justifies beliefs about institutions, Lyotard offers the following definition: "Narratives … determine criteria of competence and/or illustrate how they are to be applied. They thus define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do" (23). In other words, narratives are stories that organize human behavior. They are social and ideological, and they

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determine our beliefs about the world. In addition, they serve to legitimate knowledge, scientific or other, by providing a framework in which ideas make sense. When anomalies occur, new narratives are needed, a process he calls *paralogy*.

To demonstrate what Lyotard means, consider a classroom example. A couple of years ago, I taught a composition course on identity that explored the relationship between self and society. I assigned an excerpt from *The Postmodern Condition* in order to provide the opportunity for the class to investigate how social narratives influence their actions. To illustrate narrative, I asked my students to perform tasks that, upon first glance, did not seem related to narrative at all. I asked the students who did not complete the assigned reading to write a response on why they chose not to complete the reading. I asked the students who did read but failed to bring their reading to class to write the sentence "I will always come to class with a pen/pencil, paper, and the assigned reading." I asked the students who completed the reading to circle every word in Lyotard's essay that had implications for education. Then, I exited the classroom for ten minutes while students completed the assignments.

When I returned, I asked them a simple question: Why did you perform the tasks I asked you to perform? From this conversation, we generated over 25 different narratives that prompted students' actions, and we divided the narratives into three sub-categories relating to the broader university, the teacher, and the student. The most obvious narratives students identified were "teachers are authorities," and as such, "students must do what teachers say." Even though the assignment appeared to have no pedagogical

value whatsoever, students still performed, regardless of their personal ideas about the assignment's purpose. This activity demonstrated for my class that narratives do, in fact, influence our actions, regardless of whether we are conscious of them. Though students might have been skeptical of what I asked, they still completed the tasks, and they acquiesced to the educational narratives that demand their participation.

Now, if a student chose not to participate in the activity and, instead, walked out of the classroom (which did not happen), the student would be exercising the right to deviate from the educational narratives that naturalize his/her behavior, which would have illustrated Lyotard's critique of grand narratives. For Lyotard, the postmodern is defined by its "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv). By protesting the activity, the student who chose to walk out of the classroom would exemplify the postmodern by deliberately choosing not to participate in the narratives justifying normative behavior. That is, the student would be exercising what neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty defines as "abnormal discourse," a deliberate response that challenges agreed-upon conventions of a particular community, in this case, an educational community that values the teacher-student hierarchy (*Philosophy* 11).

Because grand narratives organize individual cultures by providing a commonsensical framework for acting within them, they legitimate actions and produce an influence so widespread that narratives are almost unrecognizable. The shift of the 1960s and 1970s, however, revealed for Lyotard that the perceived seamlessness of grand narratives deserved a closer look. *The Postmodern Condition* decried the grand narrative

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only to replace it with *petit récit*, or little narratives (60). To make this case, Lyotard employs the term *language games*, borrowed from philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, to describe the level at which local communities form beliefs, which is similar to Kuhn's description of scientists' "professional commitments" and Rorty's appropriation "normal discourse."

Language games are best understood with regard to discourse communities; within a particular discourse, agreed-upon rules organize the kind of language employed, the types of arguments possible, and the conditions of language use. In Lyotard's view, little narratives mimic the structure of language games. The postmodern tendency to replace grand narratives with little narratives fulfills the quest for what Lyotard terms *paralogy*, which he sees as the postmodernist method of inquiry that responds to anomalies or fissures within grand narratives (60). To legitimate knowledge by paralogy is to understand the proliferation of language games and to honor their diversity, which Lyotard believes sets the groundwork for "a politics that would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown" (67). The quest for knowledge, according to a paralogical *telos*, would prove "inexhaustible," calling for an outpour of little narratives. The goal of inquiry, then, is never knowledge proper but transitory knowledge, via little narratives, that is open to change, given the right circumstances.

The influence of Lyotard's work cannot be overstated, and his landmark text led to the paralogy he advocated, though with consequences. In the 1980s and 1990s, postmodern theory became a field of inquiry and preoccupied academics in philosophy,

history, literary studies, architecture, sociology, education, and others. Drawing on the works of Lyotard, Louis Althusser, and Frederic Jameson, particularly, postmodernists challenged the quest for ultimate truth, the legitimacy of grand narratives, and the unity of identity. Turning attention to multifarious truths, local narratives, and fractured identities, postmodern theorists strove to account for epistemological complexities and to understand meaning and identity formation within socially contingent contexts. The postmodern ethos was exciting, as it opened door after door for critical exploration. The "narrative of [fill in the blank]" infiltrated scholarly publications and provided a new means for understanding old concepts. However, behind each postmodern door, the theorist was met with yet another form of critique: the "infinite critique" of postmodernism depleted its usefulness.

In practice, the philosophy led to a form of philosophical and linguistic nihilism, although unintentionally. Two major figures, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler, provided influential critique on the indeterminacy of *context*, but their ideas produced overzealous conclusions. To begin, Derrida argues in *Margins of Philosophy* that "context is never absolutely determinable" and provides a useful critique of J.L. Austin's speech act theory (310). In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin concludes that utterances (words that produce actions such as "I do") perform (do something) within a context (a specific time and place such as a church at three o'clock). When utterances produce unintended results, we can recover the "total speech act" to determine why problems occurred, although Austin admits the approach is "piecemeal" (52). Derrida rejects "the total speech act" and

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uses writing as an example to demonstrate that "total speech acts" are not recoverable. In addition, he asserts that an utterance can be "cut off … from its original … context" (320). For example, if a friend asked me if I wanted to go the movies, and I responded with "I do," she knows that I am not saying, "I will marry you." Thus, the utterance assumes a new context and breaks with its conventional one. This possibility leads Derrida to conclude that Austin is wrong to argue that words assume meaning within a particular context because the "infinity of new contexts … is absolutely illimitable." As such, an utterance is not constrained by its context; an inevitable break will occur. Similarly, context itself is indeterminate and leads to further "contextualization," as Judith Butler argues (*Excitable* 148).

Butler problematizes Derrida in *Excitable Speech*. She argues that Derrida's account of context does not provide an account of the "social iterability of the utterance" because he dehistoricizes context (150). While Butler agrees that utterances break from the past when they enter new contexts, she goes a step further by examining injurious speech, suggesting that hate speech, when directed at someone, produces bodily effects. Racial slurs, for example, "live and thrive in … the flesh of the addressee" and these slurs "accumulate over time," creating a "sedimented history" (159). By opposing the sedimented history of hate speech, addressees create moments for the utterances to break from the past, but this break relies on the history to change the future. In other words, derogatory names affect people bodily; coming to terms with the social stigma that

produces injury, people have the opportunity to re-appropriate the terms so they are no longer injured by them.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains how this is so. Advancing the notion that both gender and sex are linguistic constructions, rather than pre-discursive phenomena, she maintains that "it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible" (185). Subversion of gender constructions (i.e., the dismantling of ideas that boys should do X and girls should do Y) occurs through the act of repetition, but this repetition draws on traditional gender norms in order to displace them. She continues, "The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, *to displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (189). She terms this process *parody*. When gender norms are repeated to a degree that the original norms permitting them are displaced (i.e., men in dresses, women in dresses, women wearing ties, men wearing ties), the normative structure of gender collapses.

Lacking in Derrida's critique but obvious in Butler's is the notion that there is hope for changing the effects of words, the injury of social norms, and, most importantly, the possibility for humans to determine their own identity. However, Butler does not find an ultimate answer. Her newest work, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, concludes with the notion that we are unknowable to ourselves because cultural scripts that precede us limit our self-understanding and therefore condition us. While Butler voices the complexity of social engagement and re-imagines the power of language to transform society, she is

unable to develop a successful theory for radical social transformation. Like other postmodernists, Butler turns to consciousness, an "internal" process, as the means for deliberately changing cultural practices (McGowan 22). Attempting to challenge authoritative forces that exclude people from culture, postmodernism only goes half way: it identifies oppression, reveals its power, and locates possible fissures that lead to liberation. However, postmodernism lacks the method.

Consequences emerge from this philosophy. Writers such as Jean Baudrillard, who developed the notion of the "simulacrum," believe that the "real" is no longer possible (2). Instead, humans have "hyperreal," where signs of the "real" substitute for the "real." The influence of technology and entertainment, particularly, motivate humans to concern themselves with anything but everyday life. Instead, humans welcome hyperreality because it offers intensity that "reality" does not. For Baudrillard, this shift is perilous. Baudrillard offers Watergate and Disney World as examples of the substitution of hyperreality for the real. In Disney's Epcot, countries are simulated. One can have a beer in "Germany" and then eat fish and chips in "England." Consumers experience the "model" of the countries, not the countries themselves, but for many, this experience is enough. One does not need the "real" when the "model" is an option. Baudrillard argues that the substitution of the "model" for the "real" "allows each time for all possible interpretations" (17). No "correct" or "real" interpretations exist, and so no criteria exist to judge interpretations. Thus, all interpretations are possible.

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At the end of *Simulacrum and Simulacra*, Baudrillard advocates for new theoretical methods, but like other postmodernists, he does not provide an answer. Herein lies the problem of postmodernism. Rather than providing alternatives, postmodernist inquiry rests in the mode of critique, and because they stop short, they fail to move the debate beyond the realm of interpretation. In this way, they offer little insight for illuminating human action. Any attempt to explain social engagement falls suspect to inaccuracies, following the deconstructive misconception that "every reading is a misreading." Accuracy and truth, assumed unattainable, are replaced by interpretations, open to infinite possibility.

The residual effects of this formulation are plain to see: judgments, positions, assertions, and standpoints are always suspect and should be understood as temporally located and temporally fleeting. Because context and temporality are indeterminate, theorists have no place to stand to render judgment; judgment is particular and therefore un-transferable among contexts. Further, postmodern theory does not account for our day-to-day interactions, in which humans make decisions, believe truths, and render judgments. These acts occur not because humans tend toward totalization but simply because they understand the world by recognizing and validating structure.

At the same time, postmodernism serves a generative function. Utterances, through their ability to assume new contexts, are valid only within a given context and thus can be viewed as part of a larger "story," as participating in a narrative. As the driving force of postmodernism, narrative reorganized what we consider to be the

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substance of knowledge. Although Lyotard attempted to invalidate the legitimacy of grand narratives, his work produced an alternative application: postmodernists co-opted the term *narrative* and defined it as a means of social control which provides validation for any understanding we might come to in a discursive moment (23). If we accept a particular interpretation of a discursive interaction, we are merely subscribing to a particular narrative, and this narrative validates our interpretation.

Of course, these narratives are transitory and subject to change, once our context for the narrative changes. In this sense, the concept of narrative provides possibilities for understanding speech acts and discourse because the term captures the descriptive process we undertake when we create interpretations of discourse, both written and spoken. We create narratives and convince ourselves to believe those narratives, accepting them as validation. But, for the postmodernists, narrative itself has no foundation, no grounding, and thus no legitimation. From this we may conclude that, if we live in a world where narrative is always open to revision, our narratives ostensibly carry no weight. It makes no epistemological difference which narrative we subscribe to because it is one among many, all of which are valid. Yet, I suggest that the narratives we craft and choose to accept as true do have material consequences because they guide our decisions and we act on them.

We can see how this works when applied to an institution. In an English department, for example, the following narrative circulates with regard to composition and literature: literary criticism is a "real" discipline that produces knowledge, while

composition lacks the content to be a "real" discipline since it is concerned with writing skills. Literature has content (texts) and a body of theoretical knowledge with which to examine these texts. Composition is vocational, a subject that shapes students' writing skills, with no apparent "object" of study. Subscription to these narratives creates a value system within English departments, and we see the effects in composition programs that are staffed by faculty who are not afforded substantial office space, living wages, or voting rights. In this way, the narratives we believe have locutionary force; there are consequences to believing particular narratives because they guide departmental decisions of funding allocation, curriculum changes, and other forms of faculty governance. If English departments did not subscribe to the narrative of composition-as-nondiscipline, but validated both composition *and* literature as legitimate disciplines, then marginalization would not occur. This logic, however, does very little to move us out of the master narrative trap. If composition advances to the status of literary studies as a "legitimate discipline," then composition is not overturning the master narrative of "disciplinarity" more broadly but is instead is re-instantiating it.[2] Postmodernism teaches us, then, that counter-narratives do not overturn master narratives. In many ways, counter-narratives, if they are successful, simply supplant the existent master narratives or fit into another master narrative (e.g., disciplinary formation for Composition Studies). In this way, they replicate the very structure they attempt to abolish.

As a result, postmodernism is immobilizing: it only offers alternative master narratives. In *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, Mark Currie postulates the following:

"Effectively the grand narrative is no more than another narrative, no different from the stories it analyses, and just as open to narratological analysis or deconstruction as the narrative it narrates" (109). The result of this view is a collapsing of "narrative and metanarrative" and "an elevation of the particular, fragmentary little narrative as counter-politics of the local." Currie's critique captures the postmodern aporia, as the inability to distinguish between grand narratives and little narratives shattered the paralogic possibilities Lyotard advanced. Though knowledge is reformulated by postmodernism through the conception of data and facts as "constituted" or "constructed" and is described as an adherence to a particular narrative, it is still a foundational enterprise, albeit a temporary one.

Without postmodern insight, narrative's usefulness as a term for social participation might have been overlooked. By discarding the postmodern aporia in the face of master narratives, I propose a shift. If postmodernists understand narrative as a term that names the logic validating our perspectives, then narrative logic—using narrative to justify our beliefs—explains the process. The skepticism of postmodernism forces a loose perspective on investigating what this logic looks like, and you will not find an explanation of its function aside from Lyotard. I argue, however, that an accidental by-product of postmodernist thinking is the development of narrative logic, and the term serves the twenty-first century well because it paves the way for making sense of our current intellectual milieu. To return to my example of teaching Lyotard in the classroom: I was simply asking my students to explain in words the narratives that

prompted and justified their actions. In this way, I asked students to identify the narrative

logic that influenced their actions, and this logic, though open to postmodern critique,

was based on narrative.

3. Pragmatism and Narrative Logic

Postmodernism teaches us that narratives are transitory and subject to change if

our context changes. In this way, narrative is never fixed. While postmodernism would

also tell us that the revisionary aspects of narrative are still in accordance with ideology,

as we see in appropriations by Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser (as well as the

conflation of grand narratives with little narratives), these ideas under-theorize the

material implications of narrative. The narratives we believe and subscribe to produce

consequences, a point that Judith Butler and Jaçques Derrida point to yet do not fully

articulate. Both writers investigate how narratives are contingent upon context, and they

each disprove the totality of context. In *Giving An Account of Oneself*, Butler examines

the limits of narrative with regard to "sayability." In the courtroom, for example,

defendants are expected to provide a narrative account of themselves, and as they do,

legal and cultural norms condition the possible accounts defendants can give (64). In

effect, defendants are forced to create a coherent narrative account because that approach

is valued in courtrooms. For Butler, the problem is that forces "beyond us and before us"

condition narrative accounts (64). In this way, narratives are not constitutive but

contingent upon the rhetorical situation calling for them. Context, then, largely

determines what can and cannot be said. For Butler, the key to agency is controlling the

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rhetorical situation by calling attention to it and by breaking its form so that new discursive possibilities emerge. In "Living On: Border Lines," Derrida makes a similar case by investigating what happens when narratives are "demanded" (265). To demand a narrative account is to demand a "narrative of Narrative" in the sense that creating a narrative account of oneself or of a story only reveals a part of the larger narrative framing it.

In both cases, narrative's possibility is determined by context, and interlocutors appropriate narratives in accordance with external pressures. While I agree with both Butler and Derrida in this conclusion, I argue that narrative is not determined solely by context. In many cases, we have a choice in the narratives we tell and the narratives we believe. My previous example of being late for work demonstrates the role of choice in narrative accounts. I chose to accept blame in the first case, whereas in the second case, I chose to believe I was innocent. My choice, however, is influenced by my context, which includes the factors leading up to the rhetorical situation. As a result, what I choose to accept makes a difference in my future actions. In this way, the narratives I choose to believe have direct consequences; it matters if I think I am wrongly accused because I will act on that belief. By limiting its scope to the forces conditioning narrative, postmodernism does not fully address this aspect of narrative.

Here is a concrete example: if a well-published colleague of mine, who serves on the editorial board for a reputable journal in my field, encouraged me to submit an article for publication, I would formulate a way of thinking about my work. My narrative would

be based on self-affirmation and acceptance from a member of my discourse community, but if my article is rejected entirely, my narrative has to change: I am not qualified to join my discourse community; my colleague provided false hope. Or, I did not follow the right procedures; I am not a qualified professional. In both cases, I have to reformulate my relationship with my scholarly work, change the story of what happened and what will happen, in order to be resilient in the face of rejection. There are many narratives I can believe in the situation that would produce different effects. To begin, I could subscribe to the narrative that my work is not worthy of publication. Or, I could believe that my article was not a good fit for that particular journal. Or, I could believe that my colleague intentionally set me up for failure. The narrative I attach to the article's rejection is going to determine how I act on the knowledge of the fact, and in this way, the narrative guides my beliefs and produces consequences. Thus, it matters which narrative I believe. One does not weigh equally against others.

Postmodern theory, however, does not offer insight for understanding why it makes a difference for us to believe some narratives over others or how our subscriptions to particular narratives enable some outcomes and not others. Though sensitive to the fact that narrative produces consequences, postmodernist inquiry stops one step short in its attention to the delivery of narrative, as well as the conditions shaping its delivery. I depart from postmodern inquiry by looking at the consequences of narrative and how it influences action. If we understand our world through narrative, then we make decisions and act on the narratives we believe. In order to have agency in this process, we have to

be conscious of the narratives we tell ourselves so that we can anticipate their consequences. In doing so, we have the power to reshape our engagement with the world.

Compared with the postmodern agenda, this argument is ideal. Obviously, changing our relationship with the world is not an immediate process, but we do have the power to shape our own beliefs. To fully understand how, we have to foreground narrative in a tangible framework that looks to the effects of narrative (its action), rather than the forces causing it. What we need in order to mobilize our thinking about action and to move beyond postmodern critique is a new concept of narrative based in the American philosophy Pragmatism. For this project, pragmatism provides a framework that allows us to account for both narrative logic and the consequences it produces. It is a means for describing how we discern available choices for action in relation to their consequences so that we are actively participating in our world. A pragmatist conception of narrative rejects the postmodern view that we are duped by ideology and recasts the agent as one who embodies narrative logic but controls its outcomes.

In general, pragmatism pushes scholars to think about belief and experience, to question how we form habits, and to challenge principles of certainty. Linked firmly with a rejection of metaphysics, pragmatism centers primarily on the present, reflecting backward toward what Van Wyck Brooks calls a "usable past" and forward to a possible future. Embedded in this usable past are temporary stances toward action, which determine how we act in the present (James 24). These temporary stances, which the pragmatists call habit, guide us in the present, providing the ground for our critical

determination with regard to action. However, pragmatism teaches us to consider these stances mutable and to be prepared to change them if our experiences offer justification for doing so (24). In this way, pragmatism aligns with postmodernism by considering our habits subject to change; however, pragmatism goes a step further, to answer the question, "How do we act?"

Though C. S. Peirce[1] coined the term, William James made the philosophy popular. In *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907), James explains that the word *pragmatism* itself derives from the Greek noun πράγμα, which means a deed, action, affair, state-affair, business; as James notes, we derive "practice" and "practical" from this Greek word (18). The term itself, then, is concerned with action, which James links back to the work of Aristotle. Furthermore, a pragmatist "turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action, and towards power" as well as "against dogma, artificiality and the pretence of finality in truth" (20). Bridging the opposition of idealism and rationalism, pragmatism is not concerned with metaphysical concepts that have no practical solutions, nor is it concerned with first causes. Pragmatism considers truth as a provisional process, not an end result. The pragmatic method is only "an attitude of orientation …. *The attitude of looking away from first*

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[1] To distinguish his use of pragmatism from that of James' and literary scholars, C.S. Peirce coined the term "pragmaticism" in his 1905 essay "What Pragmatism Is" (*CP* 5.414). Highlighting that pragmaticism is a method *only* for understanding conduct, Peirce reigned in pragmatism's scope.

things, principles, 'categories,' supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things,

fruits, consequences, facts" (22, emphasis in original). The links to postmodernism are

plain to see: pragmatism is anti-foundational and supports the suspicion of grand

narratives we find in postmodern thinking. But, pragmatism is not based on critique.

Instead, pragmatism is concerned with narrative's consequences and how these

consequences guide future action.

Similar to Lyotard's employment of "language games," pragmatism examines

rules for conduct and the consequences those rules produce. As Peirce writes, "The word

pragmatism was invented to express a certain maxim of logic, which … involves a whole

system of philosophy….intended to furnish a method for the analysis of concepts"

(Peirce, "A Definition of Pragmatism" 58). As a pragmatist, "In order to ascertain the

meaning of an intellectual conception one should consider what practical consequences

might conceivably result by necessity form the truth of that conception; and the sum of

these consequences will constitute the entire meaning of the conception" (*CP* 5.8-9). In

other words, when we consider an idea, for example, whether global warming is real or

not, we consider the consequences of believing one way or another. The consequences

we consider and ultimately prefer guides our thinking and directs the position we take. If

I believe that *not believing* in global warming will lead to destruction of our species, I

would adopt the position that global warming is real because the consequences of

believing the opposite are too risky to chance. Thus, global warming, for me, means the

end of humanity; I accept that it is real. My acceptance has consequences in that, where

the environment is concerned, I will make efforts to prevent global warming because I do not want humanity to be eradicated. In this process, I engage in what Peirce calls "thought." In "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," he defines thoughts as "actions having beginning, middle, and end," which "consist in a congruence in the succession of sensations which flow through the mind" (28). We *think* when our habitual responses to everyday life do not apply; that is, when our normal responses do not satisfy the conditions of our experiences. Peirce refers to this process as the "irritation" of doubt. For Peirce, our beliefs dictate our actions, and when our beliefs do not guide our actions so that we respond appropriately, we are irritated and must question our beliefs. Expectations offer insight to this process. For example, earlier in this chapter, I offered a hypothetical example of a woman who habitually carried a red purse on her daily walks. On the afternoon she did not have her purse, I struggled to attain belief, to give the purse's absence a story. But, I struggled to attain belief because my expectations were disrupted. If the woman had her purse, I would not have had pause for thought; my expectations would have been met.

When our expectations are not met, we are provoked to think. It is also in this process that we move from doubt to belief, and our new belief should respond appropriately to the present experience, providing a new rule for future conduct. That way, we are able to act appropriately the next time we encounter that experience. By stating that thought has a beginning, middle, and end (BME), Peirce gives thought a tangible structure. For Aristotle, this structure would be considered a *plot*. In *Poetics*,

Aristotle defines plot as the arrangement of events with a BME (17). For me, plot is a necessary element of narrative, and all narratives have a BME. Thus, thought is narrative in form. In this way, pragmatism offers a philosophical basis for narrative logic and its consequences; the logic offered by narrative shapes the consequences its produces; therefore, action cannot be separated from the logic leading to it.

The effects of unintentional actions support this claim. For example, say that I believed all university teachers deserve adequate working conditions (that would be my guiding principle, to borrow from Peirce). If I were an tenured professor, my actions in faculty meetings and on committees should reflect this belief. However, if I were faced with the choice of converting a classroom into offices for tenure-track faculty as opposed to offices for non-tenure track faculty, I would have to weigh my decisions. If I knew for a fact that five tenured faculty did not have offices but that ten non-tenure faculty were currently sharing one large classroom, I might vote for converting the classroom for tenure-track faculty. On the one hand, I would make this choice out of necessity; five people without an office hardly makes for productive working conditions. On the other hand, my vote appears to counter my belief because I would rather improve the working conditions of five people, as opposed to ten. If my vote were removed from context, my non-tenure track colleagues could easily accuse me of contradicting my own beliefs, and regardless of the fact that I ensured *everyone* had some kind of office space, the consequences of my actions would support my colleagues' accusations. If I had voted to give the space to ten instructors, my tenure-track colleagues could accuse me of voting

against *their* best interests. In each case, someone loses, but the choice I make depends on the outcome I wish to see. My narrative directs me to vote for five offices instead of ten because I want all teachers to have an office. This example captures the process of narrative logic: as thinkers, we have to recognize that our narratives produce different consequences and determine which consequences we want to produce; we do this by considering who will be affected and how they will perceive our actions.

In "Social Consciousness and the Consciousness of Meaning," pragmatist George Herbert Mead discusses this process using different terms. For Mead, communication takes the form of gestures, which he considers social acts "in which one individual serves in his action as a stimulus to a response from another individual" (397). Individuals are prompted to act when others stimulate them to do so; before they can act, however, they internalize the roles of others to determine the most appropriate form of response. Anticipating what others want when they gesture, individuals internalize others' gestures, reflecting on how the gestures call for a specific type of response. At the same time, individuals' responses also shape others' future responses, so individuals must remember that fact as they choose a response. For my project, this means imagining what effects one's belief in a narrative will produce and how the effects will evoke responses from other people, leading to positive or negative outcomes.

To build on Mead, we can see that narrative logic is not only a function of the agent but also a result of the narrative's delivery as received by an audience. The logics of pre- and post- action sometimes look very different, as reception reveals the

consequences of our narrative logic. And, to be clear, narratives are not simply available for our consumption in the way that books are available for reading. Narratives are integral to our formation as humans, and they are often linked with our previous experiences, serving as what Peirce calls "guiding principles." Imagine that two weeks prior to my decision to vote in favor of creating tenure-track offices, I had attended a meeting where the Dean explained that no more non-tenure track faculty would be hired for at least five years (imagine!). While deciding how to vote, I would rely on that experience. Such a narrative may explain how my decision was motivated by the fact that non-tenure track faculty would not increase in size and therefore could maintain their current space until new space becomes available. Even though my vote appears in one sense to counter my own self-beliefs, I would be acting in response to a prior experience that shed light on my decision.

We do this all of the time in our everyday lives. While the notion is not radical or new, it does give insight to the ways we utilize narrative logic. My view emerges from Mead's *The Philosophy of the Present*. His extraordinary critique of temporalist philosophy examines how new experience influences our actions, and, in the pragmatist spirit, he presents "emergent novelty" as a term to describe the kinds of situations that prompt us to change our course, an idea both James and Peirce outlined but never developed fully. For Mead, the present is conditioned by the past and extends toward the future, but isolating a particular past, present, or future does not explain the complexity of our temporal engagement as organisms. It is through our engagement with "emergent

novelty" that we recognize the ways in which the past, present, and future are connected. Arthur E. Murphy writes the following in Mead's introduction: "Within experience new objects are continually arising and a new present reorients the settled conditions of an older era in the light of its discoveries" (18). This summary offers a pragmatic understanding of experience because it suggests that our very notion of the "emergent present" is largely understood or conditioned by our past experiences. However, the past is also reformulated based on the present, which makes the past as emergent as the present because our very notion of the past will be different in light of the present. This process underscores how knowledge grows and, in this way, mirrors Kuhn's notion of paradigm shift. Mead's work offers an explanation for how scientific communities reformulate beliefs based on new discoveries, and though Kuhn does not credit Mead, "emergent novelty" provides a helpful way to understand how knowledge changes. For example, when we read, we rely on our previous understanding of reading, but faced with a text like *The Philosophy of the Present*, our previous understanding of reading philosophy and our understanding of concepts such as *time* and the *present* are restructured. Thus, our past experience is made new in the present when we read Mead. If "[…] we are particularly interested in presenting the past which in the situation before us conditioned the appearance of the emergent," then we have to understand that the past must be refigured in the face of the emergent, not re-instantiated (46).

The past, however, does not necessitate the emergent: "The emergent when it appears is always found to follow from the past, but before it appears it does not, by

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definition, follow from the past" (36). In other words, the emergent only follows from the past once we have figured out how to deal with it in the present. If the emergent departs radically from our past conceptions, then we have to undergo an adjustment to make the emergent fit in with our previous experience. Only then does the emergent result from the past, but this result is only retrievable after the fact.

For example, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed in 2001 with the distinct purpose of improving public education. Talk of money and improved literacy advanced positive expectations for the initiative, and many instructors felt certain the bill would be successful. Four years later, college-level writing instructors began teaching the first class of freshman fully educated under the bill, and an avid number of people posted on public listservs, chatted in the halls, or wrote in academic journals against the bill's removal of formal grammar instruction, over-reliance on timed essay exams, and unequal distribution of resources. In order to handle the new problems presented by first-year writers, writing instructors had to develop a new method for teaching, one sensitive to the practices of NCLB. That is, they had to develop a narrative for understanding first-year writers and how to best teach them. First, they have to examine the principles of NCLB on their own in order to recognize the effects of the bill's teaching. Then, they have to reconsider their former methods of teaching and how they may be adapted for the present. After doing so, they may develop an approach that will meet the demands of college-level writing while also addressing missing gaps in students' education. Through this reflective process, instructors respond to the emergent in light of the past, but the past

itself is also revised. What seemed like a good bill eight years ago suddenly produces

negative consequences for students' writing abilities. While the emergent does not

necessarily develop from the past, the emergent allows one to recast the past in the

present and to make the past continuous with the present. Then and only then have

instructors undergone an adjustment. Following from adjustment, instructors might

choose to reconfigure their entire relationship with regard to assignments, lesson plans, or

particular textbooks, and in this process, the emergent narrative on first-year writers

shapes their future engagements with traditional first-year students. This novelty revises

the past while also setting new rules for the future.

Peirce labels this process "habit-change," and in this process, we develop new

rules for conduct, that is, new "guiding principles" for action (*CP* 5.477). New

experiences break our expectations and require us to revise our habitual responses to

experience. In this way, Mead's discussion of the emergent reflects the pragmatic maxim

as it relates to experience and belief. Applied to narrative, Mead's thought offers a way to

understand how narratives condition present actions and provide a framework for the

future. Novelty also provides moments when our existing narratives do not apply, and

only through the process of adjustment are we able to revise our past narratives to make

sense of the present and to know how to act in the future. As a result, a change in

experience prompts a change in narrative, which prompts a change in action, and the

influence of the experience is not confined to the present and the future but also to the

past. This understanding of narrative allows us to see how we have agency in the

narrative process. We are active participants in adjusting to new experiences, and our narratives for approaching novelty prompt us to invent new narratives.

At the same time, we are not always propelled to view the emergent as *emergent*, and in these instances, our application of former narratives do not serve us as we respond to new situations. By re-inscribing the past into the present so that the present is continuous with our previous narrative understanding of it, we miss opportunities for discovering new ideas and for responding to new experiences in an adequate way. For example, in my classes, female students often profess that feminism is dead. Since women have received significant gains in the social world, the fight for equality is a fruitless enterprise. Believing in a narrative such as this prompts many women to see their participation in the world as equal with males', and while some of their experiences might confirm gender equality, this narrative may prevent some females from recognizing experiences that are sexist. The importance of reflection, then, as Mead makes clear, cannot be under-emphasized. Postmodernists were right to highlight the pervasiveness of ideology in narratives, but reflective, deliberate consciousness is necessary for narrative logic to do more than replicate our own status quo, even though the option is not always available in immediate discursive moments.

4. Applications for Institutional Engagement

Through the lens of pragmatism, I have grounded narrative logic in action, as it relates to belief and experience, because I think narrative logic is best understood as a corollary to the pragmatist enterprise. Emergent novelty and habit-change are useful

terms for explaining action, but given the residual effect of postmodernism present today,

a pragmatist approach to narrative makes transparent the fact that narratives produce

consequences, and it provides a framework for understanding how narrative logic

organizes social engagement. As a result, I propose that narrative logic is an effective

way to explain our engagement with institutions, the university particularly. Applied to

institutional participation, we need such a theory because most of the work we engage

in—from annual reports to grading, program assessment to strategic plans, faculty

governance to academic freedom—requires narrative logic.

NOTES

1. For English Studies see Raman Seldon's (Ed.) *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* Volume VIII (2005) and Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (3rd ed. 2009). For psychology, see Jerome Bruner's *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1987) and Theodore R. Sarbin's (Ed.) *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct* (1986). For linguistics, see Charlotte Linde's *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (1993) and *Working the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory* (2009). For management theory, see Mary Jo Hatch's "The Role of the Researcher: An Analysis of Narrative in Organization Theory" (1996), Barbara Czarniawska's *Narrating the Organization* (1997) and Writing *Management* (1999), Carl Rhodes and Andrew D. Brown's "Narrative, Organizations, and Research" (2005), David M. Boje's *Storytelling Organizations* (2008), and Barbara Czarniawska's *A Theory of Organizing* (2008). For communication studies, see Walter Fisher's *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (1984), Dennis K. Mumby's (Ed.) *Narrative and Social Control: Critical Perspectives* (1993), and Steve May and Dennis Mumby's (Eds.) *Engaging Organizational Communication: Theory and Research* (2005). For history, see Hayden White's "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" (1980) and "The Narrativization of Real Events" (1981), in addition to F.R. Ankersmit's "Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language" (1983). For postcolonial studies, see Homi K. Bhaba's *Nation and Narration* (1990) and Mona Baker's *Translation and Conflict*

(2006). For postmodern theory, see Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) and Frederic Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981). For philosophy, see Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981) and Bernard Williams' "Life as Narrative" (2007).

2. See Wendy Bishop and Gay Lynn Crossley's "How to Tell a Story of Stopping: The Complexities of Narrating a WPAs Experience" (1996); Ruth Mirtz, Keith Rhodes, Susan Taylor, and Kim van Alkemade's "The Power of 'De-positioning': Narrative Strategies in Stories of Stopping" (2002); and Melissa Ianetta's "Disciplinarity, Divorce, and the Displacement of Labor Issues: Rereading Histories of Composition and Literature" (2010).

3. For an informed discussion on rhetoric and composition's attempt to mimic regulatory notions of disciplinarity, see Lisa Ede's *Situating Composition: Composition Studies and the Politics of Location* (2004).

CHAPTER III

NARRATIVE, AGENCY, AND INSTITUTIONS

> [A]n organization keenly aware of its stories can use them to make both minor daily
> changes and more radical significant changes throughout the organization. For this
> reason, stories are vital to any type of change because an organization's stories help to
> align its internal and external identities. Stories merge the ways people inside and outside
> the organization perceive and describe their interpretation of the organization.
> –Brenton D. Faber, *Community Action and Organizational Change* (42)

In the field of Rhetoric and Composition (RC), narrative primarily describes a

textual genre assigned to students, a discursive medium for historical and disciplinary

accounts, and a theoretical framework of postmodern thought. For example, in a recent

2010 issue of *CCC*, Melissa Ianetta uses Jean-François Lyotard's distinction between

grand and little narratives to analyze dominant RC histories such as Gerald Graff's

Professing Literature and Peggy O'Neill, et al.'s *A Field of Dreams*. Arguing that each of

these histories forges unnecessary divisions between labor and disciplinarity, Ianetta

examines how these histories re-inscribe the modernist narratives Lyotard admonished

scholars against (70). Moreover, as a discursive medium, narrative accounts of RC's

histories have contributed to useful scholarly work that chronicle, with complexity, the

varied perspectives comprising the field. For example, Debra Journet, Beth Boehm, and

Mary Rosner's *History, Reflection, and Narrative: The Professionalization of*

Composition, 1963-1983 brings together a range of scholarly narratives that show different ways for studying the history of RC, while articles such as Mirtz, et al.'s "The Power of 'De-positioning'," Wendy Bishop and Gay Lynn Crossley's "How to Tell A Story of Stopping," and Patricia A. Stephens "A Move Toward 'Academic Citizenship'" demonstrate how individual narratives reflect particular disciplinary values. These texts, while using narrative as a discursive diving board for plunging into serious conversations about labor and disciplinarity, fail to articulate fully narrative's service to the field at large. In other words, narrative as a vehicle for describing disciplinary lineage is clear enough, but narrative as a framework of analysis, with the exception of *The Activist WPA: Changing Stories about Writing and Writers* (discussed later), remains unquestioned.

I find this fact surprising, especially given that rhetorical scholars in Communication offer "narrative criticism" as a distinct methodology within the field at large (Burgchardt 239). Moreover, a 2009 article in the *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*—a journal that hosts scholarly publications from rhetoricians proper, regardless of the field—"resurrects" Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm in an effort to clarify the theory and to redirect scholarly focus toward narrative. Even further, Organizational Communication, a subfield within Communication, shares discursive space with another interdisciplinary field called Organizational Studies (OS), which joins together scholars from Business, Management, Sociology, Economics, and Sociolinguistics, among other fields. In OS, "stories and narratives permeate every aspect of an organization's

functioning" (Seely et al. 165). As a result, "any discussion of organizations that does not place narrative and storytelling at the center is bound to be misleading and incomplete" (166). For OS, to understand an organization is to understand the web of narratives shaping it.

Because OS has developed a rich body of literature theorizing narrative as a powerful methodology for analyzing how institutions develop, grow, change, and expire, I will not attempt to re-invent the wheel. Instead, this chapter will weave together several lines of inquiry in order to demonstrate how a narrative perspective can help writing program administrators (WPAs) understand their institutional lives. Since fields outside of RC embrace the centrality of narrative to the study of organizations, my intention in this chapter is to bridge disciplinary inquiry on narrative and to expand RC's understanding of narrative beyond the postmodern and historical perspectives. My goal is to make narrative a comprehensible framework for theorizing institutional critique. In this way, I follow the pragmatist tradition so humbly begun by C.S. Peirce to isolate and render intelligible the architecture of theories ("Architecture" 316). With regard to institutional theory, this architecture consists of narrative.

Contributing to RC scholar Lisa Adler-Kassner's recent work *The Activist WPA*, which describes how "stories" influence the way writers are viewed by constituents inside and outside the university, I focus specifically on the confluence of these narratives, paying attention to narrative's influence on institutional identities and institutional change. I begin with an explanation of why RC is poised for narrative

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analysis, offer an overview of how OS defines organizations and institutions, make the case for a "human" perspective of organizations, and end with a discussion of what a narrative approach to universities looks like. From this chapter, we derive our narrative methodology for the case studies explored in Chapters IV and V.

1. Rhetoric and Composition and Institutional Critique

Beginning in the 1970s, narrative research emerged in OS and has since been developed as a theoretical lens and a methodological approach to studying organizations (Rhodes and Brown 168). Through a narrative lens, an organization is not "an object of study" but a "subjectively and inter-subjectively constructed" framework of stories developed by an organization's members and its researchers (168). For OS, such a perspective is necessary to account for the inherent complexity of organizations; as a result, a proliferation of narrative scholarship emerged at the end of twentieth century (Tsoukas and Hatch 1007). Drawing on literary theory, this scholarship invigorates the postmodern turn to narrative by placing narrative at the center of institutional critique.

Consequently, assessing the university from a narrative point of view is a natural fit for rhetoric and composition scholars, primarily because the field is marked by its propensity for institutional critique.[1] Devoted to both the study and teaching of RC, scholars in the field examine RC's disciplinary identity, both past and present, in order to develop generic understandings of how the field and the institution of education influence one another. Since at least the sixties, RC has worked valorously to establish itself as a legitimate academic field. Developing both graduate and undergraduate programs,

circulating a robust body of scholarship, and replicating traditional processes for tenure

and promotion, the field has, in a short amount of time historically speaking, inhabited an

institutional niche similar to its longstanding counterparts English and Communication.

Because the road to disciplinarity has been met with resistance at several turns by a

number of university communities inside and outside the field, RC scholars have

reflected on these experiences in the form of critique, in an effort to identify the

structures that have enabled and inhibited the discipline's growth. I will briefly

summarize four major developments leading to these reflections in order contextualize

my project.

To begin, postmodernism's influence in the late 1980s, particularly, motivated RC

scholars to produce a range of publications centered on institutional critique. Relying on

French theorists such as Jean-François Lyotard, Louis Althusser, and Michel Foucault,

writing professors began to see both their teaching practices and their disciplinary

affiliations within the context of institutional oppression. Particularly, Michel Foucault's

research on discourse has equipped RC scholars with the theoretical tools for tracing the

field's historical lineage within an intellectual tradition that utilizes discourse as its main

source of power.[2] For RC theorists such as Brenton D. Faber, Foucault's influence is

hopeful: if institutions gain power through discourse, then discourse is the means for

transforming institutional structures (*Community Action* 88). Who better, then, to

research these structures than rhetoricians, scholars whose primary object of study is

discourse?

In the nineties, institutional critique split in two directions, both of which

influenced the field's commitment to institutional critique. First, materialist analyses of

labor began to overshadow Foucaludian analyses of power. Continuing to the twenty-first

century, materialists such as Eileen Schell, Marc Bousquet, Chris Carter, Tony Scott, and

David Downing have investigated the division of labor in RC in order to draw

conclusions about the economic principles organizing university labor, to demonstrate

how these principles intentionally marginalize particular groups of people (especially

women, minorities, and non-tenure track faculty), and to point the way forward for those

engage in university labor struggles. In his most recent book, *How the University Works*,

Bousquet, for example, analyzes the managerial frameworks dividing labor in the

university, and he argues that WPAs offer disingenuous advice for new faculty entering

the profession. According to Bousquet, by suggesting that rhetoric, and rhetoric alone,

can enact institutional change, WPAs such as Thomas Miller and James Porter promote a

heroic vision of the WPA that willfully ignores the power structures stratifying university

faculty (178, 162). For Bousquet, discourse cannot radically transform the institution;

contingent faculty, through collective struggle, however, can.

Second, critical/liberatory pedagogy developed alongside the discipline's turn

toward institutional critique. Viewing the composition classroom as mimetic of

inherently oppressive institutional structures, RC scholars such as bell hooks and Ira Shor

offered the classroom as a site for combating institutional oppression, advocating for

pedagogical approaches that viewed education as "the practice of freedom," an idea

derived from Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in the late sixties. Congruent with postmodern inquiry, liberatory/critical pedagogy supplanted teacher-as-authority with teacher-as-hero; the sole purpose of the teacher was to provoke students to recognize how culture, education, and language functioned as oppressive structures inhibiting students' freedom (Bramblett 17). Stanley Fish, Gerald Graff, Gregory Jay, and William Thelin repudiate liberatory pedagogy similarly to the way Bousquet repudiates discourse as a method for institutional change. Although the approach led scholars to re-examine progressive education from the thirties and to imagine the writing classroom as a way to accomplish more than just the teaching of writing, it set forth unrealistic expectations for both professors and students: freedom, whatever that means, can not be accomplished in the course of a single semester.

A final development running parallel to postmodernism, materialism, and liberatory pedagogy—a development that precedes all three—is the establishment of writing program administration as a discernible field. Although WPAs have existed since the late nineteenth century, at least since Harvard implemented the first-year composition entrance exam, the title itself did not appear until the 1970s when the Council of Writing Program Administrators was formed (Connors 11; McLeod 23). This organization professionalized the work of WPAs, hosting a scholarly journal and a professional conference, which provided WPAs with a venue for exchanging resources and for developing new approaches to WPA work. These initiatives enabled WPAs to carve a distinct niche in the larger field of RC. While practical solutions to WPA work comprises

a majority of the articles published in the sub-field, disciplinary critique is an inevitable topic of conversation, mostly because the "origin" of composition is fraught (McLeod 77).

Contingent upon individual perspectives, the disciplinary territory between English and RC has been contested and continues to be. For this reason, many WPAs have experienced what Bishop and Crossley describe as a "lack of understanding" from "English departments and central administration about our [WPAs] evolving field, our interests, our priorities, and the changes in writing instruction and program administration as a result of the last thirty years of evolution" (78). In fact, disciplinary critique has been a major source of inspiration, for better and worse, leading WPAs such as Lisa Ede, Sharon Crowley, Susan Miller, Christine Farris, among others, to challenge disciplinary formations and to assess RC's professional identity. In this way, disciplinary critique is a defining characteristic of WPA work.

Combined together, all four developments place institutional critique at the heart of RC. Because all students engage in the tasks of writing, reading, and language use and are often required to take first- and second-year writing courses in their college careers, the field's exploration is vast, ranging from pedagogical strategies to theoretical developments. At the core, however, is a conscientious attention to the ways in which RC challenges traditional notions of student learning, disciplinary formation, and administration. Despite the impression such challenges have made on the work of WPAs, I have yet to encounter a convincing methodology for describing how university change

occurs. Although I am extraordinarily sympathetic to Bousquet's perspective on composition as a management science and equally sympathetic to WPAs' belief in institutional change, my goal in this project is to offer tools for analyzing power structures that are already in place, rather than presenting an alternative or a solution. The question for me is not, "What do we do?" but, "How are we doing this?" That is, how are we behaving in our institutions? What is driving our decision-making processes? To answer these questions, I draw connections between RC and OS in order to position narrative as an analytical framework that renders institutional structures and individual action intelligible.

2. Organizations Versus Institutions

In our everyday speech, we often refer to "the government" or "the institution" as ways to discuss social organizations that are, for the most part, unable to be teased out into identifiable parts. So many Americans today, for example, do not have the appropriate tools to understand how large organizations work with regard to who does what, where power manifests, and how to be active participants. Part of this ignorance results from people's inability to make structures apparent, to give qualities to them, to be able to distinguish their parts. Another part of the problem is that, for many people, institutions—particularly the U.S. government—are not structures that can be changed. This view produces political apathy, and, even worse, it convinces people that change is impossible. As an institution, the American public university faces the same criticism,

and many faculty are unable to see a different path, unable to achieve what they want in their workplace. As a result, they do not know how to intercede in institutional processes.

The problem is that institutions are hard to change. Moreover, American public universities are complex sites for social researchers because no single methodology is robust enough to account for all of the relationships that comprise institutions and because institutions themselves do not exist in isolation from other institutions. More importantly, institutions develop over time, influenced by social and political changes. To understand an institution, one must abandon the notion of singularity, for "an institution" extends beyond property lines. As WPAs, we are very much aware of this fact.[3] Therefore, to develop a neat theory of organized human behavior requires great rhetorical footwork, as one must delineate terms clearly.

Words like *organization* or *institution* reside in our everyday lexicon. Most people are familiar with the World Health Organization, the World Trade Organization, the Brookings Institution, or the institution of marriage. On the surface, each term appears simplistic because the root words, *organize* and *institute*, are obvious. An organization requires organizing, the "systematic arrangement of elements" (*OED* "organization"); institutions require the implementation of institutes, the "giving of form or order to a thing" (*OED* "institution"). In each case, the terms refer to a systematic process through which objects, people, or groups are given a discernible order; contributing to this order are three characteristics that make institutions and organizations visible: a defined *structure*, particular *actors*, and distinct *purpose(s)*.

For example, when we discuss the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), we are talking about a specific organization within a larger organization, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). CCCC serves as the "professional voice of composition and rhetoric studies" and provides guidance on the field's professional development (CCCC, "Newcomers"). The organization also hosts an annual convention that joins over 3,000 national and international graduate students and faculty to "converse, share, network, and learn about issues that influence the scholarship and teaching of composition." The organization also publishes a quarterly journal and has adopted bylaws and a set of position statements that shape its "professional voice."

As a sub-organization of NCTE, CCCC has a defined structure. Graduate students, non-tenure and tenure-track faculty, WPAs, university administrators, and professional writers are the organization's actors. They support the organization's structure through their participation in CCCC's governance, organized events, and the teaching of composition—in short, through their labor. The work performed by the CCCC's actors contributes to its purpose of supporting composition and communication by

> 1) sponsoring meetings and publishing scholarly materials for the exchange of knowledge about composition, composition pedagogy, and rhetoric; 2) supporting a wide range of research on composition, communication, and rhetoric; 3) working to enhance the conditions for learning and teaching college composition and to promote professional development; and 4) acting as an advocate for language and literacy education nationally and internationally. ("About")

Thus, the best way to begin studying an organization like CCCC is to look at its overall structure, the people who support that structure, and the purposes that bring both together.

Even an institution as amorphous as the institution of marriage (IM) lends itself to similar characterizations. In the U.S., for example, marriage is a legally binding contract granted by an authorized government official, and to receive a marriage license, couples must fulfill particular qualifications at the state level. This process is the basic structure of the IM. The primary actors are the couples who wish to be married, the courts, and participants in a civil or religious ceremony (judges, clerks, rabbi, priests, etc.). The purpose of marriage is to unite two consenting individuals, usually 18 or older, in a legal union recognized by the state. The union allows couples to receive tax benefits, to obtain employer benefits such as health insurance, to have the right to hospital visits to make medical decisions for a spouse, to receive "tenancy by the entireties," to by-pass paternity restrictions, to have joint child custody, and to obtain government protection during financial duress. As an institution, then, the IM has an identifiable structure, with many actors and purposes. In this way, the institution can be analyzed in a similar way to organizations.

Viewed through this lens, organizations and institutions appear simple. They have structure, actors, and purpose(s). In practice, however, they are complex because they traverse legal, political, social, and cultural boundaries. They coordinate with other organizations and institutions. They change over time. They can be open or closed. They resist totalization. For these reasons, John Dewey's proclamation that "the institutional

life of mankind is marked by disorganization" rings true (*Art as Experience* 20). A complete account of organizations and institutions is simply unfeasible, but we have a starting point when we begin with the identifiable parts and then move toward complicating them.

3. Complex Organizations

The complexity of organizations and institutions motivated scholars from various disciplines to develop the field of Organization Studies (OS), also referred to as Organization Theory (OT), in the 1940s (Tsoukas and Knudsen 2). Although OS is a relatively new academic discipline, scholars trace its roots to the late eighteenth century with the work of Adam Smith and maintain that OS solidified in the early twentieth century through the work of Max Weber (Hatch 5). In OS, the terms *organization* and *institution* are distinct, even though the contemporary works of Woody Powell, Mark DiMaggio, Barbara Czarniawska, and Rolf Wolff place them in conversation. To understand what led these writers to do so, we will first look at the prevalent definitions of both terms and then discuss how they are mutually informing. Our goal in this section is to define the key terms for investigating the university-as-organization.

Mary Jo Hatch, in *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives*, draws on the work of William G. Scott and defines an organization as "an interplay of technology, social structure, culture, and physical structure embedded in and contributing to an environment" (15). This definition speaks to the disorganization Dewey mentions. Organizations are not *things* we can easily point to because they are not

"complete" (16). Hatch's use of the word *environment* is comparable to what we call "context." Recognizing that an organization is embedded within a context of various laws (both legal and social), available technologies (forms of communication and machines), cultural practices (economic, religious, ideological), and physical structures (geographic location and actual space of organization), organizations are comprised of the relationships among these four fronts.

Let us look at an example of how these fronts influence organizations and their environments. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP), an organization founded in 1915 that is now composed of 50,000 members across the country, with 300 local chapters at American universities, stands as an official voice on academic freedom (AAUP, "Mission"). When Arthur O. Lovejoy and John Dewey established the organization in 1915, its *Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure* was not codified until the 1940s. Beginning in the late fifties, the AAUP's *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure* influenced the Supreme Court's First Amendment rulings, expanding First Amendment rights to include academic freedom. Cases such as *Sweezy v. New Hampshire* (1957) and *Keyishian v. Board of Regents* (1967) relied upon the AAUP's *Statement*, viewing academic freedom as a First Amendment right ("Protecting"). These cases set a tone for future U.S. Supreme Court decisions on academic freedom, demonstrating the relationship between organizations and political change. The Court's upholding of academic freedom exemplifies the interplay Hatch sees between organizations and their environments.

On a more practical level, we can also consider how the AAUP responds to technology within its environment. The development of the Internet influenced the organization's ability to share information, gather new members, and support academic freedom cases. More importantly, with web technology, the organization is able to house online publications, in addition to its official policy documents. During the Bush regime's attack on civil liberties in the early twenty-first century, the AAUP's policies were absolutely transparent and accessible. As a result, the organization was and continues to be called upon to help thousands of individuals battle academic freedom. The organization's success, in part, continues because of the availability and transparency of its web presence. In this way, technological changes outside the organization led to new developments inside the organization, which created networked approaches to academic freedom cases.

We can see how both culture and physical structures of the U.S. influence the AAUP when we examine its mission statement. The organization's goal is "to advance academic freedom and shared governance, to define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education, and to ensure higher education's contribution to the common good" ("Mission"). Moreover, the organization works with "Congress and state legislators to promote effective higher education legislation, and [to promote] the profession and the purposes of higher education in the public eye." In this way, the organization contributes to higher education's mission of working toward the common good, which benefits university professors as well as society at large. As long as

academic freedom continues to challenge university professors, the AAUP will fight to protect it. The physical structures at work, then, are all sectors of society inside and outside the university, who attempt to violate the organization's principles of academic freedom.

This example demonstrates the interplay Hatch identifies between an organization and environment on all four fronts. To locate an organization, then, requires one to examine the relationships among the individual elements within an organization alongside the relationships between the organization and its environment. The actual "organization" is not a *thing*; it is defined through its relationships. For these reasons, organizations are marked by complexity.

Barbara Czarniawska, in *A Theory of Organizing,* points to a historical shift that prompted scholars to investigate organizational complexity. Drawing on the work of Bruno Latour, Czarniawska argues that, in the 1960s and 1970s, natural science methods informed OT. Scholars enacting these methodologies considered organizations distinct units, with "properties like those of physical objects" (7). The goal of organizational research, then, was to "formulate principles" for evaluating those properties in order to advance the "correct description of an organization." In the eighties and nineties, however, interpretive methodologies replaced the scientific. This shift led some theorists to redefine organizations as the "perceptions" of "actors" within the organization, and many agreed that actors "*construct* an organization through their actions and their interpretations of what they themselves and…others are doing." That is, actors' views of

an organization determine what an organization is, and as a result, "many descriptions of the same organization…can be compared." The purpose of the researcher was to "capture and describe" how actors' perceived an organization and how this perception influenced actors' "practices" in an organization (7).

For Czarniawska, this interpretive view has limitations. Actors, as she explains, are not fixed objects of study, and neither are organizations. Instead, actors and organizations are the "outcomes" of organizing (18). To investigate these outcomes fully, she argues that we need to consider the wider context in which organizations develop, similar to Hatch's use of the term *environment*. For Czarniawska, a more apt term to describe organizations and actors is *action net*, a theory she bases on Kenneth Burke's concept of the pentad. In *Narrating the Organization: Dramas of Institutional Identity*, she writes, "Action nets are neither people nor groups; they may be large (across several organizational fields) or small (a project)….It is from the action net that we deduce which actors are involved, not the other way around" (179). Further, she explains action nets as "connections between and among actions [that], when stabilized, … construct identities of actors" (*A Theory of Organizing* 19). To illustrate this concept, Czarniawska uses the example of publishing. In order for a professor to publish a book, she confers with a publisher, seeks funding from her university, engages with other writers in the process of writing, and establishes professional contacts (20). These connections are important because they place the writer in a context wider than the actual university to which she

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belongs. In this way, action nets offer a means for thinking about the shared connections different organizations have, and it is within these connections that actors are defined.

Both Hatch's and Czarniawska's definitions reveal the complexity of organizations, and each writer resists totalizing theories for investigating them. For these authors, organizations are active entities engaging with many different sites, and actors within organizations contribute to the development, change, and sophistication of organizations. In each case, organizations and their actors connect with a larger net or environment; thus, a rich organizational theory attempts to account for these connections. As a result, both Hatch and Czarniawska move to narrative research as a way to account for organizational complexity. In RC, such an understanding of complexity is needed because, to date, very little scholarship attempts to understand, on a finite level, how institutional structures are organized, what shapes their organization, and how their organization provides insight to the potential for institutional change and growth.

3. Institutions as Organizations

Organizational Theory (OT) and Institutional Theory (IT) are not two separate fields of study. In fact, IT, primarily developed by Philip Selznick in the 1950s, is considered a subfield within OT that represents one aspect of the concept *environment* (Hatch 64). Keeping in mind that organizations are located within an environment that shapes and is shaped by organizations, we should consider institutions and, more specifically, institutionalization a *process*. Building upon Selznick's view that organizations respond to external pressures from society, including moral values, Richard

Scott investigates how organizations become "institutionalized" (117). For Scott, institutionalization is the "process by which actions are repeated and given similar meaning by self and others." This implies that organizations (such as the university), rituals (such as marriage), and practices (such as voting) become *institutions* through repetition.

According to Woody Powell and Paul DiMaggio, repetition, in this sense, creates isomorphism in organizations (147). To demonstrate how, the authors begin by addressing scholars' desire to investigate organizational variance, and they are argue that, when organizations emerge as a field, they "push towards homogenization" (148). That is, once an organizational field, such as a developing academic discipline, "constitute[s] a recognized area of institutional life," it begins with complexity and narrows to a "totality of relevant actors." RC is a good example of how this process works. When RC emerged as a field of study, it developed its own body of publications, methods for professionalization, an articulated research agenda (albeit an interdisciplinary one), and, finally, a specialized vocabulary distinguishing it from other fields. In short, it became a discipline, operating according to a similar structure as that of communication, for example. In this way, RC, unfortunately, is a contender for institutional isomorphism, a point so eloquently explored in Ede's *Situating Composition*.

Further, Powell and DiMaggio articulate three distinct forms of institutional pressures that lead to institutional isomorphism: coercive, normative, and mimetic (147). Coercive pressures refer to governmental influences (150). Normative pressures refer to

cultural expectations (152). Mimetic pressures refer to the desire for organizations to mirror other organizations (151). For RC, coercive pressures such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) required writing instructors to adapt to students' understanding of writing as the five-paragraph essay, appropriate for high school timed writing tests but not for college-level writing. Normative pressures influenced the discipline's desire for professionalization as a way to gain legitimacy; with PhD programs, conferences, and training, RC responded to cultural expectations of rigorous academic training for students. Finally, mimetic pressures influenced publication processes, curricula, and professional conferences, all of which are similar to those in traditional literary studies.

The ultimate suggestion DiMaggio and Powell offer is that, when the pressures of cultural expectations, laws, or other organizations control the development of organizations, their potential for reformation is hindered. Czarniawska and Rolf Wolff put these ideas to practice in an article titled "Constructing New Identities in Established Organizational Fields." Czarniawska and Wolff examine two developing European universities, one of which succeeded in establishing itself as a reputable institution and one of which was forced to shut down. Building on the work of Powell and DiMaggio, the authors identify the emergence of new universities into the established field of higher education as a process of transforming from an organization to an institution (33). Czarniawska and Wolff define an institution as "a pattern of social action strengthened by a corresponding social norm." To explain how this works, they apply Czarniawska's theory of *action net*, which provides a "conceptualization of a commonsensical

observation that, within a given institutional order, some actions are habitually connected with others" (33). In other words, an institution, like the organization, is social, but it has a defined pattern (that they do not share) conditioned by normative frameworks, as well as an order that imposes habitual connections among actions, a point I later develop in relation to the University of North Carolina system.

In Czarniawska and Wolff's explanation of institutions, we can hear echoes of Scott's work, as habit—a kind of repetition—is a defining characteristic of an institution. We can also hear echoes of pragmatism, á la Peirce and James. Organizations form habits, which makes them institutionalized; institutionalization, then, is the development of a mode of conduct. The idea of habit/repetition, for OT, then, seems to be the distinguishing factor between organizations and institutions. Though I agree with the conclusions of Powell and DiMaggio, as well as Czarniawska and Wolff, in the sense that I recognize how organizations become institutionalized, I am hesitant to draw such a distinct line. For example, Czarniawska and Wolff argue that actions, "conduct that can be meaningfully accounted for," constitute both the field and its actors (35). Actors perform actions, but institutions also perform actions. The authors continue, "[W]e are born into an exiting institutional order, and not the other way around. One is not born a professor but becomes one by teaching at a university, although, in this process, one may influence the form and the content of this institutionalized action" (35). Put this way, the authors seem to make a temporal claim with regard to institutions that they do not make with organizations. Born into institutional orders, as opposed to creating institutional

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orders, we are forced to consider institutional orders as timeless entities. And perhaps that is the point.

For example, the Institute of Marriage has changed drastically, as what is possible now with regard to same-sex partners was not possible fifty years ago, but as far as most people in this country are concerned, marriage is a natural part of our social organization. In this way, the IM is an entity whose order we simply fall into, even though much grassroots organizing and protests created today's conditions. Organizations, on the other hand, are theorized as dynamic processes that change over time. In this way, organizational "order" is always in flux, whereas institutional order is simply there. Though actors can influence that order, this view of institutions, predicated on the notion of repetition, closes the terms for debate. I argue, however, that the terms are interchangeable. An institution is an organization whose origin, flexibility, and development have become irrelevant to our cultural memory because their permanence is without question. I cannot imagine a better example than the university.

4. Humanizing Institutions

If an institution is defined as an entity whose origin and development has escaped cultural memory, which, in turn, grants the institution a sense of timelessness; and if organizations are defined as dynamic processes that change over time alongside their environments, then an organizational view of an institution, such as a university, offers a very different perspective than an institutional view because the latter casts the university as an impenetrable structure. If institutions are impenetrable structures, then the

curriculum and programs offered to students over the past fifty years, for example, would remain unchanged. However, we know this not to be the case. Accordingly, I define an institution as a structure that, like an organization, is a growing, developing process of people who share a definable purpose and who work together to achieve that purpose. In this way, my view of the institution is one whose codes of conduct have the potential to change in the same way that humans' conduct has a potential to change. However, I am not suggesting that institutions be granted "corporate personhood," in the manner of conservative thinking. Instead, I consider institutions at penetrable structures that, like humans, have the potential to change and develop new habits, rules of conduct.

To this end, the remainder of this chapter will follow the lead of sociolinguistic Charlotte Linde who uses the term *institution* "to represent any social group which has a continued existence over time, whatever its degree of reification or formal status may be. Thus, an institution may be a nation, a corporation, the practice of medicine, a family, a gang, a regular Tuesday night poker game, or the class of '75" ("Narrative in Institutions" 519). In Linde's work, the basic tenets of time (continued existence) and repetition (reification) appear, but in this definition, they are tentative, not fixed. Linde's view of institutions is more powerful than the definitions provided in OT because Linde acknowledges an institution's capability to be formal or informal. More importantly, through the example of Tuesday night poker game, she recasts institutions as penetrable structures, and, more importantly, as human structures. When we think of institutions as

human structures, we consider them a complex web of narratives *within* and *at* the "boundaries" of institutions (519).

A similar understanding of institutions appears in RC, but the word *narrative* is not evoked. In their award-winning essay, "Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change," James E. Porter, Patricia Sullivan, Stuart Blythe, Jeffrey T. Grabill, and Libby Miles encourage rhetoricians to produce more scholarship in the form of "institutional critique." Acknowledging that rhetoric and composition scholars have thoroughly examined the classroom, disciplinarity, and English departments (or programmatic location), these authors encourage new developments with regard to the institution as a whole. First, they identify the institution as a rhetorical construction, arguing that large-scale institutional change can be achieved rhetorically; that is, through WPAs' participation in discourse and through efforts to combat rhetorical structures that impede change. Second, using an example from Mary Dieli's success in bringing "usability" to the forefront of Microsoft's agenda, the authors argue that a "simple textual change" led to a grant political change, and, in the process, usability reoriented Microsoft's mission (610-611).

From this example, the authors define institutional critique as "a method that insists that institutions, as unchangeable as they may seem…do contain spaces for reflection, resistance, revisions, and productive action" (613). That is, they ensure that there is "hope" for institutional change. Further, they posit that "sometimes individuals….can rewrite institutions through rhetorical action" by looking for something

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that "will lead to change and restructuring of institutions." This perspective of institutions categorizes universities, for example, as profoundly discursive structures. Rhetoric is the means for effecting institutional change. Thus, the authors suggest that, by changing discourse in the institution, rhetoricians can intervene in institutional processes.

Holding this theory together is the following pronouncement:

Though institutions are certainly powerful, they are not monoliths; they are rhetorically constructed human designs (whose power is reinforced by buildings, laws, traditions, and knowledge-making practices) and so are changeable. In other words, we made 'em, we can fix 'em. (611)

On a guttural level, there is an unfavorable response to these bold statements: "Yeah, right." If the answer to institutional problems were as easy as "fix 'em," then Porter, et al. would have valiantly earned a Nobel Peace prize by this point, and my dissertation would be non-existent.

At the same time, their argument has merit. After all, universities *are* human creations; universities *do* change. The problem is that the argument is too simplistic. As Marc Bousquet argues in *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-wage Nation*, Porter, et al.'s methodology advocates that WPAs learn to make the right arguments, which supports a top-down administrative model, where the role of faculty is to persuade administrators to produce change, leaving the decision of change up to the highest-level administrators (159). To change the institution, I just need to say the right words. For Bousquet, this kind of agency misconstrues materialism because it insists

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upon benevolent administrators and because it naively assumes that persuasion is possible in any given case. While Bousquet seeks alternatives to labor inequities in higher education, he deliberately challenges Porter, et al. because their viewpoint is symptomatic of the larger field's acceptance of a management theory of agency, which Bousquet considers impractical for addressing labor issues.

Although labor equity is something I, personally, work toward in my workplace, and while I agree, wholeheartedly, that "the problem of labor" will never be addressed through discourse alone, I am persuaded that, as a philosophical linchpin, WPAs, faculty, students, and administrators alike must all accept that institutions are human structures and that institutions are capable of changing, for without these underlying assumptions, institutions are lifeless, rigid structures that do not adapt to their environments and do not have the potential to change. Respecting Bousquet, however, I contend that Porter, et al.'s notion of agency as "something" available in any given case where a benevolent administrator reigns is too idealistic. Instead, we need to consider institutional agency as a result of many influences, both human and non-human, inside and outside of the institution itself.

5. Institutional Agency

Before we move on, I will briefly summarize the arguments presented so far in this chapter:

1. Institutional critique is a primary concern for RC scholars; however, the field has yet to explore how narrative offers a valuable framework for such critique.

2. Organization studies theorizes organizations as dynamic entities that evolve and change within an environment; these structures are always in flux.

3. For OS, institutions are organizations that, through habitual action, have become timeless entities whose order is simply "there."

4. With regard to an institution like the American public university, I argue that an organizational view of institutions is necessary; institutions are dynamic entities.

5. To accept this argument, one must accept that institutions are human structures, created by humans and thus able to be changed through human action.

6. To understand where and how humans can act within the institution, we must develop a clear definition of agency.

A philosophical buzzword, *agency* is term that describes an actor's potential to exert or exercise autonomy and power, as well as the means through which these forms of power are dictated by culture and history. Depending on which philosophical persuasion one leans toward, agency is always coupled with a determining factor. For example, Marxists argue that class determines agency. For neo-Marxists, ideology determines agency. For rhetoricians, persuasion determines agency. For Burkean rhetoricians, identification-before-persuasion determines agency. Necessarily reductive, these determinations always connect agency with a particular person—an agent—embedding the agent within a network of power (economic, ideological, or rhetorical) that is predetermined. When Bousquet criticizes Porter, et al.'s advocacy of institutional

critique, he criticizes the system they describe: a hierarchical set of relationships that places faculty below WPAs and higher-level administrators at the top of the chain. Organized in this way, institutional "agency" is determined by position, not by action.

As a pragmatist, my concern with agency differs from Bousquet's and Porter, et al.'s. For me, agency cannot be reduced to a particular person who has acted. The conditions under which one has acted—conditions that extend beyond the scope of observation—heavily influence an agent's ability to act, and in this way, "agency" cannot be ascribed to one given thing. Instead, agency is a temporary end result, apparent only through reflection and inherently dependent upon the interplay between agents and their environments. For OS, this interplay assumes several iterations—action net, actor-network theory, or organizational field. As mentioned earlier, Czarniawska's theory of an "action net," particularly, locates both agency and agents as by-products of organizing. She writes, "Usually, a study begins with the location of actors or organizations; what I wish to emphasize is that such entities are outcomes rather than inputs of organizing" (*A Theory* 18). To determine who has acted and in what ways, researchers should engage in the task of mapping out the connections or relationships among actions in order to understand the metaphorical net encapsulating the various people, organizations, and goals that worked, collectively, to organize. In order to embrace this view of agency, which disrobes the individual, the researcher's gaze must extend beyond the confines of a coherent structure or agent. This view shapes my analysis of institutional assessment and university identities in the chapter to follow. For now, Czarniawska's action net helps us

to stay mindful that agency cannot be isolated to the individual alone. To speak of an individual's agency is to speak of the larger context in which an individual can act.

Pragmatism offers a valuable framework for describing institutional action and for understanding the conditions under which one might act. To begin, for both C.S. Peirce and William James, human action is undoubtedly connected with habit, our "tendencies toward action" (Peirce, *CP* 5.476). In general, we are predisposed to act in particular ways, based on how we have acted before; for James, habit is "the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent" ("Habit" 63). Habit is conservative because it maintains a pre-existent order; in this way, habit is not only a form of self-preservation, but also social preservation. Americans will continue to participate in capitalism because capitalism is the only economic system they know. The U.S. government relies on citizens' continued participation to conserve the economic system. If everyone woke up tomorrow, for example, and did not spend a dime, the "market" would invariably suffer. As a result, habit is a requirement for business as usual.

Of course, habit is not fixed; we are motivated to change our tendencies to act in particular ways when we are exposed to circumstances under which our typical responses prove inadequate. In these moments, we are confronted with the possibility of what Peirce terms a "habit-change" (*CP* 5.476). Habit-changes occur when our associations of an action and a sign are reformulated into "transsociations," which is simply a way of saying that, when we are confronted with a situation for which our habitual responses have no use, we re-associate our relationship with the situation in order to develop a

mode for conduct. After we enact this new mode, we have undergone a habit-change. For Peirce, new associations cannot be formed from "involuntary experiences" (5.478). In this way, "habit-change" is a conscious decision. For example, as technology continues to develop and as American institutions continue to respond to state demands of providing distance education, faculty must commit to technology initiatives if they wish to fulfill state and national mandates to increase educational access. While this "choice" appears forced, it is still a choice. For faculty who refuse to participate in the changing university, negative consequences result, as their value as employees decreases. For faculty who welcome the wired institution, opportunities arise. In this way, faculty adapting to the increased technological demands required for accessible education undergo a habit-change, since their normal methods of instruction no longer suffice. That is to say, in order to respond to their present environments adequately, faculty cannot go on with "business as usual" because business now requires a change.

The university, hereafter interchangeable with *institution*, requires faculty to make habit-changes all of the time. More importantly, institutions-as-human-constructions undergo habit-changes themselves because, like organizations, they constantly respond to their environments, which includes changing student demographics, economic shifts, technological advancements, and political mandates. In this way, institutions are profoundly similar to humans because they act, change, and grow. Like humans, institutions are also influenced by Peirce's notion of "guiding principles," which condition institutions' habitual responses to experiences. Thus, institutions are human

structures whose agency—ability to act—is governed by guiding principles and influenced by its interactions with people and sociopolitical factors.

I make this comparison because "the institution" is often described as an entity able to act with the same kind of logic and capability as a human. Institutions, like humans, "think," "believe," "agree," and "disagree." Most often, these kind of statements appear in newspaper articles and public statements regarding policy changes and/or initiatives, but they drive home an important point: precisely because humans created institutions, theories for understanding their change and development necessarily require an interpretive lens, one that recognizes the inherent connection between an institution and its actors, as well as the inseparability of purpose and environment. To isolate "agency" is simply unfeasible. A better way to discuss how institutional action occurs, either from the perspective of individual agents or the institution as a whole, is to discuss the narratives that organize the daily work of an institution, the narratives that guide institutional action.

6. Narrative Institutions

Chapter II discussed the role narrative plays in guiding everyday human interaction. While applying the same paradigm to the institution signals an unwarranted attempt to anthropomorphize an inhuman structure, I take this leap in logic because, like Porter, et al., I want WPAs to engage in a radical conceptual shift that will enable a new theoretical perspective on institutional action. Furthermore, I believe wholeheartedly that,

in order to understand institutional stability, fragility, growth, change, and sustainability, one has to develop an analytic that accounts for the messy life composing the institution.

In order to do so, we need to recognize that institutions are inherently social. Furthermore, as Charlotte Linde reminds us, "Social life is created by, and reproduced by narrative...life within institutions is no exception" ("Narrative in Institutions" 521). In arguing this point, Linde suggests that narrative is an apt framework for discussing institutions because, like daily life, institutions are inherently social organisms that interact with other social organisms and, in turn, utilize narrative in the process. To accept this view of institutions, one must acknowledge that narrative is fundamental to the work of institutions and also to the identity of institutions. Narrative, in this sense, is the underlying structure of institutions and the mechanism for restructuring institutions.

Linde's argument offers perspective for this project. After all, the management system of the twenty-first century university utilizes narrative as its main source of communication within individual academic units (e.g., departments and programs), between academic units and the higher-level units that house them (e.g., the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Business, the College of Music, etc.), and between higher-level university units (e.g., Academic Affairs, the Graduate School, etc.) and state legislatures (public universities) or boards of trustees (private universities). These narratives take several forms: grades and comments submitted to students, annual reports and observations submitted to department chairs, yearly goals and assessment plans submitted to deans and vice-chancellors, strategic plans submitted to state legislators or

boards of trustees, and, not to mention, the countless meetings and emails that make all of these documents possible.

In each of these cases, the language used to communicate the work of an academic unit, college, or administration takes narrative form: administrators have to communicate their history, present status, plans, goals, and outcomes, having a sense of their past, present, and future. Those who engage in these forms of communication need to understand all of these components in order for the communications to be coherent. From an informal to a formal level, university communication requires an understanding of narrative, how to construct that narrative, and how to make it true. That truth, of course, hinges on the narrative's performative capabilities. In addition, these narratives work "to reproduce the institution, reproduce or challenge the power structures of the institution, induct new members, create the identity of the institution and its members, adapt to change, and deal with contested or contradictory versions of the past" (518). Yet very few administrators are offered a manual or user's guide for learning how to interpret the narratives they must use and understand in order to participate in the institution. Instead, most are thrown into the narrative story of their institution without the necessary interpretive lenses they need to make sense of an institution's past, present, and future. Experience, then, becomes the teacher of narrative.

Linda Adler-Kassner's *The Activist WPA: Changing Stories about Writing and Writers* offers a tentative solution to this problem. Relying on activist strategies for organizing, Adler-Kassner argues that, if WPAs want to control and direct the narratives

associated with writing and writers inside and outside the institution, they need to take an active role in controlling the rhetorical frames shaping WPA discourse, namely the jeremiad that writing produces productive democratic citizens (58). To do this, Adler-Kassner offers a straightforward set of guidelines: identify a narrative that needs to change; assess what information is needed to change the narrative; develop a message to convey the new narrative; determine the audience for the new narrative; tailor the message for that audience; develop a plan for transmitting that message to the intended audience; and finally, assess the effectiveness of the strategy (130-131). These directives provide a useful blueprint for understanding the narrative work of WPAs, and, more importantly, they call attention to the fact that, if WPAs want to control how writing is discussed and practiced, then they simply need to intervene in the rhetorical frames controlling the narratives associated with writers and writing instruction.

Combined with Linde's theories, Adler-Kassner's methodology shows how the narratives driving institutions are open to interpretation and disruption. Furthermore, these theorists help develop a narrative perspective of institutions that place institutional participation as a narrative act concerned with the consequences of believing and accepting particular narratives, with an eye toward challenging the narratives that produce unfavorable consequences. To flesh out these theories fully, we will turn our attention in the next chapter to writing program assessment, which codifies, on a finite level, the narratives associated with WPA work.

1. See, for example, Thomas Miller's *The Formation of College English* (1998); Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays* (1998); James E. Porter, Patricia Sullivan, Stuart Blythe, Jeffrey T. Grabill, and Libby Miles's "Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change" (2000); James Slevin's *Introducing English: Essays in the Intellectual Work of Composition* (2001); Gary A. Olson's (Ed.) *Rhetoric and Composition as Intellectual Work* (2002); Lisa Ede's *Situating Composition: Composition Studies and the Politics of Location* (2004); Linda S. Bergman and Edith M. Baker's (Eds.) *Composition and/or Literature: The End(s) of Education* (2006); and Marc Bousquet's *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-wage Nation* (2008).

2. Porter, et al. offer the following: "Institutional critique is by no means new.…We would say that Foucault invented it, if anybody did" (613). For John Schlib, however, RC scholars have misappropriated Foucault's analysis of power: "[W]hat I'd like to stress is this: rhetcomp scholars reference Foucault's theory of power basically as a way to arrive at their actual interest, which is agency" ("Turning Composition," 2010). Schlib advocates for scholarship that analyzes "sovereign power," which he argues is relevant to our current political context.

3. For a thoughtful article on the connection between individual institutions and "public" spaces, see Kelly Ritter's article, "Extra-Institutional Agency and the Public Value of the WPA," which argues that WPAs' agency extends beyond the confines of

institutional location in (2006). In addition, see Richard P. Keeling, Ric Underhile, and

Andrew F. Wall's "Horizontal and Vertical Structures: The Dynamics of Organization in

Higher Education" (2007).

CHAPTER IV

THE NARRATIVE LOGIC OF ASSESSMENT

Twenty-first century educators are familiar with the word *accountability*. Whether in the public school system or in higher education, educators are expected to participate in accountability measures that verifiably demonstrate quality instruction, superior support services, and institutional effectiveness. For primary and secondary schools, Bush's No Child Left Behind Act (2001) radically changed the educational experience by enforcing a pedagogy centered on preparing students for standardized tests. In addition, the bill holds teachers and administrators accountable for student success and requires educators to submit a variety of assessment and planning documents that demonstrate institutional effectiveness at the state and national levels. While no such bill exists for post-secondary education, per se, institutional accreditation standards, such as those required by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), demand similar documents from university teachers and administrators. For SACS accreditation, particularly, institutions and their individual academic units must develop outcomes, assess them, and formalize the results (Southern Association 3.3.1). More importantly, the Margaret Spellings Commission Report (2006), *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, advocates for increased visibility of "quality assessment data," driven by student learning and performance outcomes (24-25). As a

result, university accountability and assessment are beyond commonplace, as more and more accrediting bodies and state governing bodies, require formal agency reports on institutional effectiveness.

Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) have responded more than adequately to the demands of course, program, and institutional assessments. Especially in the past thirty years, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) have collaborated to develop intellectually rigorous scholarship, committee-sanctioned position papers, and formalized guiding principles on the best assessment practices in the field (Yancey 495; McLeod 97). These responses have engendered a sense of pride in many WPAs because the task of accounting for one's program and/or participating in a university-wide writing assessment initiatives places the WPA at the center of institutional research (O'Neill, Schendel, and Huot 24). For many WPAs, assessment is an "opportunity," rather than an "obligation" (10). That statement depends upon, of course, whether or not WPAs are in charge of assessment initiatives or subject to them.

For the former, assessment-as-opportunity provides WPAs with the chance to conduct institutional research for the purposes of creating new knowledge about writers and writing (12). Viewed from this lens, assessment is an inquiry-based, with a scholarly *telos*, rather than a bureaucratic one. For WPAs inexperienced in assessment and planning, the task can be intimidating because most people equate assessment with

quantifiable data, and as the excuse goes, "English people" do not "do math," an expression I hear all too often in the field. Further, assessment appears artificial, a practice applied to a writing classroom/program, rather than a practice emerging from the writing classroom/program itself. Finally, assessment is work. To conduct a classroom-based or programmatic assessment requires faculty and student buy-in, financial support, and a concrete plan. These anxieties motivated scholars such Brian Huot, Peggie O'Neill, and Cindy Moore to produce numerous articles and books encouraging WPAs to create a "culture of writing assessment" within their programs/universities and to seize the opportunity to develop innovative writing assessments that yield useful data for the field of rhetoric and composition (RC) at large.[1] In this way, WPAs have been positive models for neighboring university departments charged with assessment and planning. In fact, the field's success with assessment and planning is largely due to the collaborative and innovative mentorship of RC's scholars and professional organizations.

In my own experience as a WPA, assessment was not a choice. Hired in 2007 as the assistant director of a writing center at a mid-sized liberal arts school, one of my sole responsibilities was to revise and then implement a three-year assessment plan generated by the director and the former assistant director the year before. I remember feeling anxious when I first learned of the task. To me, assessment meant grading student writing, and my only experience with formal assessment took place in two conversations during my TAship, when I learned that "assessment was coming." Thankfully, when I entered my first WPA position, I was not alone. W-Center, the WPA listserv, numerous

professional journals, and my own institution's research and planning office offered sound advice for my work; combined with professional conferences hosted by the Council of Writing Program Administrators and the Conference on College Composition, and Communication, I was overwhelmingly enthusiastic about writing program assessment. Because of these experiences, my attitude toward assessment and planning is optimistic, and I embrace the work of scholars such as Huot, O'Neill, and Moore because their perspectives are not ideal; they are applicable and, I argue, necessary.

I mention my experiences because not all new WPAs are fortunate enough to find the level of support I received my first year. Also, I share this story because, in a short three years, I oversaw the process of revising, implementing, and interpreting a full assessment cycle that included staff and client surveys, an external review of client work, formal staff evaluation processes, and informal day-to-day assessment activities (See Appendix A). As the executor of the project, I worked alongside my director, writing center staff, and other university administrators, and my academic unit was the first on campus to implement direct and indirect measures with results and a follow-up plan. Overall, our unit faced formal assessment with relative ease. More importantly, we invited our staff to participate in the project by contributing to our mission statement and by establishing a consultant workgroup devoted to internal assessment initiatives.

What made this possible, however, was not our particular institution, Appalachian State University, or our accrediting body, SACS. To me, our ability to navigate programmatic assessment had everything to do with the fact that my director and I

embraced assessment truly as an opportunity in the way that O'Neill, Moore, and Huot suggest. When reviewing the documents and considering the methods we should employ, I was not bogged down by the bureaucratic weight of accreditation demands. Instead, I was empowered to make visible our unit's history, development, effectiveness, and contributions both to the university and the field of RC. During this process, I saw our unit fitting into a university structure that simultaneously fit into a state structure that ultimately fit into a national structure. From top to bottom, the U.S. Department of Education influenced The University of North Carolina University system (UNC), which influenced Appalachian State University (App State) and, finally, the University Writing Center (UWC).

Each of these units had distinct motivations, initiatives, and visions. Each unit, simply put, had its own story—its own narrative. Assessment was a vehicle through which these narratives interacted, aligned, or misaligned. Because my investment in assessment and planning was not preoccupied with resistance or uncertainty about where to begin, I placed my attention on the way assessment linked together various narratives from individual academic units, academic disciplines, state governing bodies, and national agencies. My view of assessment is simple: it is the process by which an individual institution develops a coherent narrative of its history, purpose, and goals that furthers the agenda of its accrediting body and the U.S. Department of Education (which, for the most part, defers to the judgment of accrediting bodies). Individual units within an institution perform a similar task by developing a cohesive identity that aligns with the

mission and goals of the institution at large and the academic discipline to which the unit belongs. At the basis of assessment is the narrative alignment of an institution with its parts and its larger governing bodies.
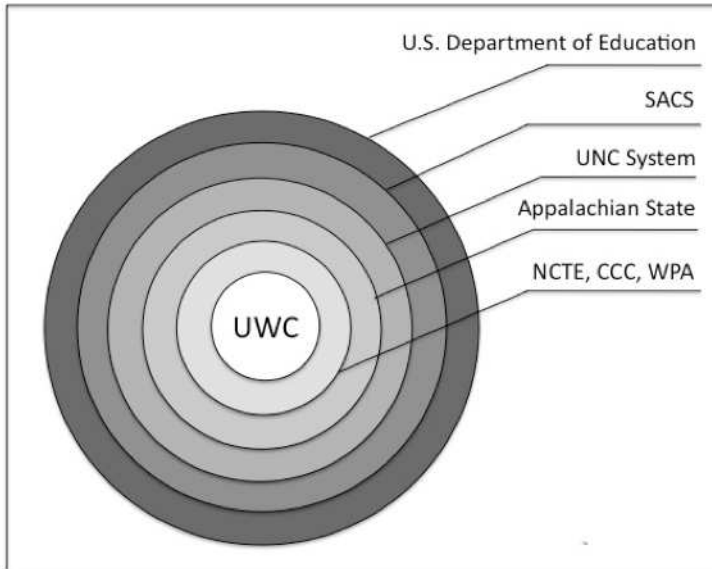
Figure 1. Narrative Levels Influencing an Academic Unit

This illustration captures what I consider the "narrative levels" of an academic unit within its institutional context. When an academic unit such as App State's UWC develops it organizational mission and strategic plan, it cannot simply ascribe to the narratives of the field or the narratives of the state. Instead, academic units are positioned within a context influenced by the nation, state, larger institution, and their respective academic disciplines. These narrative levels contribute to an organization's development. While this figure might appear commonsensical to the seasoned WPA, it might not be as obvious to new professionals in the field, especially those whose graduate experiences

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did not provide them with an intimate opportunity to study university administration. In order to guide new WPAs through the process of institutional literacy, the remainder of this chapter explores the narratives governing an academic unit. I examine these relationships by focusing on UNC, accredited by SACS, with an emphasis on App State, which officially became a part of UNC in 1971 (Institutional Research, "University"). Even further, I will examine the assessment process of App State's UWC, founded in 1974, in order to develop a narrative framework for understanding assessment. My goal is to encourage new WPAs to view assessment as a chance to establish a cohesive institutional identity and to formalize an individual academic unit. More importantly, viewing assessment from a narrative point of view enables new WPAs to approach the task with an understanding of the relationships between institutions and their individual academic units, which will enable them to act with authority and sensitivity to the guiding principles underlying assessment initiatives.

First, I will outline why narrative is a suitable framework. Then, I will create a taxonomy of narratives guiding institutional assessment, and finally, I will apply the taxonomy to App State's UWC. If WPAs understand narrative as an analytical perspective on assessment, then they will be in a position to direct the narratives associated with assessment. This direction will provide WPAs with a chance to effect institutional change and to be active participants in that change. My hope is that this chapter lays the groundwork for further assessment research so that, after this

dissertation, other WPAs will contribute their own scholarship on assessment and narrative.

1. Stories, Narratives, and Assessment

For RC scholars, the connection between narrative and assessment has been partially established. To begin, some institutions require that an "assessment narrative" accompany an individual unit's assessment plan. These narratives provide an overview of a unit's assessment measures, the results, and proposed improvements. WPAs can find examples of these documents on the CWPA website, which houses eight assessment narratives in their Assessment Gallery. Each narrative includes similar information: programmatic history, assessment initiatives, results, guiding principles, and proposed improvements. While these narratives are specifically constructed for a WPA audience, they connect assessment and narrative writing. Overall, the documents serve as powerful models for the RC community, and they offer WPAs new to the field or new to assessment with tangible resources. However, because individual institutions have different assessment and planning requirements, "assessment narratives" are not universal documents.

A second connection between narrative and assessment derives from the written structure of assessment plans. Utilizing the traditional definition of narrative—the recounting of events—assessment plans literally recount an institution's or academic unit's attempt to measure qualitatively and/or quantitatively its effectiveness. They often begin with a statement of need, which can include the history of the unit or institution.

Based on these needs, assessment plans present the learning outcomes and action steps

that were developed to measure the outcomes and whether or not they have been reached.

Then, assessment plans explain the steps taken to measure the outcomes and offer an

analysis of the results. Finally, assessment plans make predictions for the future by either

describing what was and was not successful or by pointing the way forward for future

assessment initiatives. In this way, assessment plans present an institution's or academic

unit's past, present, and future with regard to institutional effectiveness, giving the plans

a beginning, middle, and end. This format is narrative.

Current RC scholarship on assessment, particularly the work of Linda Adler-

Kassner, establishes a third connection between assessment and narrative. In *The Activist*

WPA (2008), Adler-Kassner uses Erwin Goffman's concept of "rhetorical framing" to

show how assessment provides WPAs with a chance to intercede in the stories circulating

about writers and writing. This concept is further expanded in *Reframing*

Writing Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning (2010), a book she co-authors

with Peggy O'Neill. Further, Adler-Kassner, current president of the CWPA, is so

respected in the field that the CWPA posted a document titled "Communication

Strategies," which formalizes the strategies Adler-Kassner developed in *The Activist*

WPA, alongside the NCTE-WPA White Paper on Writing Assessment in Colleges and

Universities. Appropriately, this document appears as an official recommendation from

the leading professional organizations of the field. The strategies presented encourage

WPAs to act locally, within their institutions, by creating partnerships with stakeholders,

developing a common language about writing, communicating messages with clear principles, and delivering those messages to appropriate places such as neighboring institutions, local media venues, or community members (Council). By following these steps, WPAs can control the rhetorical frames conditioning the received stories about writing and writers in higher education.

Keeping in mind my audience—new WPAs in the field—I want to explore why the push toward rhetorical framing and assessment as a matter of controlling stories makes sense. To that end, this chapter forges a fourth connection between narrative and assessment, one that brings together the three I've already mentioned. Relying on the framework set up in the previous chapters—particularly the concepts of narrative logic and guiding principles—I argue that assessment is an institutional practice that reveals how narratives work to organize institutional identities, to inform institutional engagement, and to motivate institutional change. Furthermore, assessment creates the opportunity for WPAs to see the web of narratives that contribute to seemingly straightforward documents such as assessment and strategic plans. When WPAs disentangle these webs, they are in a position to recognize which narratives they can and cannot control.

Thinking about assessment-as-storytelling and, thus, as an opportunity to advance rhetorical agency is not particular to RC. For example, Meg Scharf, in library sciences, delivered a powerful paper at the 2009 Association of College and Research Libraries annual conference encouraging her field to develop a culture of assessment and to begin

exploring the "power of narrative" as a way to promote library advocacy (192). In this presentation, Scharf encourages libraries to make their assessment efforts and initiatives public by posting them on their homepages. This move, Scharf explains, will enable libraries to communicate directly with stakeholders at the local and national levels, thereby allowing librarians to tell their own stories, rather than having others tell it for them (195).

For accountant Lee L. Schulman, eighth president of the Carnegie Foundation, all academic units involved with assessment and reporting should embrace this approach. Schulman argues in "Counting and Recounting: Assessment and the Quest for Accountability," much like Adler-Kassner in RC, that educators need to stop viewing accountability as a "sinister plot" and start taking "control" of the narrative. If educators accomplish this task, they will be able to develop new initiatives for assessment that are representative of and directly correlated with their desired student outcomes. Further, this initiative will truly enable assessment to "improve the quality of learning in higher education" because experts will oversee assessment measures, rather than outside, disinterested parties.

When assessment is viewed as a means for controlling how an institution or academic unit's story is told, it becomes a vehicle for power and also for change. As rhetorician Brenton D. Faber maintains in "Toward a Rhetoric of Change: Reconstructing Image and Narrative in Distressed Organizations" (1998) and further develops in *Community Action and Organizational Change: Image, Narrative, Identity* (2002),

narratives enable an organization "to make both minor daily changes and more radical significant changes throughout the organization" (*Community* 42). In order for this to happen, however, institutions and their workers must be fully conscious of the narratives that shape the institutions both within and without. When this kind of reflection occurs, narratives have the power to "merge the ways people inside and outside the organization perceive and describe their interpretation of the organization." This mergence happens only when the narratives inside and outside of the institution are aligned. In this way, organizational change is the process of negotiating "narrative discordance" and working toward "narrative alignment," concepts that will be explored more fully in the subsequent sections and Chapter V (Faber, "Toward" 220).

These perspectives on narrative are not exhaustive, but they suggest a scholarly recognition of the power of narrative to shape institutional and individual identities, as well as the power of narrative to influence organizational change. More importantly, when narrative as a means for effecting change and as a means for controlling an institution's identity is linked to assessment, WPAs have the opportunity to re-imagine the function of assessment and to consciously investigate the "underlying assumptions" motivating assessment efforts (O'Neill, Moore, and Huot 10). Recognizing the assumptions that guide assessment is important for WPAs because it enables them to participate actively in the process and to generate assessment research for the discourse community at large. But the question remains, what does this process look like?

2. Narrative Logic and Guiding Principles

The assessment documents endorsed by the NCTE, CCCC, and CWPA, which include the NCTE-WPA White Paper on Writing Assessment in Colleges and Universities (April 2008) and the CCCC Committee on Assessment's "Writing Assessment: A Position Statement" (March 2009), offer WPAs clearly articulated guiding principles for assessment that embody the "best practices" in the field. These documents intend to cohere national writing assessments with the professional field of RC so that the narratives circulating about writers and writing, from state legislatures to mainstream media, directly correspond with the field's values and overall vision of effective writing instruction. These guiding principles serve as the foundation upon which WPAs' should structure assessment measures, and as Adler-Kassner argues, these principles are necessary for changing stories about writing and writers (29). That is, for controlling how narratives about writers and writing are perceived and interpreted.

In Chapter II, I argued that narratives justify our beliefs and consequently provide us with rules for conduct. Narrative logic, then, is the use of these narratives to determine an appropriate response to a given situation. In this way, narratives serve as "guiding principles," an understanding I developed from American pragmatism. When applied to assessment, this framework corresponds directly with the structure developed by the NCTE, CCCC, and CWPA. The working model looks like this:

1. Writing assessment involves multiple stakeholders, which includes a number of non-writing specialists in education and the public at large.

2. Our goal, as writing professionals, is to direct the dominant conversations and stories circulating about writers and writing (Adler-Kassner; Council).

3. To do so, the NCTE, CCCC, and CWPA have developed cohesive "guiding principles" that writing experts in this country should apply when conducting assessment (NCTE and CWPA; CCCC Committee on Assessment).

4. These principles enable writing experts to develop coherent narratives about the best practices in the field.

5. In short, by rooting assessment in the principles of the field, WPAs can deliver an authorized message about writing assessment, one that establishes a dominant narrative of writing assessment informed by writing specialists, rather than people outside of the field.

Assessment, then, has its own narrative logic: the guiding principles of the field structure assessment practices and, thus, have the potential to influence the narrative of writing and writers in this country. In this paradigm, WPAs are poised to shape how stories about writing are told, and, more specifically, WPAs are agents in developing the narratives—guiding principles—finluencing assessment. In this way, narratives differ from stories because narratives are the underlying principles that shape stories about writing. For the NCTE, CCCC, and CWPA, these narratives include the following: assessment should be understood within its local context, assessment improves teaching and learning, writing is inherently social, assessment should implement multiple measures, the criteria for assessing writing shapes perceptions about writing, writing assessment should be a

continuous conversation among stakeholders, and writing assessment should be clearly articulated for all interested parties (NCTE and CWPA; CCCC Committee on Assessment).

When these guiding principles support the foundation of writing assessment, they influence how assessment is practiced, and they establish rules for conduct. However, as O'Neill, Schendel, and Huot argue, these principles are not yet fully disseminated to the field at large, as listserv queries and conference presentations make evident (10-11). In response, O'Neill, Moore, and Huot developed *A Guide to College Writing Assessment* (2009) to clarify the field's guiding principles and to offer new WPAs practical resources for developing assessment methods informed by the NCTE, CCCC, and CWPA agree-upon principles. To see what these principles look like in practice, one simply needs to read the assessment narratives housed on the Council of Writing Program Administrators' Assessment Resource Gallery. Each of these documents record, with incredible detail, the guiding principles driving assessment, and a careful read demonstrates that, for the most part, the guiding principles directly correspond with the official principles of NCTE, CCCC, and CWPA either by paraphrasing the principles or by quoting them verbatim.

For example, Saint Joseph College's narrative states explicitly that their assessment programs "mirror National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and CCCC position statements on writing assessment," specifically the use of multiple measures, articulate communication, and an emphasis on improving teaching and

learning (Artz). In Frederick Community College's assessment narrative, the NCTE-WPA White Paper's guiding principles are verbatim, followed by explanations of how the institution practiced them (Kerr). Seattle University follows a similar pattern by explicitly listing the NCTE and CWPA as the major influence guiding their assessments (Bean). With the exception of George Mason University and the University of Kentucky, all posted assessment narratives, without a doubt, re-present the desired guiding principles accepted by the RC community.

These guiding principles, however, are not the only narratives governing writing assessment. Fittingly, the NCTE-WPA White Paper advises WPAs to adapt and refine the organizations' guiding principles "in accordance with local needs, issues, purposes, and concerns of stakeholders," a point reiterated in the CWPA's document "Communication Strategies." In many ways, this suggestion serves as the overarching guiding principle for the organizations' official position on writing assessment because, when WPAs consider local context, the other guiding principles are subject to revision. While discipline-specific narratives (guiding principles) should influence assessment practices, the work of the WPA is to balance a range of guiding principles (hereafter referred to as narratives) as assessment measures are developed, which include local, state, and national narratives. The narrative logic of writing assessment, then, exists in a complicated web of narratives inside and outside an individual institution. Ideally, these narratives emerge from and are informed by the professional organizations of the field.

Isolating these specific narratives requires a thoughtful exploration of any given institution's context, including its accrediting body, state school system (if applicable), organizational mission, local community, and any other additional stakeholders outside of these categories. On the surface, it's hard to imagine a framework in which an institution can adequately respond to all of these parties, but because assessment and accountability are processes that have evolved over time—and continue to do so—institutions have gone to incredible lengths to fully research, develop, and conduct in-depth assessment and planning projects that impressively communicate with and satisfy multiple sets of audience expectations and demands. In fact, when browsing college and university websites, especially offices related to institutional effectiveness and research, one can be overwhelmed by the amount of reporting documents, institutional profiles, and other data associated with accountability and assessment. From organizational charts to departmental assessment plans, the number of documents available to the public is unbelievable.

Personally, I am fascinated by higher education's responsibility to demonstrate institutional effectiveness because I think the activities force institutions to set tangible goals and to ensure they are met. Moreover, agency reporting and assessment enable institutions, as well as their individual academic units, to develop a sense of institutional identity and to communicate that identity discursively. This process allows institutions and their units to establish a deep understanding of their purpose, mission, and goals. Of course, my description here is ideal mostly because my own experience with assessment

has been positive. Regardless, when institutions engage in these processes, they are in a position to define, on a discursive level, their mission and goals; to make transparent their commitment to student learning; and to recognize their relationships with higher education, accrediting bodies, and other organizations. Analyzing these documents enables researchers to see how institutions are immersed in a discursive web of narratives that serve to propagate the values of the Department of Education and individual state agendas.

3. The University of North Carolina System

Chapter III noted organizational theory's view of narrative as an integral part of organizational development. As Brian Pentland explains in "Building Process Theory with Narrative," narratives are "central forms of expression of organizational culture" that are "important vehicles for socialization" (716). First, an organization's culture is expressed through the narratives that the members of the organization believe and, therefore, act upon. These narratives are essential to organizational development because they provide members of the organization with a sense of purpose. Second, to develop a cohesive organizational culture, members of an organization must collectively adopt a set of narratives that shape the mission, goals, and future of the organization. This view, of course, is ideal, and very rarely do organizational narratives reflect the exact same perspective; however, in order for an institution to sustain itself as an institution, a collective narrative must be intact. Because of this need, narrative is linked with the daily life of the institution. Consequently, recognizing these narratives is essential for new

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institutional members because, as Charlotte Linde explains in "Narrative and Social Tacit Knowledge," "part of becoming a member of an institution involves learning the stories about that institution which everyone must know, the appropriate times and reasons to tell them, and the ways in which one's own stories are shaped to fit a new institutional context" (161). For new WPAs, Linde's suggestion is evident: in order to become an active member of an institution, one must sift through the available narratives, make sense of them, and determine a strategy for entering into the narrative structure. Because narrative work is an essential institutional activity, new workers must, over time, learn how to isolate the narratives at play and to find the means of participation and intervention. This framework provides a theoretical lens for negotiating a new workplace and for figuring out how to begin understanding an organization's parts and goals.

In the age of accountability, this notion indicates that WPAs must be cognizant of the narratives shaping an institution's mission and history because these narratives function as organizing principles for the institution's past, present, and future actions. Earlier, I referred to the NCTE-WPA and CCCC Assessment Committee's guiding principles as narratives because the principles provide WPAs with a foundation for practicing assessment. For WPAs who value these principles, they offer a structure for assessment that is guided by a set of core beliefs recognized and honored by the field. Institutions act in the same way. Their success is largely determined by their ability to develop a mission, comprised of core values and principles, and to fulfill this mission through their daily activities. Often, these values and principles are influenced by state

and national bodies such as accrediting agencies and state governing boards. More importantly, because individual institutions are connected with other institutions, their core values and principles must complement their inter-institutional relationships as well. From this perspective, narratives are simply the guiding principles of an institution that provide data "organizational members use to plan, enact, interpret, and evaluate their own actions and those of others" (Pentland 717). To locate these narratives, we need only look at an institution's mission statements, historical records, accountability and planning documents, and inter-institutional partnerships to discover how an institution behaves.

The core values and principles of the University of North Carolina System (UNC), defined by its mission statement, were motivated, in part, by constitutional and statutory mandates, including Article IX of the North Carolina Constitution, which simply states that "The General Assembly shall maintain a public system of education" designed to serve North Carolina citizens and to provide education free of charge, "as far as practicable" (qtd. in UNC "History"). This constitutional mandate provided UNC with an educational mission, and aside from a series of general statutes regulating community and technical colleges, as well as the governing body of the system, the most profound legislation impacting UNC's mission was the 1971 Higher Education Reorganization Act. This act unified 16 universities under the Board of Governors and provided a basic purpose for the system: "to foster the development of a well-planned and coordinated system of higher education, to improve the quality of education, to extend its benefits, and to encourage an economical use of the state's resources" ("History"). Central to this

mission, of course, is strategic planning, which led UNC to adopt a mission statement in 1992 that achieved statutory status in 1995. With the development of a cohesive mission, UNC enveloped its 16 institutions in effort to "to discover, create, transmit, and apply knowledge to address the needs of individuals and society...through instruction...research...and service" ("History"). Hence, when considering the narratives guiding The University of North Carolina, one must consider this fundamental mission, as it truly underscores the mission of all UNC institutions.

For example, when UNC's Board of Trustees was renamed the "Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina" in 1972, "continuous and flexible planning" became a strategic priority of UNC in response to the Higher Education Reorganization Act's charge to create a "well-planned" university system. The first long-range plan was developed in 1976 (UNC Board of Governors "Long-Range"). These plans, carried out incrementally over five-year periods except in cases where leadership was in transition, are a staple of UNC, indicating its commitment to maintaining a relevant and effective system of higher education. In addition, this priority is evident in the system's mission statement because "addressing the needs of individuals and society" is a process that has to be continually assessed and updated, especially given how fast technology and society change. To work in UNC's system, as a result, is to engage in a dynamic environment that values planning and reporting because, for UNC, these initiatives enable the system to stay current with the needs of its region and ever-evolving student demographic.

This core value, a sincere commitment to planning initiatives that ensure UNC

fulfills its mission, is a fundamental narrative supporting the daily institutional life of any

given university campus within the system. Not only does UNC implement its own long-

range planning initiatives, the system also abides by the accreditation demands of SACS,

which requires a sophisticated set of accountability documents. Further, UNC has a

reputation among its faculty for placing emphasis on planning and reporting, and the

most recent instantiation of this practice was the University of North Carolina Tomorrow

Initiative (UNCT), developed by former Board of Governors Chairman Jim Phillips in

2007. Beginning in February of 2007 and culminating in a formal report the following

December, UNCT studied, with great detail, the changing demographics and economic

challenges facing North Carolina's future, with an eye toward analyzing how UNC's

multi-campus system was poised (or not) to respond adequately to those changes. The

motivation for this project, according to Phillips, was to cohere the planning initiatives of

all UNC institutions in order to offer the Board of Governors a comprehensive view of all

17 campuses (16 universities and one public boarding school) and to prevent the

duplication of programs (Shaw). Along with responding to "the needs of the state," these

motivations offered each campus the opportunity to evaluate its current programs and to

advocate for increased resources that would enable individual institutions to better serve

the needs of North Carolina.

As operating principles, the outcomes of UNCT's official recommendations were

presented to UNC's Board of Governors, in order to "guide and shape current and future

priorities, resource allocations, and existing and future programs, and strategic plans and missions of the UNC, its 17 constituent institutions and its affiliated entities" so that UNC continues to offer quality education within a "rapidly changing, knowledge-based global economy and environment" (UNCT Commission 2). Following the report's submission, the UNCT Commission required each individual institution within the system to respond to the report's outcomes, determining how individual institutions worked to meet those recommendations and what obstacles prevented the institutions from fulfilling the outcomes (Appalachian, "UNC Tomorrow"). Two "phases" of reporting were required in 2008 to demonstrate institution preparedness for the Implementation Phase of 2009-2012. Practically, this initiative influenced individual institutions by creating the opportunity for them to develop new strategic initiatives that would fulfill UNC's mission on the basis of UNCT's findings. For most institutions, tangible differences took the shape of enhanced resources and revised strategic planning initiatives taking into account not only the mission of UNC but also the findings of UNCT (See Fig. 2 below).

Currently undergoing the Implementation Phase of the UNCT Commission's recommendations, UNC institutions are responsible for integrating the UNCT's findings into their current assessment and planning practices, which adds an additional layer of consideration to the institutions' already developed planning measures. Further, alongside UNC's emphasis on reporting and planning and UNCT's recommendations for future planning, all universities in the UNC System are accredited by the Southern Association

of Colleges and Schools (SACS), which offers another set of directives for university assessment and planning. While none of these influences are exclusive, since SACS does not conflict with UNC or vice versa, the layers of consideration a single institution in UNC must consider as its evolves are great in number. To manage these directives and to fully understand how they coordinate and what their purposes are, university administrators must have keen awareness of the intersections among UNC, UNCT, and SACS so that their respective institutions fulfill their stakeholder's demands with grace and exceptionality.

University of North Carolina Mission Statement

The University of North Carolina is...dedicated to the service of North Carolina and its people....[The] mission is to discover, create, transmit, and apply knowledge to address the needs of individuals and society....In the fulfillment of this mission, the University shall seek an efficient use of available resources to ensure the highest quality in its service to the citizens of the State. Teaching and learning constitute the primary service that the University renders to society.

UNC Tomorrow Mission Statement

The University of North Carolina is dedicated to the service of North Carolina and its people. In order to efficiently and effectively fulfill its three-pronged mission of education, research and scholarship, and public service in the 21st century, the University should proactively anticipate and identify the needs facing our state both now and into the future, and, consistent with its mission, develop and implement responses to those needs.

Appalachian State University Mission Statement

....As a member of the University of North Carolina, Appalachian's fundamental mission is to discover, create, transmit, and apply knowledge to address the needs of individuals and....We accept our responsibility to be actively involved in addressing the educational, economic, cultural, and societal needs of the changing region, state, nation, and world. As a publicly funded institution, Appalachian is committed to accomplishing its initiatives through efficient and effective resource utilization..
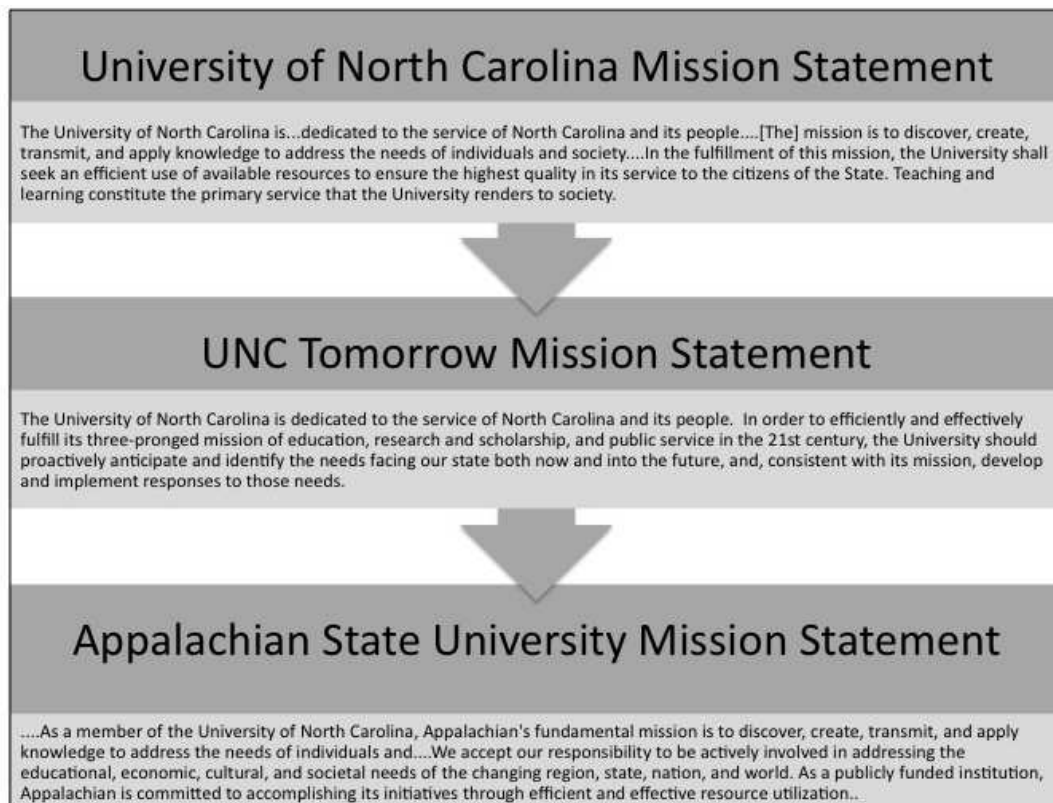
Figure 2. The University of North Carolina Mission Statement Flow Chart

SACS' demands for evidence of "Institutional Effectiveness," as outlined in its

Core Requirements, rides tandem with UNC's long established commitment to planning.

Together, UNC and SACS place a great deal of pressure on UNC institutions to report

their progress and responsiveness as institutions of higher education. An additional

directive, of course, must be added here. In September of 2006, the Margaret Spellings

Commission on the Future of Higher Education published a list of recommendations

calling for a "robust culture of accountability and transparency throughout higher

education" (21). In this report, which was fueled by Spellings' desire to assess higher

education's performance with regard to access, affordability, accountability, and quality,

the Commission argued that institutions of higher education needed to improve their

transparency and accountability measures by making their institutional effectiveness and

public contributions easily accessible (7, 14). For the Commission, one way to address

this inadequacy would be to create a public database housing accountability documents,

which would, in turn, instill greater "public trust" in institutions of higher education (14).

This initiative, while less important for UNC, played (and continues to play) a significant

role in university development across the country, as many institutions discovered that,

indeed, their accountability efforts were not transparent.

When this charge infiltrated higher education, UNC's institutions were already

involved in accountability measures. In January of 2006, after establishing a set of

Strategic Directions in the 2004-2009 Long-Range Plan, which was extended to 2011 due

to a change in leadership, UNC pushed its institutions to figure out measures for

implementing the directions ("Supplement"). For example, at App State, these directives, combined with the Spellings Commission's findings, prompted Chancellor Kenneth Peacock to announce in August of 2006 that App State would create a new strategic plan for 2008-2012 (Appalachian State University, "Strategic Plan"). Taken together, UNC's 2006 charge and the Spellings Commission's recommendations prompted App State to develop its strategic plan with both audiences in mind. Just one year later, in 2007, App State's focus for strategic planning would be expanded, yet again, by the UNCT Commission's recommendations.

As a result, when the Board of Governors approved App State's Strategic Plan 2008-2012 on September 12, 2008, the document responded to UNC's *Long-Range Planning 2004-2009*, UNCT's *Final Report*, SACS's *The Principles for Accreditation*, the Spellings Commission's *A Test of Leadership*, and App State's administration, faculty, students, and community members' feedback. In one simple document, the voices of influence are significant. Although many faculty view assessment and planning documents as externally motivated and internally draining (resources, time, effort), the creation of such a plan as this allowed App State and its governing bodies to establish a relationship based on shared goals, and even though many of these goals were directed to UNC institutions, with regard to UNCT and UNC long-range planning generally, the university community at large shaped the directives through committee work, reports, and open forums. In this way, App State's Strategic Plan, which appears singular, is actually polyphonous, synchronizing the goals and expectations of its governing system,

accrediting body, and national legislature. Weaving together these narratives within the confines of a singular planning document takes rhetorical skill and unwavering patience, but through the process, an institution can discursively develop a identity that aligns with its local, state, and national contexts. In this way, assessment and planning initiatives challenge institutions to form a singular and collective identity at the same time. Not only is App State an individual institution with its own mission and goals, but the university, as part of the UNC System, the U.S. Department of Education (ED), and SACS is also a collective entity shaped by a number of organizations that lay the foundation for its guiding principles.

4. Appalachian State University's Writing Center

Individual academic units within an institution operate similarly to the institution itself. Navigating directives from national legislation, accrediting agencies, statewide governing bodies, and individual institutions, academic units are subject to and limited by the narratives shaping its home institution. When App State's University Writing Center was charged, for example, in 2007 to develop, implement, and complete a three-year assessment cycle, in addition to developing a strategic plan for 2008-2012 alongside the university, we had to consider the overall mission of the university, UNC, UNCT, SACS, and ED. Before we could even begin to develop a formal mission statement, define our program and learning outcomes, and consider our strategic vision, we had to consult an array of institutional resources to figure out where our unit fit into the university's organizational structure and how we were furthering the mission of UNC and its national

legislative bodies governing. That is, we had to assess the narratives influencing our academic unit.

The narratives, or guiding principles, driving our assessment and planning process were as follows:

1. **Accreditation Narrative**: The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Core Principles

2. **National Narrative**: The Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education's Directives

3. **State Narrative**: The University of North Carolina's Strategic Directions and Special Initiatives

4. **Institutional Narrative**: Appalachian State University's Strategic Priorities and Initiatives

5. **Disciplinary Narrative**: The National Council of Teachers of English, the Council of Writing Program Administrators, and the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Guiding Principles

Each of these narratives helped us piece together, like a puzzle, a smaller narrative that would reflect each of its contributors while simultaneously enabling the UWC to assert an autonomous mission and vision. More importantly, although these narratives were explicit and implicit directives, they did not hinder the development of our organization's identity; instead, they shaped it. Rather than viewing our assessment efforts as isolated

acts, we envisioned them as thoroughly integrated, well researched, and informed by the best principles and practices our nation, state, and discipline.

The chart below succinctly organizes the foundations, directives, and principles motivating our assessment and planning process. I present this chart because, when one considers the range of voices influencing a simple practice like assessment, the importance of the task becomes clear. Assessment is not simply a practice that is value
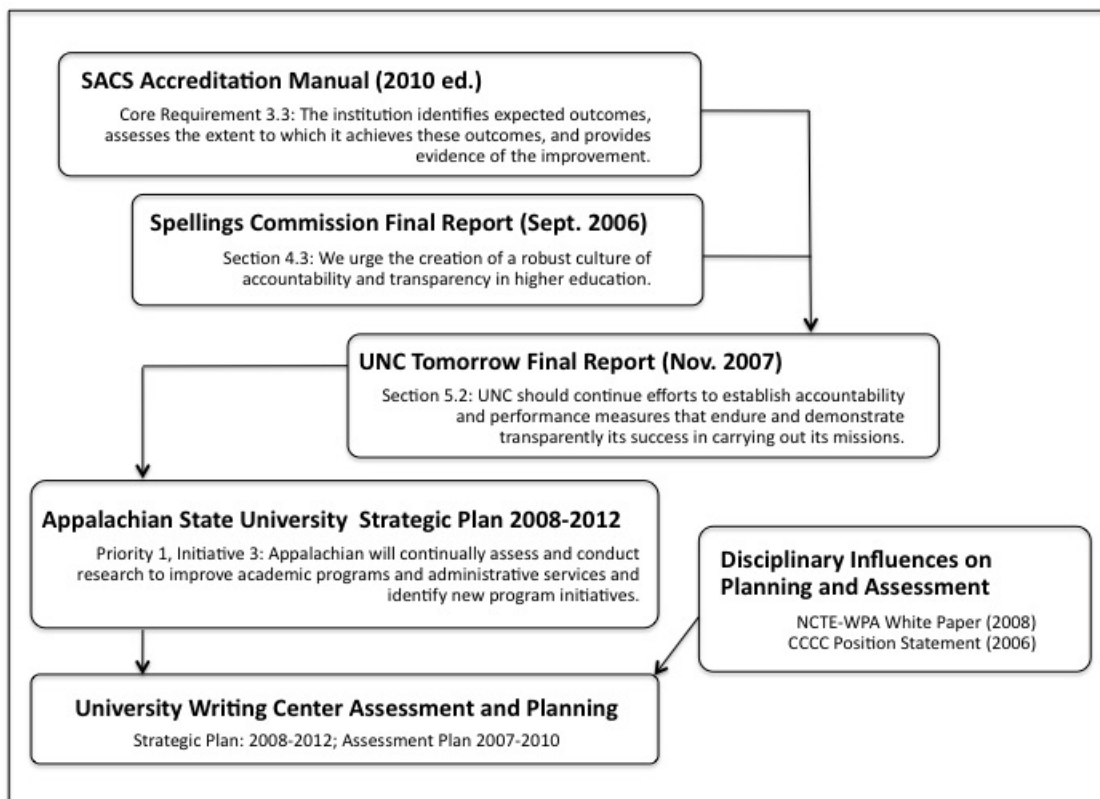

Figure 3. Guiding Principles for Assessment and Strategic Planning

by administrators but also a practice that enables an academic unit to develop "initiatives for institutional improvement and self-knowledge" (Welsh and Metcalf 463). Self-knowledge, particularly, involves learning what stakeholders expect from an academic unit and figuring out how to balance those expectations alongside a unit's own vision—a process that can be accomplished, despite what faculty and administrators new to the task might think. Further, assessment provides a space in which a unit can learn what it is capable of accomplishing while also testing the boundaries what might be possible within a given set of confines.[2] When academic units undergo a thorough self-study during the process of developing a unit plan with a defined mission and vision, they begin to see their value within the organization and also their commitment to fulfilling the organization's mission, both of which are important for the academic unit to develop a synergistic perspective of its relationship with the university at large.

The problem, of course, is that institutional contexts influence the level of synergy an academic unit might embrace. John F. Welsh and Jeff Metcalf, in "Faculty and Administrative Support for Institutional Effectiveness," argue that administration and faculty tend to resist institutional effectiveness measures when external agencies enforce the initiatives or when forces outside of the actual institution/department undergoing assessment design the measures (449). These circumstances are understandable, and for WPAs facing similar situations, a synergistic approach to assessment must sound extraordinarily naïve. The only way to fix such a problem, however, is to work diligently within one's context to develop a true "culture of assessment," as many WPAs and

university administrators have encouraged. Luckily, at App State, a culture of assessment preceded our initiatives, and after researching the history of UNC, we learned that assessment and planning have been central to UNC's educational mission for at least 40 years.

Appropriately, when our administration announced its development of a new strategic plan in 2006, it simultaneously announced that all individual academic units would be required to submit their own assessment plans by fall of 2007 and strategic plans by fall of 2008. By emphasizing, from the start, that the process was "a natural extension of the institution's commitment to excellence in teaching and learning" whose aim was "program improvement," the administration demonstrated that, indeed, program administrators and faculty had something at stake in this process (Institutional Research and Planning, *Assessment at Appalachian* 3). To guide faculty and staff through this process, the administration held open forums, frequent faculty meetings, workshop opportunities, and individual conferences with the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (IRAP). In doing so, the administration fostered a vibrant culture of assessment on campus and more than adequately supported each academic unit's participation in the projects.

In the UWC, I approached our assessment plan with the intention of improving the systems we had in place because I recognized that the process actually had less to do with the "administration" than it did with our own initiatives to contribute to the development and growth of our community within the university and the town of Boone.

Furthermore, the narratives of the field solidified my commitment to developing a

localized approach comprised of multiple measures. As I developed our planning

documents, I distinguished between "direct" and "indirect" measures, balanced narrative

with quantifiable data, and challenged our unit to improve our own planning efforts.

From creation to implementation, our academic unit initiated all planning efforts, keeping

its focus on the ways in which our unit connected with and furthered the mission of App

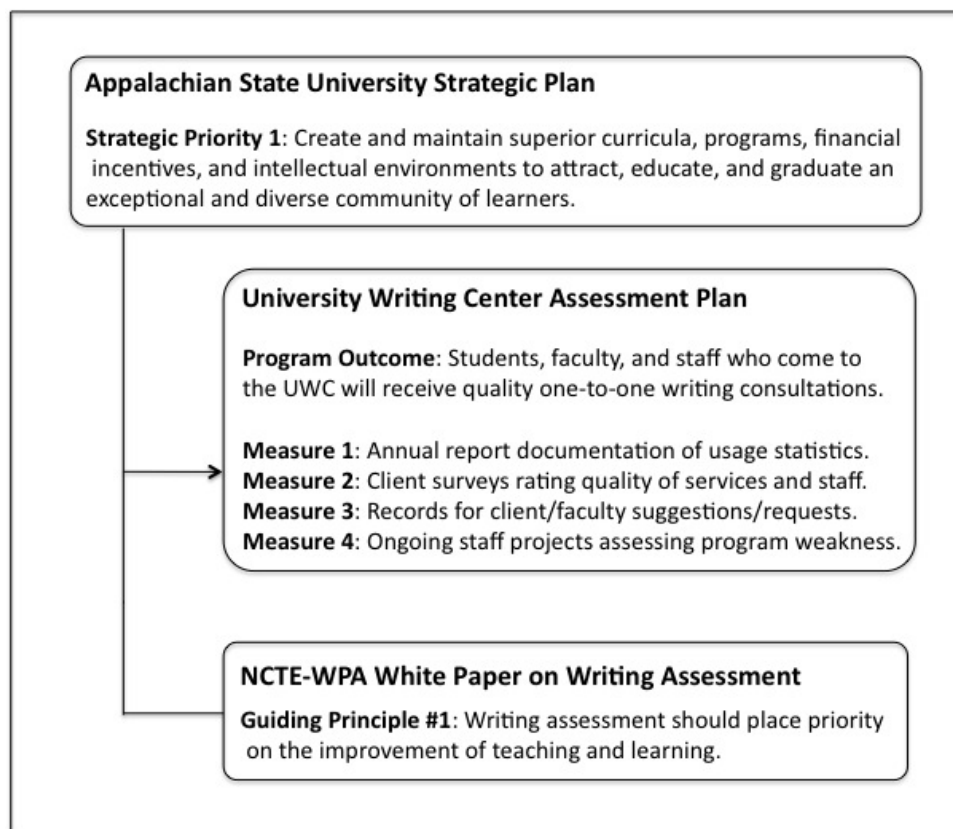State as a whole, as well as the best practices in the field of RC (See Fig. 4 below).

Appalachian State University Strategic Plan

Strategic Priority 1: Create and maintain superior curricula, programs, financial incentives, and intellectual environments to attract, educate, and graduate an exceptional and diverse community of learners.

University Writing Center Assessment Plan

Program Outcome: Students, faculty, and staff who come to the UWC will receive quality one-to-one writing consultations.

Measure 1: Annual report documentation of usage statistics.
Measure 2: Client surveys rating quality of services and staff.
Measure 3: Records for client/faculty suggestions/requests.
Measure 4: Ongoing staff projects assessing program weakness.

NCTE-WPA White Paper on Writing Assessment

Guiding Principle #1: Writing assessment should place priority on the improvement of teaching and learning.

Figure 4. Major Guiding Principles Influencing the UWC's Assessment

These experiences taught me a powerful lesson about university participation: institutional context matters. When I went to academic conferences touting the benefits of assessment, I was treated like a brainwashed bureaucrat who simply worked for a benevolent administrator. In the "real world" programs were being cut, positions eliminated, and academic identities fragmented, regardless of the craftsmanship and integrity of assessment and planning documents. Regardless, I am fortunate that at App State the UWC was privileged enough as an independent program to maintain its credibility and to demonstrate its necessity to the institution's larger mission of providing superior curricula and instruction.

Part of what makes my experience unique is the fact that, in the fall of 2008, App State implemented a brand new General Education Curriculum with a vertical writing model, which required students to complete a writing course throughout their college experience. With an increase in writing classes and a number of faculty who needed professional development to teach the new writing courses, the UWC had a secure position within the university because the General Education Program now looked to the UWC to assist with its mission. When writing became a university-wide priority through general education reform, our value as an academic unit concretized.

Obtaining this kind of permanence, even temporarily, directly impacts what an academic unit deems possible within a given set of confines. For our program, assessment and planning provided us with the tools to recognize our place within App State's institutional mission. Further, the process demonstrated that our unit's narrative

absolutely contributed to the narrative of our institution, which contributed to the narrative of our state, and so on. While some WPAs might criticize this approach because it is not critical of the planning process itself, accountability and transparency are not going anywhere. To that end, I encourage new faculty to approach assessment and planning from a narrative perspective so that they find the fissures and congruencies within with narrative levels of their own institutional context so that, when their narrative is called for, a powerful and integral response will be provided.

While this chapter chronicled a positive relationship between institutional identity and narrative, the narrative logics of an institution's individual academic units do not always cohere. At App State, the UWC harmoniously identified itself as a service-oriented program furthering the mission of the university as whole, particularly the General Education Program. The next chapter, however, presents a case study of competing narrative logics between two programs within one department. *Division* and *fragmentation* replace words like *synergy* and *cohesion*, as I examine how a proposal to relocate the Composition Program at App State from the English Department to University College called into question the relationship between departmental and disciplinary narratives. While the contrast might appear stark to the onlooker, these case studies map out at least two ways that narrative logic provides a useful perspective for institutional engagement.

NOTES

1. For a vibrant and useful discussion on how to create a culture of writing assessment, see Brian Huot's "Toward a New Theory of Writing Assessment" (1996) and "Toward A New Discourse of Assessment for the College Writing Classroom" (2002); Peggy O'Neill, Ellen Schendel, and Brian Huot's "Defining Assessment as Research: Moving from Obligations to Opportunities" (2002); and Cindy Moore, Peggy O'Neill, and Brian Huot's "Creating a Culture of Assessment in Writing Programs and Beyond" (2009) and *A Guide to College Writing Assessment* (2009). These writers, more so than other scholars in the field, provide incredible guidance on assessment by explaining the guiding principles and assumptions WPAs need to develop and execute successful writing and program assessments.

2. See Chris W. Gallagher's *Reclaiming Assessment: A Better Alternative to the Accountability Agenda* (2007).

CHAPTER V

THE NARRATIVE LOGIC OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

> [N]arratives are internal constructions that distinguish and politicize what
> members of an organization value....these narratives denote the various identities
> members claims and provide the framework from within which new members
> may choose their own organizational identity. –Brenton D. Faber, *Community
> Action and Organizational Change* (33)

Writing program administrators (WPAs) fulfill a variety of roles within an

institution, often serving as both program directors and tenure-track or full-time faculty

members (McLeod 7-11). This dual responsibility—teaching and directing—presents a

unique set of opportunities and challenges for WPAs, as the narratives governing

departmental and programmatic behaviors and beliefs have the potential to cohere,

compete, or misalign. These potentials, of course, are contingent upon a variety of factors

related to curricular collaborations, reporting lines, staffing, and institutional location. To

add an additional complication, the organizational and labor structures of any given

writing program vary across institutions. Even within the same state system, WPAs fulfill

different roles, and the programs they oversee provide different kinds of services for their

home institutions. Within The University of North Carolina (UNC), for example, each

institution's composition or first-year writing program has a defined goal, set of core

classes, and reporting line(s) that differentiate them. Further, additional writing programs

such as writing centers or writing/communication across the curriculum programs lack

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uniformity from school to school, as do the responsibilities and autonomy of WPAs. These differences prevent a systematic, straightforward analysis of the narratives governing writing program administration, requiring a research methodology that is, fundamentally, location specific.

Adhering to these principles and following the vibrant tradition in the field of rhetoric and composition (RC) to share local stories about programmatic development, this chapter focuses specifically on the Rhetoric and Composition Program's (RC Program) attempt at Appalachian State University (App State) to relocate from the College of Arts and Sciences to University College (UC) in the 2009-2010 academic school year. While the previous chapter explored how assessment initiatives positively revealed the confluence of narratives between App State's University Writing Center (UWC) and its stakeholders, this chapter examines how this particular institutional change effort challenged the synergistic possibilities among disciplinary, departmental, programmatic, and institutional narratives guiding the RC Program at App State. More importantly, this local example problematizes a simplistic view of institutional change by making transparent the nexus of narratives guiding departmental decision-making processes. For new WPAs, this example will question a number of idealistic narratives inundating WPA scholarship, especially those that position the WPA as an uninhibited change agent/hero leading his/her program toward liberation, in addition to the narrative that institutional change is simply a matter of making the right arguments.

As I mentioned at the start of this project, my first position as a WPA introduced me to the politics of university administration and departmental governance, an experience that I was wholly unprepared for and an experience that revised the romantic narratives I had associated with the "power" of a WPA. Firsthand, I had to identify, at least on an informal level, the system at work within a university department in order to figure out my role in that system. In other words, when I began my position, I did not know initially how to interpret the arguments presented in faculty meetings, how to research institutional history in order to present informed contributions to the discussions, or even how to follow Robert's Rules of Order. Needless to say, my entire first year as the Assistant Writing Center Director and Adjunct Faculty in English was relatively silent, without any kind of rhetorical sophistication.

Despite the academic remarkability of my graduate experiences, I expected to be better equipped to handle higher-level conversations regarding placement, course design, or labor practices. I also expected to encounter a fully collegial environment where all faculty, regardless of affiliation within the field of English studies, embraced the common pursuit of guiding student writers through the literacy process. Finally, I expected to reap the benefits of RC's legitimacy battles of the 90s and early aughts by earning collegial respect and recognition as an expert in the field. While my experiences were not the antithesis of these expectations, they definitely challenged what I believed to be true about institutional engagement at that point. Accordingly, the tenor of this chapter contrasts with that of Chapter IV because my institutional position as a WPA conflicted

so drastically with my institutional position as a faculty. Moreover, the Rhetoric and Composition Relocation Proposal (hereafter, Proposal) forced me into an interstitial space within which my institutional identities conflicted. In the UWC, the narratives guiding my work cohered; in English, they tended toward dis-unification. Piecing together the best possible solutions, consequently, proved difficult.

What follows in this chapter is an account of the RC Program's Proposal to relocate to UC, and I investigate the range of narratives underscoring the major debates. My intention in this chapter is to show how a narrative framework equipped me with the analytical tools I needed to figure out when and how to act. By isolating the narrative logic at work in the initiative, I obtained a rich understanding of the interplay among university structures, interested stakeholders, and faculty governance. Further, I felt confident in my role as WPA-Adjunct Faculty and recognized the degree to which my institutional authority was conditioned by my dual identity. Had I entered the position with this framework in mind, my initial participation might have looked very different. However, part of what it takes to enter an institution is an adjustment of our expectations and prior experiences in the face of new relationships, new guiding principles, and new narrative dynamics. I have no intention in this analysis of negatively or unfairly representing App State. Instead, my goal is to encourage novice WPAs to identify the frameworks they discovered and to make these visible to other WPAs who may feel overwhelmed by their first professional experience.

To develop this analysis, I rely heavily on primary research, particularly the Provost-appointed Rhetoric and Composition Relocation Task Force Report, which was published in April of 2010. This document presents the Task Force's recommendations, a history of the proposal, and a considerable number of appendices that reveal the polyphonous underbelly of the relocation effort. In addition, I draw from a collection of institutional research documents I created and subsequently distributed during a half-day workshop at the 2010 Conference on College Composition and Communication in Louisville, KY (session AW.6). The documents formalize the structure of our programs, faculty positions and rank, university-wide collaborations and partnerships, curricular changes since 2007, and task delegation among WPAs. I also incorporate secondary research on institutional change in order to connect my analysis with current scholarship that is attentive to the relationship between narrative and change. Finally, I argue that the Proposal offers a powerful example of the fragility of institutional structures because, when viewed from a narrative lens, the document reveals the ways in which university structures are always evolving alongside a dynamic range of national, institutional, disciplinary, departmental, and personal narratives that are indeterminate. These narratives influence an institution's, as well as its individual academic units', abilities to maintain a stable, transitional, or transformative identity. In other words, the narrative levels guiding an institution have the power to cohere but also to conflict; because of this, institutions are never fixed structures.

Before I begin this discussion, however, I must make the following admission: in May of 2005, I received my MA in English from App State, and my major areas of study included Eighteenth Century British Literature, Post-WWII American Literature, and Rhetoric and Composition. During this program, I fulfilled a two-year TAship in the UWC and the English Department. In 2005, I left App State to pursue my PhD in English, with a concentration on Rhetoric and Composition, at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. After completing my doctoral work in the spring of 2007, a full-time position opened at App State that was designated 3/4-time Assistant Writing Center Director and 1/4-time Adjunct Faculty in English. I applied and accepted this position with enthusiasm. When I began the job in August of 2007, I was an alumna-turned-colleague to English faculty, and without a doubt, this subject position complicated my ability to enter the department with confidence, especially because my former teacher-student relationships had to be reconfigured, some for the better and some for the worse.

I have no doubt that my perspective on the relocation initiative is mired in my past experiences; however, as a pragmatist, I see this chapter as my attempt to formalize a contingent truth about narrative and institutions, grounded in experience, that I can continue to apply to new contexts after this project's completion. As Kate Ronald and Hephzibah advocate in *Reason to Believe: Romanticism, Pragmatism, and the Teaching of Writing,* systems are not immutable, and we need to apply pragmatist principles that enable us to imagine alternatives within a seemingly fixed structure. These principles value the role of lived experience and observation to inquiry, and they honor the

importance of fallibility to any conclusion and/or judgment. Ronald and Roskelly term this practice "romantic/pragmatist rhetoric," which is a method for "systematizing...belief so that it becomes continually tested and rethought and continually responsive to changing contexts" (137). The narrative logic of institutional change is such an endeavor, and after this single iteration, within the context of a dissertation, I intend to continue finding additional locations where my method may be retested and reformulated. As a pragmatist, I recognize that I can only offer a contingent understanding of narrative logic within a departmental context. Knowing that this understanding has the potential to evolve, I consider this chapter as a conversation starter with my audience.

1. Writing Programs at Appalachian State University

Appalachian State University houses three writing programs: the Rhetoric and Composition (RC) Program, the Writing Across the Curriculum Program (WAC), and the University Writing Center (UWC). WAC and the UWC are located within a relatively new academic structure called University College (UC). Founded in 2007 by former Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education (VPUG) Dave Haney, UC was created to bring together the university's general education curriculum, student and faculty support services, residential learning communities, interdisciplinary degree programs, and co-curricular programs, all of which support faculty and students both inside and outside of the classroom. The VPUG oversees UC and reports directly to the Provost of Academic Affairs. In addition to WAC and the UWC, UC houses First-year Seminar (FYS), the Vertical Writing Model (VWM), and the General Education Curriculum (Gen Ed).

Alongside the development of UC, the Provost appointed the General Education

Task Force in 2005 to provide recommendations for an innovative general education

model that would appropriately respond to national and state demands for improved

college curricula. In the fall of 2007, UC implemented the Task Force's recommendation,

creating a sophisticated and revitalized Gen Ed curriculum. This program is divided into

four "Perspectives," which generates a majority of the course, but students also take FYS

and the first two courses of the VWM (See Figure 5 below). The Gen Ed Curriculum

Committee designed the VWM to offer students continued support for writing throughout

their college careers. During the first year, students take English 1000, Expository

Writing; in the second year, English 2001, Introduction to Writing Across the

Curriculum; in the third year, a "Writing in the Major" course; and in the fourth, a Senior

Capstone Project. The RC Program teaches the first two courses in this sequence. Aside

from FYS, these are the only courses required for all undergraduates.

Supporting the VWM, the WAC Program works with all writing faculty across

the university, including RC faculty in the English Department. The WAC Program also

reviews all writing course proposals and assesses writing courses for Gen Ed. WAC

consultants are English faculty, and WID consultants teach in a range of university

disciplines. Alongside the WAC Program, the UWC provides additional writing support

for university students, faculty, and staff. UWC consultants are advanced undergraduates,

graduate assistants (GA), graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), and RC faculty. In

consultation with the Office of Distance Education, the UWC provides an online writing

center, and, in accordance with WAC, UWC Consultants also serve as Writing Mentors

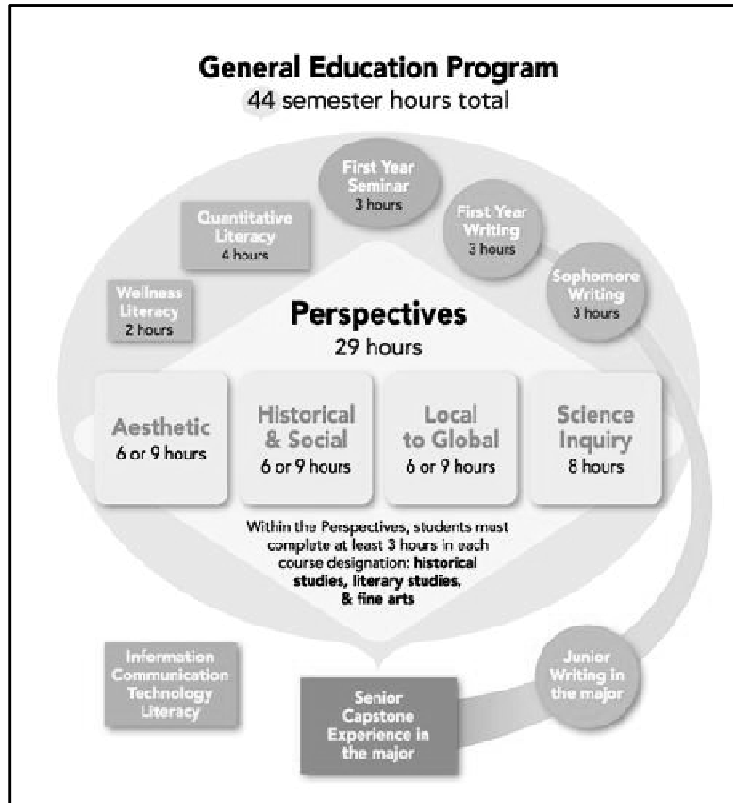for WID Faculty. Both the WAC Program and the UWC report directly to the VPUG.

Figure 5. General Education Program. (Appalachian State University, 2008; web).

From these descriptions, the collaborations between WAC and the UWC are

clear. More importantly, both programs have deep connections with the RC Program

through a variety of campus and departmental collaborations. However, unlike WAC and

the UWC, the RC Program is administratively housed in the English Department (See

Figure 6 below). Reporting directly to Arts and Sciences, the English Department houses the RC Program and offers a range of degrees, including a BA with concentrations in Film Studies, Creative Writing, and Professional Writing; a BS for teachers; a "second major" in English Education for Education majors; an undergraduate minor for B.A. or B.S. teacher education majors in other disciplines; MAs in Literature (thesis required), Secondary Education (thesis or non-thesis), and Junior Colleges (thesis or non-thesis); and a RC Graduate Certificate. Overall, the faculty composition for the 2009-2010 academic year was 42 tenured and tenure-track (TT) faculty; 38 non-tenure track (NTT) faculty; and 18 GTAs.

From this faculty pool, the RC Program is comprised of four TTs; 38 NTTs, 19 of which are benefitted; and 12 GTAs. GTAs and NTTs primarily teach the undergraduate writing courses in the VWM, in addition to English 0900, Basic Writing. WPAs, including the Assistant Director of the UWC, teach the undergraduate courses for the VWM, in addition to the advanced-level courses such as English 3400, Advanced Expository Writing; and English 3450, Writing Center Theory and Practice. Tenured and tenure-track RC faculty teach English 5100, Composition Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy, as well as a series of one-hour mentoring courses to accompany GTAs' teaching experiences. Finally, the TT faculty oversee the RC Graduate Certificate. To receive the certificate, graduate students take 12 hours of coursework in RC and complete a thesis or capstone project. The RC Program reports to the English Department Chair but is assessed by Gen Ed in University College.
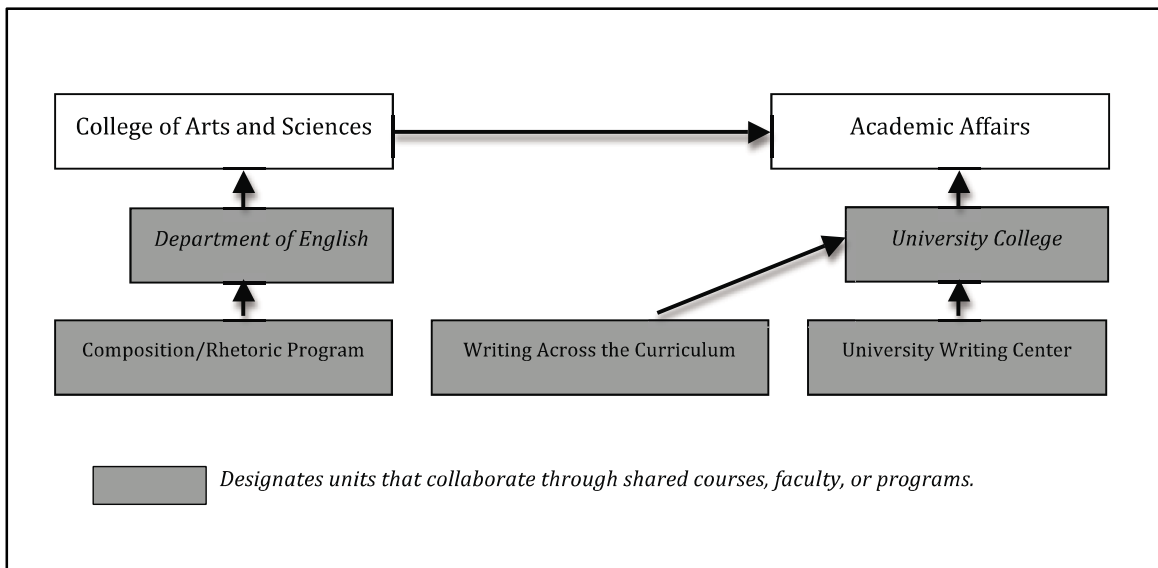
Figure 6. Writing Programs' Reporting Structures

The RC, WAC, and UWC Directors share a number of administrative tasks with regard to assessment, teaching, and mentoring (See Table 1). Additionally, all three WPAs occupy tenure-track lines in English and teach in the RC Program. The major difference is that the WAC and UWC programs are housed administratively within the UC, so each program director has two direct reports, one to the VPUG and one to the English Department Chair. Additionally, as the table below makes clear, the WAC and UWC program directors have the administrative authority to hire their employees and to oversee their budgets. In RC, the English Department Chair oversees the operational budget, and hiring decisions are vetted through a series of committees that, ultimately, recommend to the Chair. In this way, the primary difference between the programs

housed in UC and the program housed in English is the individual WPA's programmatic

autonomy.

Table 1

Administrative Comparisons of WPAs

Tasks	RC Director	WAC Director	UWC Director
Teaches RC Courses (undergraduate and graduate)	✓	✓	✓
Mentors Graduate TAs	✓	✓	✓
Develops Program Assessment for Gen Ed	✓	✓	✓
Tenured/TT line in English	✓	✓	✓
Controls Program Budget	✘	✓	✓
Oversees Staff/Faculty Hires	✘	✓	✓
Program Housed in UC	✘	✓	✓

With regard to staffing and daily operations, the three writing programs

collaborate in a number of contexts. First, all three programs support the VWM and the

Gen Ed Curriculum. The RC Program is responsible for teaching the first two writing

courses in the VWM; the WAC Program oversees the assessment and faculty

development for the VWM; and the UWC works with the WID faculty through the

Writing Mentors Program. Second, all three units employ common faculty and GAs.

Some faculty and GAs teach in two of the three writing programs, while some teach in all

three. Third, the programs partner together to provide professional development and

mentoring for their staff. WAC provides training and brown bags for all faculty teaching

in the VWM, and all three programs collaborate both financially and organizationally to invite leading RC scholars in the field to conduct workshops for writing faculty. These scholars have included Kathleen Blake Yancey, Eileen Schell, Nancy Welch, Lisa Ede, Peter Elbow, Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, and Hephzibah Roskelly, among others. Fourth, in the English Department, all WPAs serve together on a number of committees. The RC Director, the RC Assistant Director, WAC Director, UWC Director, and UWC Assistant Director have standing positions on the Rhetoric and Composition Committee in the English Department. In addition to other RC faculty, the directors collaborate on programmatic and curricular issues, such as placement and course proposals, for the RC Program. A RC hiring committee also contains members from all three writing programs, and, finally, the RC Program holds monthly general meetings where faculty are invited to learn about new initiatives and to listen to teaching presentations from their peers.

The final point of comparison among these programs centers on institutional and disciplinary missions. Because the field of RC informs all three programs, the theories and practices guiding them overlap, particularly with regard to the best pedagogical and assessment practices in the field. All three programs value a process approach to the teaching of writing and advocate for students' acquisition of the rhetorical skills they need to write in any genre and/or discipline. On the institutional level, all programs support the goals of UC through the VWM. WAC oversees the faculty development; the UWC support students and WID faculty; and the RC Program's primary responsibility is to teach the first two courses in the sequence. As a result of these collaborations, faculty

in all three programs share pedagogical strategies, work together on course design and programmatic initiatives, and co-participate in professional development workshops. The narratives influencing all three programs, from institutional mission to disciplinary allegiances, overlap significantly.

2. Rhetoric and Composition Relocation Proposal History

As I explained these programs, I intentionally emphasized their collaborations so that the reader has a vivid picture of the ways in which these programs share particular institutional and disciplinary narratives that, in turn, shape their organizational identities. All three of these programs support the mission of the Gen Ed curriculum and therefore are responsible for the development of a writing culture on campus. In this way, WAC, RC, and the UWC, in the process of serving all undergraduates, also service each other through their shared faculty, professional development, and institutional visions. The narrative of university service brings these programs together. Also, all three look to the Council of Writing Program Administrators and the Conference on College Composition and Communication for scholarly direction and expertise. The guiding principles of these organizations, in turn, support the curricular development of each program, in addition to assessment initiatives and programmatic identity. From an outside perspective, then, all three programs promulgate similar narratives regarding the best practices in the field and a sincere commitment to university service. Further, disciplinary narratives in the field, particularly those presented in *A Field of Dreams: Independent Writing Programs and the Future of Composition Studies*, suggest that the number of writing programs seeking

independence with regard to institutional location is increasing. As a result, independent writing programs represent a disciplinary trend.

These narratives prompted the Rhetoric and Composition Committee to discuss the possibility of program relocation in the spring of 2009 (Rhetoric and Composition Relocation Proposal Task Force [RCRPTF] 4). In late April, visiting scholar Nancy Sommers led a faculty development workshop for the WAC program, during which she, the WPAs from all three programs, and the VPUG brainstormed the writing programs' administrative and institutional locations at App State. This conversation sparked the VPUG's interest, as well as the WPAs', which led to a series of meetings and additional conversations among the appropriate stakeholders, including the Provost, the English Department Chair, the Vice-Provost for Faculty Affairs, and the Dean of Arts and Sciences (4). These meetings prepared all invested parties for the development of a proposal, scheduled for fall 2009. During the summer of 2009, the WPAs conducted research in order to investigate the legitimacy of such a proposal and its feasibility at App State (4). Of course, this summary is only one piece of the whole story.

When the RC Committee discussed the possibility of relocation, other factors influenced the desire to seek an alternative location. To begin, former RC Director Dr. Georgia Rhoades worked consistently from 1998 to 2007 to change the culture of NTT writing instructors at App State. Prior to her leadership, the balance of TT to NTT ratios for the teaching of composition shifted considerably; so much that, by 1998, nearly all composition courses were taught by NTTs (Rhoades and Haney). Of these faculty, only

two were in benefitted positions (Kelly). To promote a stable work environment and to

create a writing faculty community, Rhoades advocated for NTT living wages, and when

Dr. Dave Haney accepted the English Department Chair position in 2001, the two worked

together to create several 3/4 and full-time lines for NTT faculty. The university at large

followed this lead in 2006, converting over 39 NTTs to 3/4-time benefitted positions. On

a university level, the work initiated by Rhoades and Haney set a tone for the entire

campus, which changed NTT culture campus-wide (Rhoades and Haney). By 2009, 19

RC faculty held 3/4-time or full-time benefitted positions, a considerable improvement

from 1998 (Hassell, "Reporting").

These changes did more than improve working conditions for RC faculty at App

State. They developed a culture of permanence that improved faculty retention and

morale. To supplement their labor advancements, Rhoades also established incredible

relationships with publishing companies and local RC scholars within UNC. Through

these partnerships, Rhoades invited speakers from the field to work with RC faculty at

App State; in doing so, she transformed RC faculty into highly trained, specialized

writing faculty whose contributions to the RC program were not only welcomed but also

crucial to the program's success (Rhoades and Haney). A final piece to Rhoades' legacy

occurred in 2002 when the department hired Dr. Beth Carroll to implement a writing

center, which provided NTT faculty with another site for improving their professional

quality. These combined efforts transformed, dramatically, the commitment and rigor RC

faculty invested into their program. With two TT faculty in RC and nearly thirty faculty

who were well professionalized, the RC Program at App State became a cohesive program with a clearly defined mission and vision.

Of course, these cultures shifted again in 2006 when Dave Haney accepted the Vice-Provost of Academic Affairs position, and yet again in 2007 when Georgia Rhoades accepted the WAC Director position in UC and the new Gen Ed Curriculum was implemented. In the 2007-2008 academic year, the RC Program hired a new RC Director, Kim Gunter, and prepared for the new Gen Ed curriculum, which would go into effect in the fall of 2008. Charging the RC Program with staffing and developing the first two courses in the new VWM, the Gen Ed Curriculum offered additional opportunities for RC faculty, and this charge required RC faculty to engage in an extraordinarily lengthy professional development process, which begin in 2007 and is still ongoing. More specifically, this process invited RC faculty to directly shape their own program and to invent their curriculum (Kelly). Appropriately, this experience engaged RC faculty in meaningful professional development that empowered their teaching and enriched their institutional lives (Kelly). The end result of this experience, however, demonstrated for many RC faculty that their institutional purpose was to serve Gen Ed, as opposed to English. The institutional location of and intense collaborations with the UWC and WAC compounded this perspective (RCRPTF 4).

When Kim Gunter took over the program in 2008, the RC program was cohesive, dynamic, and self-assured. There was only one problem: the program's success had created tenuous relationships within the English Department as a whole, beginning with a

departmental decision in 2007 to remove the voting rights of NTT faculty in benefitted

positions (RCRPTF 8). The Departmental Personnel Committee (DPC), which is a

committee structure unique to App State that makes recommendations on tenure and

promotion, decided in the spring of 2007 that, since the Faculty Handbook allowed

faculty with the title of "Lecturer" to serve and vote on the DPC, which makes

recommendations on tenure and promotion, all English NTTs in benefitted positions who

had the title should be re-contracted with the title "Adjunct" (8). This decision passed,

forging an unalterable line between the TT faculty and the NTT faculty and thereby

changing inter-departmental relationships permanently. At this point, RC faculty who had

been empowered to invest in their program could not vote on any departmental decisions

influencing their work, from course descriptions to textbook policies (8). Instead, 38 RC

faculty had to rely on the votes of their three WPAs. The DPC decision was no small

matter in the English Department, as it "heightened the feelings of disrespect, created

inefficiencies and obstructions in decision-making" (8). These inefficiencies are best

illustrated in the chart below (Figure 7), which reveals the complicated web of

committees outside of RC that have the power to make decisions for RC. Regardless of

one's affiliations within the department, after the 2007 DPC meeting, palpable tensions

alienated English faculty, and resentment began to build on both sides. For the next three

years, NTT voting rights continually appeared on the departmental meetings agendas, and

the item was continually tabled due to a "lack of clarity" in the Faculty Handbook (8).

Readers familiar with Barry Maid's contribution to *A Field of Dreams* will notice that

these mirror, almost to a T, the events leading to the University of Arkansas Little Rock's relocation from English.

A final motivation for the Proposal that ran parallel to departmental governance issues was the physical working environment for NTT faculty. Only two full-time NTTs were secured individual offices, which were actually converted storage closets (62-63). Additionally, the other 36 NTTs were offered one large office with 14 desks and three computers and a smaller office with six desks and two computers. The larger office vibrated continually (known as the "shaky room"), and in both communal offices, faculty did not have privacy for student conferences and often met in other locations.

The tensions with voting rights, working conditions, and departmental decision-making procedures demonstrated to the RC Program that their collaborations with the UWC and the WAC Program would be better served if all three writing programs were housed in the same administrative unit with one direct report to the VPUG. In addition, the RC Program continually aligned itself more and more with the Gen Ed vision, and the program agreed that a structural shift to UC would strengthen the campus writing programs by centralizing their missions, increasing their hiring flexibility, and enabling their development of a vibrant writing culture at App State. Finally, the RC Program saw possibility in such a move because disciplinary visions would also be aligned. As resentment concerning faculty representation and governance within English hindered the

Figure r: Basic Organizational Chart of Structures involved in Rhetoric and Composition Decisions
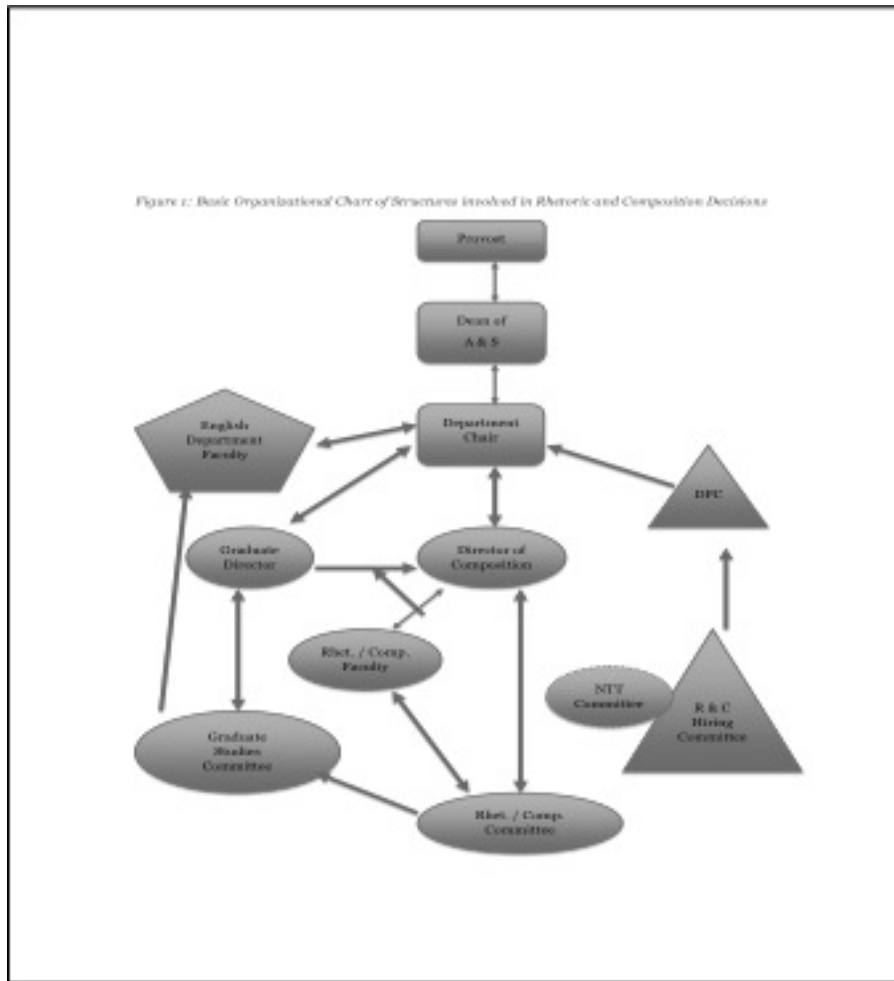
Figure 7. Decision-Making Influences on RC Initiatives. *Rhetoric and Composition Relocation Proposal Task Force Recommendation* (Appalachian State University, 29 Apr. 2010; web; 9).

strength of the writing programs' collaborative efforts to create new initiatives, such as

self-directed placement, the internal divisions within English worsened (59).

All of these factors led the 2009-2010 RC Committee to create a proposal to

relocate from the English Department to University College. And, because the larger field

of RC had its own collection of "divorce narratives" from various programs the relocated,

the WPAs felt confident that they were making the best decision. After a series of committee meetings and countless email exchanges, the proposal was submitted to the Provost, Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, and the English Department Chair, all of whom were the primary administrators influencing the decision, on September 28, 2009 (RCRPTF 4). Because the Provost and VPUG agreed that the deliberation be "as transparent as possible," the Provost decided to appoint a Task Force in the spring of 2010 to review the case and to submit formal recommendations. The Task Force met for the first time on January 22nd and submitted its final recommendations on April 28th. Between these dates, the Task Force Chair spent over 20 hours holding anonymous faculty meetings, the Task Force held three open forums for all university members, and the Task Force conducted considerable research on independent writing programs.

In addition, three formal votes were conducted to gauge faculty responses. First, the NTT RC Faculty participated in a straw poll; 31 supported the proposal, 4 opposed, and 1 person abstained. The voter turnout was 36/38. Second, the TT faculty conducted a straw pole as well; 9 supported the proposal, 17 opposed the proposal, and 2 people abstained. The voter turnout was 28/42. The composite votes from the English Department were 40 in favor, 21 opposed, and 3 abstentions (45). The final formal vote conducted on the proposal was by University College Council, who voted on whether or not the UC was an appropriate institutional location for the RC Program; 10 voted in favor, 2 opposed, and 4 abstained.

The final recommendations (not ranked) were as follows, and I quote at length in order to offer the full justification:

1. Combine the Rhetoric and Composition Program with the Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum to create a single unit (e.g. "ASU Writing"), with one direct report to Academic Affairs or the head of University College, or
2. Create a Rhetoric and Composition Program as a separate unit with a direct report to Academic Affairs or the head of University College.

The Task Force strongly recommends against delaying this decision. Structural problems are increasingly interfering with the department's ability to function, and postponement of a resolution will exacerbate the problems.

The primary factors supporting this recommendation, based on the overarching criterion of what would be best for students, are as follows:

- Benefits gained across the university by giving greater autonomy to Rhetoric and Composition and locating it in a multidisciplinary structure,
- Evidence of significant morale problems that have the potential to impact teaching and job performance throughout the department, and
- Increased potential for effectiveness and development of Rhetoric and Composition and the other programs in the English Department by decreasing bureaucratic inefficiencies and wasted energies. (3)

These recommendations are straightforward, and if we examine the language, we can see that the Task Force presents the recommendations with a sense of urgency, encouraging the administration to act quickly. However, two significant changes happened during the Task Force's final stages: the Provost announced that he would return to his faculty position in the fall of 2010, reporting directly to the Dean of Arts and Sciences, and the VPUG announced that he had accepted a provost position at another institution (5). At this point, my narrative ends. I left the position in July of 2010, and this document was not published until the fall of 2010. For the inquisitive, however, I must state that the RC

Program continues to be housed in the English Department, despite the Task Force's warning that "Leaving the situation as it is will be detrimental to all faculty members involved" (3). Further, the Dean has imposed an indefinite hiring freeze on the department due to its inability to foster a productive and safe work environment.

3. The Rhetoric of Institutional Change

Even in a 15-page history, discourse proves its limitations, as I cannot account for all of the complexities influencing this process. More specifically, the finer points of contention and possibility simply cannot be re-presented for the reader, despite my best efforts. Personally, this struggle for change was the most academically challenging experience I have ever faced. When I left the institution, faculty who would invite me for coffee no longer spoke to me; administrators that I had good relationships with prior to this experience publicly chastised me; and TT faculty on both sides of the debate published, through the departmental listserv, personally scathing remarks about one another. These statements found their way to English graduate students' inboxes, as well as the Task Force Report. Indelibly etched in cyberspace, these statements offer discursive proof that organizational change can be messy, frightening, and profoundly human. And, we don't always have winners.

The question that must be asked, then, is what can we learn from this experience? Rhetorician Brenton D. Faber offers tentative answers. In *Community Action and Organizational Change*, Faber advances a thorough analysis of organization change that focuses on the role of narrative and image. For Faber, organizational change occurs when

conflict emerges between an organization's internal narratives and its external images

(33). That is, between the narratives organizational members believe and the images non-

organizational members perceive. When this happens, Faber argues, organizations

become distressed. The process of change involves realigning the discordance between

narrative and image, which results in stability (39). In this analysis, we can hear echoes of

Linda Adler-Kassner's work on writing program administration and how rhetorical

framing conditions the narrative possibilities for telling our stories about writing. While

both writers are right to acknowledge that "If those of us who believe in higher education

do not produce the narratives that build up and sustain our educational structures, other

people will start telling our stories for us" (Faber 107), neither writer offers an

ameliorative solution for narrative discordance within a supposedly cooperative

organization, especially the kind revealed by the RC Proposal.

By all intents and purposes, English faculty inside and outside the RC Program

should have been able to agree on whether or not to relocate the program, given the

longevity of both programs and how closely they have evolved over the past thirty years

particularly. Several committee responses to the Proposal, including the Undergraduate

Studies Committee and the General Education Committee, attempted to reach this goal,

but various groups within the department could not agree on what Faber terms the "core

narratives" (104). Core narratives are the discursive foundations of an organization, the

bottom line guiding principles that, no matter what, everyone believes. In many respects,

the core narratives of an English department should emerge from disciplinarity, but

disciplinarity itself served as a major stumbling block to clear communication. The "inherent connection between reading and writing" offered no discursive recourse. And perhaps rightfully so. After all, RC has worked extraordinarily hard in the second half of the twentieth century to develop a cohesive disciplinary identity. To hear, then, that RC is merely a subfield of English studies, as opposed to an "official discipline," is to experience a form of verbal abuse that directly impacts self-identification and reinforces a colonizing mentality where English owns RC, a well-investigated topic in the field.

In the absence of core narratives centered on shared connections and possibilities, the English Department cannot experience true organizational change, at least not in the way Faber understands it. Since the process of change results in the realignment of image and narrative or, in our case, of interdepartmental narratives alone, the Task Force's recommendations, had they been successfully implemented, would have exerted the change needed for realignment. For example, if an outside party, such as the Provost, imposed a set of principles, "The RC Program will stay because of X" or "The RC Program will relocate because of Y," the English Department, more than likely, would have been forced into the position of adjusting to the new story, in whatever form that took. Instead, no story was imposed, and no principles were assigned; the only item reinforced was narrative discordance.

Examining Foucault's theory on discourse, Faber notes that,

in contexts of change, old discursive structures are erased by the new discourse. Each organization is a constant site of discursive struggle. But in the midst of this

struggle, the organization must recognize and assert its core narratives. Employees must learn these core values. (103)

The reason that App State's English Department did not complete the process of organizational change as defined by Faber is due the fact that "core narratives" were never established, even before the Proposal process. If one examines the departmental history during the approval of the English Department mission, evidence of conflict regarding core narratives are abound. Unfortunately, this lack of cohesion does not bode well for the department, and it seems that the only solution to resolve its stress is the imposition of a core narrative from an external influence. To date, I have no knowledge if this is even possible within that context.

For this particular example, the narrative logic of institutional change drastically differs from the narrative logic of assessment I presented in the last chapter. Clearly articulated missions, goals, and identifications with the larger narratives of the institution, such as Gen Ed, UC, the UWC, etc., did not provide the RC Program with any leverage for relocating their program. If anything, the more research the program conducted, the farther away it moved from its end goal. The more inter- and extra-institutional data the program collected, the less grounded the program became in its own struggle. On a discursive level, the overall English vote, with RC faculty included, was in support of the proposal, as was the UC vote. More importantly, the RC Task Force Recommendations clearly stated that the program should be relocated. The inactivity of the Provost and the

lack of support or advocacy for units outside of the English Department impeded the change process, bringing it to a halt—at least for the time being.

What we can glean from this example is commentary on the tumultuous nature of institutional change and the absolute uncertainty of university structures. Resulting in a stalemate, the Proposal revealed that the English Department did not have a set of core narratives shaping the identity of its faculty. Instead, factions within the department had their own core narratives that were pitted against other groups' core narratives, and these interactions resulted in extreme fragmentation, political hysteria, and dis-unification. In this way, although no resolution was reached, the process highlights the instability of university departments, especially in circumstances where narrative discordance has no opportunity for realignment.

4. Narrative Abundance

Although Faber's framework of discordance and realignment does not fit the circumstances of App State precisely, his theory helps us to understand why institutional change proved impossible in our context. In order for core narratives to develop, organizational members have to work together to create them. This initiative requires patience, time, and a safe space. During the proposal process for the RC Program, the available narratives at any given time were so vast that, literally, prospects of achievement from one day to the next drastically varied. Keeping up with the proliferation of narratives was hard enough, let alone coming to a true agreement about fundamental principles.

Although the key rhetorical moves used during the proposal process were narrative efforts to control the story and to intercede, where possible, in others' stories so as to direct the outcomes, the narratives shifted and developed quickly, preventing a single person from controlling the process. More importantly, with the perpetual growth of circulating narratives, the end result was merely fragmentation. If forced to offer the "whole story" of how the Proposal developed, even I could not provide a coherent account, and I was one of the most active members as a WPA and the Chair of the NTT committee. I even co-authored the document. For example, when the proposal process began in August 2009, through an informal meeting between WPAs and the VPUG, the news of the meeting reached the ear of the Chair who then placed the proposal as an agenda item for the first full faculty meeting, even though the committee's plan was to draft the proposal and present it to the chair before announcing to the full faculty (RCRPTF 4). Without warning, the RC Director had to construct, on the fly, a cohesive narrative of the proposal's process, even though the process had yet to begin. Uninformed, the English faculty received an unintended narrative that contradicted the one constructed by the RC Committee the semester before. From the start, one of the most criticized aspects of the proposal was the process itself. Not recognizing that the Chair mis-stepped, the full faculty entered the change initiative suspicious and weary of RC's intentions. This event was the first of many to provoke the circulation of what I will call "process narratives." Because the process appeared sneaky, many faculty would not

even consider the proposal and, therefore, committed on day one to challenging the efforts RC faculty made to advance the proposal.

The process narratives impeded the development of the proposal, and a lot of time was devoted to lengthy conversations concerning how the proposal came into existence, who developed it, and why the English faculty was not consulted first. Despite how clearly this process was explained to the English faculty, the process narratives continually infiltrated discussions, obfuscating the merits of the proposal and directing attention away from the key issue: Is it pedagogically sound for the program to relocate? As a result, WPAs were often placed on the chopping block during faculty meetings, as though they were intentionally trying to damage the English Department. A familiar statement aimed at WPAs was "You can't do this. You didn't follow proper academic channels." In this example, process narratives served to shut down debate. I term these kinds of narratives "closed narratives," which are narratives that pose as the "final word" on the subject in order to deflect attention from the content of the issue under consideration.

"Policy narratives" are another form of closed narratives used to shut down debate. For example, during faculty discussions, a consistent narrative circulated that, before the administration could even consider the proposal, it had to be vetted through the university's Academic Procedures and Policies Committee (AP&P). This narrative was presented as precedent because, in the past, another academic attempted a similar project and had to go through AP&P first. However, since the RC Proposal was a move from one

college to another, different rules applied. Regardless, the policy narrative of AP&P was presented repeatedly, even during the Task Force's Open Forums. Like process narratives, policy narratives also function to shut down debate and to block progress.

A final closed narrative that inundated faculty discussions about the proposal was the "narrative of history." Often presented by senior faculty, these narratives function to remind the faculty of the department's intertwined history and previous unification. Like the nostalgic narratives associated with Women's Rights, these narratives are meant to complicate and make strange the current conversation, given the prior unification and functionality the department may or may not have possessed. These narratives also put emotional strain on faculty by convincing them that the present horrors are aberrations. Therefore, the debate should center on recovering the past, rather than focusing on the actual issue at hand; in our case, the RC Proposal.

Throughout one given meeting, the amount of time taken to address narratives of process, policy, and history detracts considerably from what I call "open narratives," which are narratives that foster dialogue and analysis of the guiding principles motivating the current object under consideration. In this category, I place narratives associated with institutional mission, disciplinary aims, programmatic development, and pedagogical visions, all of which could have fostered meaningful discussions about the proposal itself and the possible consequences, both good and bad, that might result from its acceptance or denial. Less frequently, however, did open narratives enter faculty discussions about the Proposal. Because of this fact, I discovered that closed narratives tend to dominate

decision-making processes because they distract people from considering the issue at hand, and they also prevent open narrative discussions that could lead to the develop of core narratives.

When faced with narrative abundance, institutional change is hindered because too many stories produce too many possibilities, making communal decisions almost impossible. While I have only named a couple of categories, open and closed, I intend to continue developing a narrative schema so that new WPAs have a sound framework for knowing when they are interpellated within a particular narrative structure. My hope is that this work will allow new WPAs to shift the focus away from closed narratives that misguide decision-making processes toward open narratives that enable all participants to consider the consequences and guiding principles of the actual proposal on the table.

Despite the perceived legitimacy that the WPAs felt from the institutional and disciplinary narratives that motivated the creation of the change intiative, the Proposal served to reify that organizational coherence and disciplinary identity are false constructions. While unsuccessful at the time of this publication, the Composition Program's attempts to gain independence deserve critical scrutiny, particularly with regard to narrative's role in the debate. By examining the effects of open and closed narratives, WPA scholars are poised to develop a rigorous theory of institutional change.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: WHAT NARRATIVES (UN)DO

[W]hen narratives of organizational change become dominated by an organizationally legitimated plot, the narrative serves to close down the openness required by ethics. –Carl Rhodes, Alison Pullen, Stewart R. Clegg, "If I Should Fall From Grace" (548)

I began this project with a relatively simple idea: narratives are the guiding principles that influence our actions and structure our beliefs. As cognitive mechanisms enabling us to determine proper courses of action within a particular context, narratives are mutable structures that adapt when our rules for conduct cannot adequately respond to new contexts. At the organizational level, narratives influence decision-making processes, and to determine how, we need only examine the consequences to determine the logical guiding principles that prompted one decision over another. When we engage in this form of analysis—looking at the consequences to determine the guiding principles—we utilize narrative logic, a descriptive term I developed through my study of C.S. Peirce's pragmatist philosophy.

For Writing Program Administrators (WPAs), narrative logic presents a useful framework for rendering university structures intelligible, particularly the complicated layers comprising an institution and its academic units. When we are motivated as WPAs to participate in institutional change initiatives, we need to consider, first, the consequences we want to produce. By imagining the end result, we develop, cognitively,

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a mental narrative that will enable us to reach our goal. These narratives are simply guiding principles that prompt us to act in accordance with the consequences we desire. In this way, narrative is transformative and equips us to act deliberately.

The two case studies I presented offered contrasting perspectives on narrative logic. Sometimes, we have the power to direct narrative logic, while other times we are merely subject to the narrative logic of our co-workers or our institutions. In both cases, narrative logic informs institutional participation. Remaining sensitive to the fact that we will not always have direct control over the narratives governing our workplace, simply identifying the narratives we see at work is an important first step to fully understanding our institution and for integrating ourselves within that organizational culture. Accomplishing this task is not easy because, sometimes, we might not agree with the narratives we identify. More importantly, after negotiating the narrative logic of an organization, we might realize that we do not want to invest ourselves in that culture. Regardless, narrative logic will help us determine the level of participation we will offer and the intensity of the identifications we might make.

I had one goal with this project: to guide new WPAs through the process of institutional analysis from a pragmatist narrative perspective. Of course, as I revealed in Chapter V, narratives are not always positive constructions. Similar to rhetoric generally, narratives can be used for good or bad purposes. For example, when conducting our first direct writing assessment for the UWC three-year plan, we implemented a draft collection project that raised serious concerns about the ethics of reporting.

Because this project was our first attempt at direct writing assessment, we realized at the end of our process that, in the future, we had much to improve in order to generate accurate and useful assessment results. However, working within our institutional context, we made the best use of the resources we had, which included the funding to hire three English faculty to serve as outside readers. After collecting 35 sets of drafts, consisting of the rough drafts clients brought into the UWC and the final drafts they submitted to their professors and/or publishers, we placed the drafts in a random order and developed a numbering system. Then, we asked our readers to review all 70 drafts indiscriminately and to rate them according to a rubric.

The rubric was divided into four criteria: focus, organization, development, and style and mechanics. When the readers submitted their results, I tallied all of the ratings to see the level of improvement and, particularly, the highest level of improvement in the areas we tested. As I compiled our results, I recorded the percentage of increase or decrease for the whole document, as well as the individual criterion. Together, the UWC Director, our Research and Handouts Group, and I analyzed the results of the assessment. What we found was that, in some cases, students' improvement actually decreased from one area to another during the revision process. In these circumstances, we investigated the session logs to see what conclusions we could draw from the results. Not surprisingly, we noticed patterns: for students who performed worse on draft 2 than draft 1, most of them visited the center only an hour or two before the paper was due. Also, in opposition to our assumptions about grammar, we found that, when students only

addressed grammatical concerns, they scored higher in all categories. This pattern was the most fascinating discovery we made.

As I developed our assessment plan, which included formalizing the results, I realized that I had a range of options for presenting this information to a larger administrative audience. Depending upon the consequences I wanted our plan to produce, I could tell the story in a number of ways. The easiest and most beneficial way to report our center's effectiveness, of course, was to average the total improvement for all papers which would cause the drafts that worsened to disappear into the sum total. Had we presented these results alone, we would have perfectly matched our criteria and demonstrated the level of institutional effectiveness upper-level administrators would deem useful. However, as writing specialists, we could not simply present one number, which would have erased the inconsistencies and diminished the variety of our data. We had to consider a couple things: if the narrative logic of assessment is the improvement of teaching and learning, then our report of this project had to reflect that guiding principle, if we were to hold true to our institutional expectations and our disciplinary values. Furthermore, if we were to stay true to the narratives of our field, we also had to reflect on the process of assessment and develop better strategies for the future. That way, the assessment process means learning not only about students' writing but also about improved assessment practices.

These options fascinated me and provoked me to consider the ethics of institutional reporting. While many WPAs labor over the actual assessment process itself,

the ethics of reporting offer a unique set of challenges. When administrative audiences receive our assessment plans, for example, they are presented with a particular narrative account of our unit's effectiveness—a narrative account we can, for the most part, control. Practicing an ethical approach to these narratives is necessary; otherwise, we send false impressions of our academic units, which compromise their integrity.

As I continue with the narrative logic of institutional engagement, I want to explore how narratives can be true and false at the same time. Had we submitted one percentage demonstrating client improvement, we would have shared a true value based on actual practice. However, this figure, while resembling the narrative logic of effectiveness, actually falsifies our data through the process of omission. While this concept might be familiar, since the presentation of "partial truths" is common, my future research will examine the ways in which organizations present partial narratives in order to reflect a profitable narrative logic that convinces interlocutors that the narrative is complete and does not warrant investigation.

This process, as a complement to narrative logic, is an attempt to secure narrative legitimation, which I see as the specific rhetorical move organizations make to present narratives that appear, on the one hand, to be complete and/or to meet a set of expectations or goals but that, on the other hand, mask the inconsistencies of the organization's activities. At stake in this investigation is the power of organizational structures to control public perceptions of its work through the dissemination of narratives that serve, on the one hand, as external signifiers supporting the structure's

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mission and also serve, on the other hand, as empty referents. The ability of structures, particularly institutional and statist structures, to hide the emptiness behind these narratives rests in the structure's ability to mask the fact that the narratives are only narratives, not transcendental truths or accurate experiential observations. In other words, a structural hermeneutic posits itself; narratives both "conceal" and "do," and they garner legitimacy if they are believed. I base this assertion on Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, which illuminates the crisis of legitimation in both the sciences and the humanities.

Applied to my writing center example above, assessment reveals the ways in which narratives can be presented and interpreted as true and false, partial and impartial, complete and incomplete. While the assessment document we submitted to our administrators shared all of our results and also included an action plan for improving our measures in the future, the process signaled to me that narratives should not always be trusted, even when they seem official or legitimate. Given the prevalence of discourse today via web and telephone technologies, a healthy skepticism is necessary. Combined with the increasing demand for organizational accountability and transparency, a critical narrative perspective provides scholars with a framework for interpreting the proliferation of discourse in the twenty-first century. Most importantly, this framework offers implications for how we might analyze institutional identity and communication beyond the university proper.

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APPENDIX A

WRITING CENTER ASSESSMENT PLAN 2007-2010

<div style="border:1px solid black">

Assessment Plan

Appalachian State University
ASMT-ES - Writing Center

ASMT-ES - Writing Center

Mission: The University Writing Center provides writing support to Appalachian's students, faculty, and staff, and to members of the Boone community. In individual conferences, we assist writers with the development of any type of writing project at any stage of the writing process. We believe that all writers benefit from sharing work in progress with informed, attentive readers. Our collaborative, flexible methods reflect our respect for the individual writer, whose voice and goals are central to all our endeavors.

Vision: The University Writing Center strives to provide all members of the Appalachian State University community with effective writing assistance in a non-evaluative, supportive environment. To meet the needs of all writers on campus, our center is committed to educating and training consultants to work with ASU's diverse client base, offering writing services for both on-campus and off-campus clients, and ensuring that our facility is accessible to all clients. We aim to create a climate of research and writing on campus so that we may foster an intellectual community of writing and the teaching of writing.

Outcome: One-to-One Consultations

Students, faculty, and staff who come to the UWC will receive quality one-to-one writing consultations.

Outcome Type: Program Outcome
Start Date: 08/26/2008
End Date: 05/15/2009
Outcome Status: Currently Being Assessed

Means of Assessment

Assessment Method	Criterion	Timeline	Active
DIRECT MEASURE: Annual report will document the number of clients who received consultations, the number of consultation sessions conducted, and the percent increase over a range of time. **Assessment Method Category:** Headcount or Involvement Records	To increase number of sessions by 10% each year.	Data will be collected from August to May each academic year.	Yes
DIRECT MEASURE: Anonymous client surveys will indicate level of client satisfaction regarding quality of services and staff. **Assessment Method Category:** Survey	Client surveys will indicate that 75% of respondents will rate our services satisfactorily.	Every two years.	Yes
INDIRECT MEASURE: Maintain continuous record of client and faculty requests for changes in/additions to services offered. **Assessment Method Category:** Behavioral Observation	The UWC will document and record client/faculty requests and fulfill the requests based on available resources.	Ongoing; yearly.	Yes
INDIRECT MEASURE: Ongoing consultant projects that assess program weaknesses. **Assessment Method Category:** Course-Embedded Assessment	The UWC will assess program weaknesses and modify them based on available resources. Consultants will assess program weaknesses through their non-consulting tasks.	Ongoing; yearly.	Yes

Related Goals

ASMT-ES - Writing Center
* Program Goal - To provide an accessible, comfortable, collaborative environment for writers of all abilities.

Outcome: Ethical Practices

All UWC one-to-one consultations are conducted in accordance with ethical and pedagogical best practices in the field.

Outcome Type: Program Outcome
Start Date: 08/26/2008

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End Date: 05/15/2009
Outcome Status: Currently Being Assessed

Means of Assessment			
Assessment Method	**Criterion**	**Timeline**	**Active**
INDIRECT MEASURE: Day-to-day observation of consultants by supervising administrators. **Assessment Method Category:** Behavioral Observation	Consultants, under supervision of administrators, will follow the policies and procedures of the UWC.	Ongoing; yearly.	Yes
INDIRECT MEASURE: Regular review of consultant session logs by administrators. **Assessment Method Category:** Behavioral Observation	Consultant session logs will follow the ethical and pedagogical practices learned during staff education, which includes detailed description and non-evaluative language.	Ongoing; yearly.	Yes
INDIRECT MEASURE: Consultant participation in peer and self evaluations. **Assessment Method Category:** Behavioral Observation	Self and peer evaluations will identify strengths and weaknesses of consultant practices.	Fall semester; yearly.	Yes
INDIRECT MEASURE: New consultant observation by administrator. **Assessment Method Category:** Behavioral Observation	Administrator observations will will identify strengths and weaknesses of consultant practices.	Fall semester; yearly.	Yes
INDIRECT MEASURE: Annual individual staff conferences and evaluations by Director and Assistant Director **Assessment Method Category:** Behavioral Observation	Individual conferences will ensure that consultants are meeting UWC expectations.	Fall semester; yearly.	Yes

Related Goals

ASMT-ES - Writing Center

* Program Goal - To provide an accessible, comfortable, collaborative environment for writers of all abilities.

Outcome: Accessibility

All faculty, staff and students who come to the UWC will have access to the best facilities and technologies we can provide.

Outcome Type: Program Outcome
Start Date: 08/26/2008
End Date: 05/15/2009
Outcome Status: Currently Being Assessed

Means of Assessment			
Assessment Method	**Criterion**	**Timeline**	**Active**
INDIRECT MEASURE: Yearly technology inventories and comparisons with current technologies, both software and hardware. **Assessment Method Category:** Headcount or Involvement Records	Inventory will determine needed technology resources.	Ongoing; yearly.	Yes
INDIRECT MEASURE: Yearly consultations with the Office of Disability Services to determine what needs are being met. **Assessment Method Category:** Interviews	The UWC will comply with the Office of Disability Services requests based on available resources.	Ongoing; yearly.	Yes
DIRECT MEASURE: Anonymous client surveys will indicate level of client satisfaction regarding accessibility in the UWC. **Assessment Method Category:**	Client surveys will indicate that 75% respondents find our resources accessible.	Every two years.	Yes

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Means of Assessment			
Assessment Method	**Criterion**	**Timeline**	**Active**
Survey			

Related Goals

ASMT-ES - Writing Center

* Program Goal - To provide an accessible, comfortable, collaborative environment for writers of all abilities.

Outcome: Client Writing Improvement

Clients' writing skills will improve after consultations.

Outcome Type: Learning Outcome
Start Date: 08/21/2007
End Date: 12/31/2008
Outcome Status: Currently Being Assessed

Means of Assessment			
Assessment Method	**Criterion**	**Timeline**	**Active**
DIRECT MEASURE: Regular evaluations by clients (appointments and walk-ins) through anonymous surveys that gauge clients' perceptions of improvement in their writing (indirect measure), confidence (indirect measure), and level of service (direct measure). **Assessment Method Category:** Survey	Client surveys will indicate that 75% of respondents will rate our services satisfactorily.	Every two years.	Yes
DIRECT MEASURE: Optional written feedback from all clients after every session. **Assessment Method Category:** Survey	Feedback will indicate that 75% of clients are satisfied with their consultations.	Every two years.	Yes
DIRECT MEASURE: Consultants and administrators will collect two sets of drafts from UWC clients: drafts clients brought to the UWC and drafts clients submitted for review to professors or editors. After collecting both sets of drafts, three external reviewers will score the drafts according to a holistic rubric, and the UWC will review the scores and interpret the data. 34 sets of drafts will be assessed. **Assessment Method Category:** Portfolio Review	Draft assessment will indicate that 75% of clients will demonstrate improved writing after a writing center consultation.	Drafts collected Spring '08; results will be compiled and interpreted Fall '08.	No
DIRECT MEASURE: The UWC will monitor pre- and post-scores of clients seeking UWC help with writing for standardized exams, including PRAXIS I and the College of Business's Writing Proficiency exam. **Assessment Method Category:** Performance/Exhibition	Seventy-five percent of clients will pass their exams after visiting the UWC.	Yearly. As of Fall '09, this assessment method is no longer necessary. The COB does not administer a writing proficiency exam, and the College of Education now accepts composite PRAXIS scores. We still assist students with the PRAXIS, but the demand is lower now that composite scores are accepted.	No

Related Goals

ASMT-ES - Writing Center

* Learning Goal - To foster the growth and competence of writers by clarifying and promoting approaches to effective process writing.

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Outcome: Professional Development for Consultants

Writing consultants demonstrate consistent improvement in consulting and professional development as their employment continues.

Outcome Type: Learning Outcome
Start Date: 08/21/2007
End Date: 05/15/2009
Outcome Status: Currently Being Assessed

Means of Assessment			
Assessment Method	**Criterion**	**Timeline**	**Active**
INDIRECT MEASURE: Feedback gathered by Director and Assistant Director during annual individual staff conferences/evaluations. **Assessment Method Category:** Interviews	Administrators will assess consultants' professional development and, if needed, offer more professional development opportunities based on available resources.	Ongoing; yearly.	Yes
DIRECT MEASURE: English 3450 will be offered regularly as a prerequisite for undergraduate consultants, and English 5120 will be offered yearly for graduate consultants working in the UWC. **Assessment Method Category:** Course-Embedded Assessment	Student assessment collected by both instructors; consultants, by taking these courses, will be prepared, qualified writing consultants.	Yearly.	Yes
DIRECT MEASURE: UWC administrators will organize and conduct regular workshops to target areas needing improvement for consultants and then ask consultants to fill out a survey to determine satisfaction with individual workshops and to identify potential future workshops. **Assessment Method Category:** Survey	Consultants will attend staff workshops in order to fill in knowledge gaps and will respond to a survey rating the workshops. Overall, 75% of consultants will indicate satisfaction with the workshops.	Every two years.	Yes
DIRECT MEASURE: Consultants will participate in discussion forums using Moodle, which generates reports on consultant usage. Assessment will be based on analysis of online discussion board postings with regard to type, frequency, and profile of posts/authors. **Assessment Method Category:** Headcount or Involvement Records	Statistics will show that all consultants utilized the discussion forum.	Yearly.	Yes

Related Goals

ASMT-ES - Writing Center
   * Program Goal - To enhance the academic experiences of writing consultants employed in the UWC.

Outcome: Consultant Writing Improvement

Writing consultants demonstrate improved writing.

Outcome Type: Learning Outcome
Start Date: 08/21/2007
End Date: 05/15/2009
Outcome Status: Currently Being Assessed

Means of Assessment			
Assessment Method	**Criterion**	**Timeline**	**Active**
INDIRECT MEASURE: Director and Assistant Director will review self-evaluations and engage in frequent conversation about consultant writing improvement. **Assessment Method Category:** Interviews	During conferences with Directors and in self-evaluations, consultants suggest writing improvement.	Ongoing; yearly.	Yes

Means of Assessment			
Assessment Method	**Criterion**	**Timeline**	**Active**
INDIRECT MEASURE: Research projects carried out by staff to monitor consultants' growths as educators (indirect measure supplemented by day-to-day direct observation by supervising administrator[s]). **Assessment Method Category:** Course-Embedded Assessment	Consultants will engage in research projects during non-consulting tasks in order to advance their knowledge of writing.	Ongoing; yearly.	Yes

Outcome: Non-Consulting Tasks

Writing consultants actively participate in and/or lead non-consulting tasks that contribute to the overall mission of the UWC.

Outcome Type: Program Outcome
Start Date: 08/21/2007
End Date: 05/15/2009
Outcome Status: Currently Being Assessed

Means of Assessment			
Assessment Method	**Criterion**	**Timeline**	**Active**
INDIRECT MEASURE: Provide opportunities and support (supplies, scheduling, etc.) for group projects and facilitate communication among staff regarding such projects. Weekly review of consultants' participation in current projects using online discussion board postings about non-consulting tasks. **Assessment Method Category:** Course-Embedded Assessment	Consultants will successfully perform non-consulting tasks, thereby increasing their knowledge of writing.	Ongoing; yearly.	Yes

Outcome: Research on Writing Center Theory and Practice

Research projects are regularly carried out by writing consultants and administrators.

Outcome Type: Program Outcome
Start Date: 08/21/2007
End Date: 06/16/2008
Outcome Status: Currently Being Assessed

Means of Assessment			
Assessment Method	**Criterion**	**Timeline**	**Active**
DIRECT MEASURE: Standard course assessment (i.e., grading, portfolio review) of students upon completion of English 3450 and/or English 5120 **Assessment Method Category:** Course-Embedded Assessment	Students will pass these courses and will demonstrate ability to conduct research on writing center theory and practice.	Yearly.	Yes
INDIRECT MEASURE: UWC will monitor availability of research resources on campus, including but not limited to writing center-focused journals and books. Yearly audit of UWC subscriptions and resources. Yearly audit of ASU library's subscriptions and library resources. **Assessment Method Category:** Survey	We will provide consultants with the most up-to-date resources, based on availability of funding.	Ongoing.	Yes

Related Goals

ASMT-ES - Writing Center

* Program Goal - To contribute to research on writing centers and composition pedagogy and philosophy.

Outcome: Scholarly Presentations and Publications

Staff regularly presents or publishes research for the writing center community.

Outcome Type: Program Outcome
Start Date: 08/21/2007
End Date: 06/16/2008
Outcome Status: Complete

Means of Assessment			
Assessment Method	**Criterion**	**Timeline**	**Active**
DIRECT MEASURE: Administrators will budget for presentation of research at regional writing center conference. Evidence of staff participation in regional and/or national conferences on writing centers, writing pedagogy, tutoring, or related areas. **Assessment Method Category:** Field Placement/Internship Evaluation	Consultants and administrators will present at professional conferences or publish research on writing centers.	Ongoing.	Yes
INDIRECT MEASURE: Funding will be provided for membership in national and regional writing center organizations. Yearly audit of active/renewable professional memberships. **Assessment Method Category:** Enrollment	We will renew memberships when they expire.	Yearly.	Yes