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IT managers, construction marketers, and emergency medical technicians: Professional adult learners in higher education

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IT MANAGERS, CONSTRUCTION MARKETERS, AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIANS: PROFESSIONAL ADULT LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

To Shelagh.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project grew out of a desire to try to understand the experiences of professional adult learners as they returned to college. The first professional adult learner I knew was my mother, Pat Michaud. During the 1990s, while raising two boys and working full-time, my mom enrolled in the School for New Learning at DePaul University in Chicago, IL. I was in school during this time as well and remember with fondness our discussions of classwork, teachers and grades. I was astonished then and am astonished now by her tenacity and determination to earn a college degree, a process she began years before, in another life, at Ocean County Community College in Toms River, NJ. Mom, you have taught me what it means to be a life-long learner and inspired this project. Thank you!

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Childcare is an essential aspect of any dissertation-writing process. Barbara and especially Bill Newton, my mother- and father-in-law, provided by childcare and a quiet study-carrel and for this, I am eternally grateful.

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PREFACE

> Our current system of higher education is not adequately serving working adults. Of those who do enroll, the vast majority never actually receive a college degree and are unsuccessful at obtaining the economic, professional, and personal advancement that they hoped to realize....Our nation's colleges and universities must collectively acknowledge the need to educate more working adults. Traditional modes of instruction and student support must be re-examined and adjusted to meet these students' unique needs.
>
> Mahesh Sharma, President, Cambridge College (Cambridge, Mass.) *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 12, 2006 (A55)

On the tarmac of Whately Regional Airport, Alan Drive winds past the new air-traffic control tower and the long-term parking lots and along Runway 06, terminating at the Alan Center, home of Northeast State College's (NSC) Barrington Learning Center.[1] On any given weeknight throughout the year, NSC students shoot down Alan Drive and park out front of the Alan Center, beneath the boom of jets and amid the rumble of a small army of shuttle busses and airport maintenance vehicles. As the sun slips under the western edge of the runway, they gather up their things, rush into the former terminal building, and climb the marble stairs to the second floor, where the Barrington Center's classrooms are housed.

In their arms, they carry bags of fast food and containers of coffee, soda, or water. Over their shoulders they swing backpacks and briefcases. In the long

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[1] Throughout this dissertation I have substituted pseudonyms for the real names of people, places, businesses, and institutions.

hallway that connects the Center's four classrooms, they whisper on cell phones to children, spouses and partners, share workplace woes and victories with former and current classmates, and check-in with advisors and counselors on innumerable issues of scheduling, planning, and financing. If there's time, they debrief with one another about classwork from the week past and the work of the week ahead. As the time approaches six-thirty, they make their way to their classrooms, settle into their seats, and wait for class to begin. They are parents, spouses, workers, and now, students. They are weary, but ready to learn.

Room 105 is in the far corner of the building—the last room on the left, just past the computer cluster and next door to the tiny student lounge. Two of the walls in Room 105 are made up entirely of windows that look out over the tarmac. All day and night, planes shoot past Room 105. At first, it's jarring: one is continually reminded of the fact that one is attending or teaching college *at* an airport. In his essay on Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), "Where Worlds Collide," Pico Ayer describes airports as,

> the new epicenters and paradigms of our dawning post-national age—not just the bus terminals of the global village but the prototypes, in some sense, for our polyglot, multicolored, user-friendly future. And in their very universality—like the mall, the motel, or the McDonald's outlet—they advance the notion of a future in which all the world is a multiculture...LAX is as clear an image as exists today of the world we are about to enter, and of the world that's entering us. (107)

So it is poignant, if not oddly coincidental, that Northeast State College, an institution that is also symbolic of our "polyglot, multicolored, user-friendly future," has positioned one of its nine learning centers, quite literally, amidst the chaos and the noise, *on* the tarmac at Whately Regional Airport. As a symbol of our strange postmodern condition, airport and college—transportation hub and education center—co-exist, simultaneously shuttling people back and forth from the places they've been to the places they're going. At NSC's Barrington Learning Center people are entering new worlds—beginning new journeys, ending old ones, and forever being entered by worlds previously unknown.

Tonight, I am back in Room 105, where I taught my first class at NSC in 1999. It has been six years since I last sat in this room and watched the planes slam down on the runway outside the wall of windows. At that time, I was teaching NSC's introductory composition course, The Writing Process, and as a new instructor and newcomer to teaching adult learners, I felt myself forever working without a net as I attempted to help my students, all of whom were older than me, improve their writing. I knew virtually nothing about them or the ways in which their adult lives—full of experiences and responsibilities I could not, then, have begun to fathom—complicated their educational undertakings at NSC. Perhaps more importantly, as their writing instructor, I knew nothing about the ways in which these students were, perhaps, *already* writers. I assumed that if they already knew how to write, they wouldn't be sitting here in my class.

As I sit and wait for my first interviewee to arrive, it occurs to me that now, six years after first teaching at NSC, with a doctorate in composition studies nearly in hand, I know little more about how to teach writing to the kinds of students one finds at such a school than I knew on that first night of class. I know little about the role of education in NSC students' lives. I cannot begin to imagine the ways in which past experiences with education and literacy instruction have affected NSC students or how these experiences might be shaping their current endeavors. I have no sense of the literate demands made on them outside of school—at work, home, or in the community. In large part, that's why I'm here and that's why I've designed this dissertation project: to try to better understand who adult students are as literate individuals, where they have been, and where they are going.

Over the past fifteen to twenty years, adult students like those you will meet in this dissertation have been streaming back into our nation's colleges and universities. Drawn to the post-secondary classroom for myriad reasons, most of which have to do with the need for professional advancement and credentialing, there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that not only are more adults now returning to college, but that they are already here among us, we just don't always see them. As I have dug into the literature to find out what others in the field of composition studies have had to say about adult learners enrolled in formal programs of post-secondary study, I have been disappointed to find little scholarly work. While we've paid careful attention to issues of literacy as they relate to populations of adult students trying to crack into the literacy game and, consequently, the professional labor market, very little has been written about adult learners who, when they return to school, are already highly literate and already fully immersed in the professional workforce. To put it plainly, we have simply not heard enough about or from a group of students I will refer to in this dissertation as professional adult learners.

This project seeks to begin to remedy this absence by giving voice to the experiences of a small group of NSC students whom I met and interviewed during the winter and spring of 2006. My hope is that by telling these students' stories, I will inspire others in our field to take more seriously a population of students who, despite their recent growth, have remained mostly on the margins of our scholarly conversations. If it is true, as a spate of recent government studies have shown, that today's college students are becoming more and more nontraditional, to the point where the so-called nontraditional students are now beginning to outnumber the traditional, we need to think about how this fact changes our sense of what it is we are up to when we say that we teach writing in the university. We need to think about the ways in which *who* our students are affects *what* we ask them to do with writing, not just in literacy courses, but across the curriculum. But first, we need to hear from the students themselves—the professional adult learners. We need to gain a greater sense of where they have been, why they have enrolled, and where they are going. And we need to try to understand their transition, as writers, from the workplace back into the university. Only then can we begin to imagine how we might help them become better writers, thinkers, and language-users.

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CONSTRUCTION MARKETERS, IT MANAGERS, AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIANS: PROFESSIONAL ADULT LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

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In this study, I examine the literacy, school, and work experiences of three professional adult learners attending Northeast State College (NSC), a four-year public university in New England. I define professional adult learners as those over the age of twenty-five who enroll in formal programs of post-secondary study for reasons having to do primarily with career advancement and/or transition. More often than not, professional adult learners work full-time and pursue their studies part-time. This project grew out of my work teaching at NSC in the late 1990s. At that time, I had a limited sense of who professional adult learners are, why they enroll or re-enroll in college, and what role literacy, and in particular writing, plays in their lives. I had an even more limited sense of how I was supposed to help such students, many of whom are already competent and even savvy communicators, improve their writing. In this project, I investigate participants' literate lives both in and outside the classroom, examining, in particular, their writing across three domains: school, home/community, and

work. I argue that, far from remediation, what professional adult learners need in terms of writing instruction is an overarching awareness of the role of genre in professional and academic writing and frequent opportunities to connect writing instruction inside school with the wide variety of rhetorical tasks and projects in which they often already engage outside of school.

CHAPTER ONE

ADULT STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND COMPOSITION STUDIES

> In addition to the increase in the number of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds who will attend college in the coming years, the average age of students attending college will continue to rise, a tendency already clear in many schools. Consequently, no longer can we expect our first-year writing courses to be made up of eighteen- and nineteen-year-old students fresh out of high school. Our older students may include wives, husbands, single parents, military veterans, full-time workers, and part-timers of many sorts… Although we know of no research concerning the ways in which the presence of this population might affect the writing classroom, we know from personal experience that these students have different kinds of goals and different strategies for reaching them than their younger classmates.
>
> Beverly J. Moss and Keith Walters, "Rethinking Diversity: Axes of Difference in the Writing Classroom" (451)

For many compositionists who work at research universities like the one where I have worked, learned, and taught for the past several years, undergraduate adult learners, or nontraditional students as they are sometimes called, are those sometimes off-beat but often engaging older students who crop up in our courses from time to time, standing out in a sea of fresh young faces. While teaching at the state's flagship university, I rarely had more than one or two adult learners in my classes. Because they were usually paying for their education themselves, the adult learners with whom I worked took their coursework seriously and sometimes complained to me in private about the perceived lack of commitment to school that they observed in their traditional-age classmates. For their part, many of my traditional-age students seemed capable of little more than thinly veiled tolerance for the adult students whom, they must have felt, were breaking unspoken but well-known rules of engagement virtually every time they raised their hands. In this way, the "non-trads" in a room full of traditional-age students can sometimes seem, as a fellow instructor once put it, like yet another "situation to manage."

Teaching at a four-year college or university comprised of mostly traditional-age students provides only a limited glimpse into the recent growth in adult education. That those who serve primarily traditional-age student populations[2] see so few adult students is not at all representative of national trends and growth patterns. A series of recent government reports has shown that the number of adult students enrolling in educational programs is on the rise and has been for some time. Three National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) studies document this trend. The first, "Participation Trends and Patterns in Adult Education: 1991-1999" (2002), examined adult enrollment patterns in educational programs among multiple demographic categories and found that "among virtually every group of adults, the overall increase in participation was widespread" (7). Among those adults surveyed for the study, a remarkable 46% were currently participating in some type of formal educational activity. Thus, the report's authors conclude, "The increase in participation in adult education found

[2] Government studies of undergraduate student populations classify those between the ages of 18-24 as "traditional" college age.

in this report is not new. What *is* new is evidence of the breadth of this increase. Virtually every group of adults examined increased their participation in adult education between 1991 and 1999" (11). Of course, the term "adult education" is rather capacious—it can refer to many different kinds of educational activities: workplace or community initiatives as well as formal programs of post-secondary study at the community college or university level.[3] The general trend, however, suggests that formal educational activities are no longer for just the young and unemployed. They are, increasingly, lifelong and recursive processes—activities in which one engages and re-engages throughout one's life and professional career.

From their emphatic first sentence, the authors of a second NCES study, "The Condition of Education" (2002), which focuses on adult learners engaged in formal programs of post-secondary study of the kind I will discuss in this dissertation, assert that "Today's undergraduate population is different than it was a generation ago" (1). Working to dispel the myth of the "traditional undergraduate," the authors of this report write,

> The "traditional" undergraduate—characterized here as one who earns a high school diploma, enrolls full time immediately after finishing high school, depends on parents for financial support, and either does not work during the school year or works part time—is the exception rather than the rule. In 1999-2000, just 27% of undergraduates met all of these criteria. Thus, 73 percent of all undergraduates were in some way "nontraditional." (1)

Who are these new nontraditional students? The study's authors attempt to

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[3] In their book *Learning in Adulthood*, Sharan Merriam and Rosemary Caffarella suggest that adult learning takes place in three different contexts or settings, with many variations within each setting and often considerable overlap between settings. These settings are: formal/institutional, nonformal, and informal/self-directed. In this project, I focus on adult learners engaged in programs of formal/institutional study.

describe this population "in terms of their demographic characteristics, enrollment patterns, ways of combining school and work, participation in distance education, and persistence patterns" (2). A nontraditional student, they suggest, is any student who meets one or more of the following criteria:

1. Delays enrollment (does not enter post-secondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finished high school);
2. Attends part time for at least part of the academic year;
3. Works full time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled;
4. Is considered financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid;
5. Has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others);
6. Is a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents);
7. Does not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school). (2-3)

Using these criteria, the report's authors attempt to move past the traditional binary relationship that insists that one is *either* traditional *or* nontraditional to suggest that a more realistic appraisal of a student's status should be based on *the extent to which* he or she is traditional or nontraditional. Students might be thought of as "minimally nontraditional" (if they have only one of the above characteristics), "moderately nontraditional" (if they have two or three), and "highly nontraditional" (if they have four or more). When categorized in this way, the authors of "The Condition of Education" (2002) report found that in 1999–2000, 27 percent of all undergraduates were traditional (met none of the seven criteria) and that 28 percent were highly nontraditional (met four or more of the criteria) (3). Thus, this study suggests that there are now about as many highly nontraditional students in our post-secondary institutions as there are traditional and more nontraditional students, overall, than traditional. In this dissertation, I profile three such "highly nontraditional" students, each of whom meets four or more of the seven criteria set out by the authors of "The Condition of Education" (2002) report.

Given the shifting nature of today's undergraduate population, as described in the previous report, a third and final NCES study, "Work First, Study Second: Adult Undergraduates Who Combine Employment and Post-secondary Enrollment" (2003), helps shed light on the "characteristics and educational experiences of working adult undergraduates" (iii). The authors of this report note that "About 43% of undergraduates who were enrolled in post-secondary education during the 1999-2000 academic year were age 24 or older" (iii). Furthermore, about two-thirds of those over the age of 24 who enroll in programs of post-secondary study consider their job their primary activity. The authors refer to this group as "employees-who-study" and contrast them with the other one-third of the adult student population, whom they refer to as "students-who-work." Among employees-who-study, the authors found that most are older, on average, than students-who-work (36 vs. 30 years old); more likely to be married (52 percent vs. 31 percent); and more likely to have children or other dependents (57 percent vs. 43 percent). Furthermore, most employees-who-study work full-time and attend school part-time. Students-who-work, not surprisingly, do the opposite (iii-iv). In the end, the authors of the "Work First, Study Second" report draw a number of interesting conclusions about such students:

> In 1999–2000, roughly two-thirds of working undergraduates age 24 or older reported that work was their primary activity. Among

> these employees who study, nearly 70 percent combined full-time work with part-time attendance. These working adults make up a large percentage of the undergraduate population and most of them pursue post-secondary education to obtain skills necessary to advance in their careers. (ix-x)

These three studies, tracing, as they do, a rise in rates of participation among all adults in formal educational activities, a rise in the number of adult students enrolling in formal programs of post-secondary education, and a trend towards a more diverse undergraduate student population, raise interesting questions for those of us who profess composition. Given these changes, one would expect to find a considerable body of work among our field's literature documenting the unique challenges and demands of teaching writing to an increasingly nontraditional undergraduate student population. Surprisingly, a thorough review of our field's literature since 1991[4] yields very little scholarly work on the kinds of adult students I will describe in this dissertation—that is, professional adult learners who are often already highly literate, not necessarily "basic writers," and often already enmeshed in complex discursive workplace communities.

In the field of composition studies, when we have written about adult learners enrolled in *formal curricular contexts* (usually in community colleges), admirably, our work has tended to focus on those students who are, perhaps, in the greatest need of literacy instruction—that is, A) students from difficult or troubled socioeconomic backgrounds or B) non-native speakers of English. This work with so-called "basic writers" dates to the early writings of Mina

[4] I chose 1991 as the starting point for my literature review because it is the year in which the NCES report "Participation Trends and Patterns in Adult Education" gleaned its earliest data on adult enrollment patterns.

Shaughnessy in the 1970s and has been driven, I believe, in large part, by the field's long-standing commitment to issues of social justice. Too large to catalogue in its entirety, recent examples of this kind of scholarly work include Bay (1999) who reports on the results of a survey of the educational backgrounds and experiences of eighty-five adult students over the age of twenty-four and Frederickson (1998) who speculates about the role of "silence" among adult learners in the English classroom. While immensely significant, this body of work does not necessarily provide insight into the literate needs and experiences of the kinds of students I will discuss in this dissertation—professional adult learners who are not so much trying to crack into the literacy game as they are already enmeshed in it and seeking to advance.

If we turn from the formal curricular contexts in which compositionists have worked with adult students to what Gere (1994) has called the *extracurriculum*, we see a virtual explosion of work on literacy and writing instruction in family, community, and workplace settings, much of which has featured adult students. But, again, the adult students we meet in extracurricular studies are often those who are struggling to gain so-called "basic" literacy skills or to learn English. Belzer (2004), for example, discusses the difficulties of using critical pedagogies to teach literacy courses at a community-based literacy initiative in Philadelphia. Gowen (1991) describes a workplace literacy program for low-wage workers at King Memorial Hospital in New Orleans. Hull (1997) focuses on a workplace education program aimed at non-native English speakers at a factory in California. Thus, while studies of "extracurricular" writing and writing instruction have proliferated in recent years, these studies, like much of our work within the formal curriculum, have tended to focus on adult students with low levels of literacy or those who are non-native English speakers.

Scholarly discussion about professional adult learners of the kind I will discuss in this dissertation has been largely absent from our field's vast body of literature. For example, such students have failed to attract notice during the field's various "taking-stock" moments such as the CCCC Chair's Addresses, the commemorative anniversary edition of *CCC* "A Usable Past: *CCC* at 50," and the spate of books and articles that have reflected on the current state of the field, such as Richard Fulkerson's recent survey article "Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century" or the recent *College English* Symposium entitled "What Should College English Be?" Among the various longitudinal studies that have attempted to chart writing development during the college years,[5] none has focused on the developmental processes of professional adult students. When it comes to the training of future practitioners and scholars of composition, one finds discussions about professional adult students virtually absent from well-known primers such as Tate, Rupiper and Schick's *A Guide to Composition Pedagogy*, Villaneuva's *Cross-Talk*, Johnson's *Teaching Composition: Background Readings*, Glenn, Goldthwaite, and Connors' *The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing* and Lindemann's *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers.* Finally, the well-known *Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Writing* contains specific information about teaching writing to many different groups of students, focusing

[5] I am thinking here of Nancy Sommers' work with Harvard students, Andrea Lunsford's work at Stanford, and Anne Herrington and Marcia Curtis' work at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

on issues of race, class, and gender, but contains very little about the ways in which students' age or professional status function as criteria worthy of investigation in composition research.

In sum, adult students, and especially professional adult students of the kind I describe in this dissertation, have remained mostly at the margins of our disciplinary investigations. Thus, my primary task in the pages that follow is to shine a light on the literacy, school, and work experiences of professional adult students of the kind that are increasingly enrolling in our nation's colleges and universities. In many ways, this aspect of the project was inspired by Deborah Brandt's book *Literacy in American Lives*, in which Brandt documents the ways that literacy became "a key resource, a raw material, for the American economy of the twentieth century" (188). According to Brandt, over the past hundred or so years,

> Literacy became directly and deeply implicated in economic life for many mutually reinforcing reasons. Buying and selling involved many more people in recording, moving, and promoting information; readers became targets both as audiences for advertising and as purchasers of literacy-based commodities. Although always an aspect of literacy in American society, its economic meanings surged prominently as the twentieth century unfolded. (190)

What concerns Brandt in *Literacy in American Lives* is the relationship between economic transformation and literacy acquisition. To investigate this relationship, she interviewed a diverse group of Americans, without any specific set of demographic criteria, to try to understand the ways in which, as she puts it, Americans were chasing literacy and literacy was chasing them.

My concern in this project, while similar in some ways to Brandt's, is different in the sense that I have chosen to focus on a single population of students, professional adult learners, in an effort to understand the ways in which the kinds of economic and literacy shifts Brandt describes in *Literacy in American Lives* play out in the experiences of this one group. My sense was that the back-story driving professional adult students' enrollment at schools like NSC was somehow connected to the larger narrative of change that Brandt describes in *Literacy in American Lives.* If, as Brandt writes, it is true that "Economic transformations...were the engine of change in literacy learning, setting an especially brisk pace over the last several decades," I wanted to see how or in what ways this might be true in the experiences of professional adult students like those one finds at a school like NSC.

Another important distinction between my project in this dissertation and Brandt's in *Literacy in American Lives* is that I am interested in more than just the theoretical aspects of literacy acquisition in the lives of adult students. In this project, I examine the role of literacy, and, in particular, writing, in the lives of professional adult learners at the current moment. One of the things that distinguish many adult learners from traditional-age students is the extent of their experience with writing outside of school. Whereas we tend to think of the university as a site where young people go to learn the discourses of particular academic and professional communities—i.e., to prepare for the world of work and its inevitable attendant demands—adult students arrive at the post-secondary classroom door often already immersed in complex discursive professional communities. They make the *reverse-commute*—that, is, the discursive transition from the workplace to the classroom.

In the field of composition studies, we have yet to fully investigate the implications of the reverse-commute. From our work with traditional-age students attempting to make the discursive transition from the classroom to the workplace we have learned that A) writing is learned differently on the job than it is in school and B) writing functions or circulates in different ways in these two contexts. For example, in their article, "Learning to Write Professionally: 'Situated Learning' and the Transition from University to Professional Discourse," Aviva Freedman and Christine Adam draw on two social theories of learning to describe the way writing is learned differently in school and on the job. Looking to the work of psychologist Barbara Rogoff, Freedman and Adam suggest that writing in the school context is learned through a process of "guided participation" where students work closely with a "skilled practitioner" on tasks they would not be able to accomplish alone. The skilled practitioner provides a structure or "scaffold" to facilitate the student's learning with the expectation that as time passes, the student will be able to complete the task by him or herself. To describe the way in which employees learn to write on the job, Freedman and Adam invoke the work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wegner, whose theory of "legitimate peripheral participation" describes an apprenticeship system where newcomers work with old-timers on "activities that have a purpose above and beyond the initiation of newcomers"—thus making the learning process incidental to the larger process of accomplishing some specific task or job. (313)

Writing is not only learned differently in the workplace and in school, as Freedman and Adam suggest, it also functions and circulates differently. Dias et al., in their book *Worlds Apart,* highlight many of the ways that professional writing is distinctive from academic writing. Principally, Dias et al. argue that workplace discourse can be distinguished from academic discourse in three ways: "complexity, multifunctionality, and implicatedness in power relations" (151). They point out, for example, that in the workplace, "speech and gesture at least, if not other symbolic processes, are found alongside writing" (39). Whereas in school contexts, writing is called upon to do all the work of communicating meaning, in the workplace, meaning is often conveyed through writing, but also through other means, including the conversations workers carry on as they pour over a draft of a document, the gestures a worker makes as she gives a presentation, and the visual media workers use to accompany, supplement, and enhance written text. Also, Dias et al. point out that many of the workplace writer's tasks, for example, "writing in pairs or teams, claiming authorship for text produced by another, appropriating research without attribution, receiving extensive assistance from colleagues, making multiple submissions of similar or identical texts," would be "unlikely, impossible, or illegal" in academic contexts where there is a an expectation that writers will work independently and a premium is placed on original work (115). Dias et al. highlight the ways in which notions of audience are considerably more complex in workplace settings, pointing out that in the workplace

> The readers of any document…are both many and indeterminate… papers are passed up and down the hierarchy (for collaborative

> reading/input as well as for action) and potentially consulted at points distant in time and place, by readers with complex, shifting, and often unpredictable agendas. (115)

Finally, Dias et al. suggest the intensely ideological and highly situated nature of workplace writing, pointing out that, unlike academic writing, "workplace texts are but one strand in an intricate network of events, intentions, other texts, relationships, and readers" (113).

Given the ways in which writing is learned and functions differently in the workplace and in the classroom, in this project I investigate the transition adult students make from the world of professional writing back into the world of academic writing. Scholars like Dias et al. argue that workplace and academic composing are so dissimilar that it is virtually impossible to prepare student writers, situated as they are in classrooms and universities, for the rhetorical demands of the myriad workplaces into which they will someday enter. "The situatedness of workplace texts" they write "—their inextricable relationship to particular ideologies, settings, times, people, other texts, and activities—renders arhetorical (or under-rhetorical) any academic attempt to replicate them, no matter how sophisticated or elaborate the simulation, case study, or role play" (134). Presumably, the reverse is also true: genre knowledge and composing strategies learned in the workplace do not easily transfer to the unique context of the classroom, with its focus on the facilitation of student learning and evaluation and assessment. But because so few studies have examined the reverse-commute, it's hard to say for sure what adult students experience as they try to re-acclimate themselves to the classroom and its attendant rhetorical tasks.

One scholar who has studied the reverse-commute, is Randall Popken, who, in his article, "Genre Transfer in Developing Adult Writers" (1992), poses the question, "How is it that developing writers draw on strategies and principles from discourses they already have some control over and apply them to discourses they are trying to acquire?" (3) Beginning with the assumption that "a distinguishing characteristic of adult written discourse acquisition is the point of transition between the discourses they are familiar with and the ones they are not" (3), Popken draws on rhetorical genre theory[6] to examine the "transfer strategies" adult students utilize to aid in the production of academic discourse. He suggests that, when confronted with a new genre, adult students have two transfer possibilities: positive and negative. With positive genre transfer, "the properties of the two genres [old and new] are in harmony" whereas, with negative genre transfer, "the properties of the familiar genre do not match those of the unfamiliar" (6). When negative genre transfer occurs, Popken suggests, the writer reaches a state of "genre interference" where her knowledge of familiar genres is "inappropriate or dysfunctional" in helping her to compose new genres (6). In the end, Popken argues that because "the rhetorical demands which students encounter outside our work with them are often quite different from what they have encountered in our classes," (12) examining their genre transfer strategies can serve as a useful means of understanding their steps and mis-

[6] Carolyn Miller (1984) was among the first to rethink notions of genre, suggesting that we view genres of writing not as static types but, instead, "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (151). Popken explains genres as "responses by members of discourse communities to recurrent rhetorical contexts" and suggests that "much of what acquiring written discourses really comes down to is acquiring fluency with genres of a community" (5).

steps as they attempt to make the transition from the production of professional discourse to academic discourse.

In this project, in each of the data chapters, I begin with participants' life stories, as Brandt does, focusing on their educational and literacy histories, work and professional experiences, and goals and motivations for literacy development. Next, drawing on genre theory, I describe the various kinds of writing participants produce across three domains: work, home/community, and school. As I do so, I pay particular attention to the ways in which participants negotiate academic writing assignments, noting moments of struggle or difficulty and pointing out moments where it seems professional genre knowledge or composing strategies seep into the academic context. I close each chapter with a brief discussion in which I attempt to place each participant within the big picture of economic and literacy transformation as enumerated by Brandt in *Literacy in American Lives*.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCHING THE LITERATE LIVES OF PROFESSIONAL ADULT LEARNERS

> Adult education is a large and amorphous field of practice, with no neat boundaries such as age, as in the case of elementary and secondary education, or mission, as in the case of higher education. Adult education with its myriad content areas, delivery systems, goals, and clienteles defies simple categorization...One way to grasp something of the field is to find out who is involved in the activity itself—hence, studies of participation.
>
> Merriam and Caffarella, *Learning In Adulthood* (45)

> If anyone has stories to tell it is the returning adult student.
>
> Libby Bay, "Twists, Turns, and Returns: Returning Adult Students," (306)

Research Questions

The research questions I ask today and the questions that guide this dissertation project are not necessarily the same ones I asked six years ago, when I first encountered a classroom of mostly professional adult students at NSC. My earliest questions were strictly pragmatic: how should I teach writing to such students? How is a writing course geared towards such a group different from one geared towards more traditional-age students (if it is different at all)? What do professional adult students want from a writing course or writing instruction, in general?

These questions remain, but they have evolved. I am still interested in the pedagogical issues of working with professional adult learners. But in this project, I extend this pedagogical interest outward to an investigation of the students themselves and to the role of literacy, school, and work in their lives. Thus, the questions guiding this dissertation are as follows:

- Who are professional adult learners and what kinds of educational and professional histories, motivations, and goals do they bring to our classrooms?
- What should we know about the role of literacy, and, more specifically, writing, in the lives of professional adult learners in order to design programs of instruction that are well-suited to their needs, expectations, and existing knowledge?
- How does the fact that many professional adult learners come to academic writing already immersed in a variety of workplace discourse communities and having already gained a degree of fluency in workplace genres and writing strategies shape or affect their writing in academic settings?
- How does a consideration of the needs, expectations, and experiences of professional adult learners in regard to writing at the post-secondary level challenge, complicate, and/or augment our thinking about the role of writing instruction in colleges or universities that serve more traditional-age student populations?

Data Collection

To explore answers to my research questions, I conducted case studies with six NSC students during the winter and early spring of 2006. MacNealy (1999) defines case study research as "a qualitative tool" that "aims to provide rich description of an event or small group of people or objects" (195). She explains that one conducts case study research "for the purpose of exploring, describing, and/or explaining aspects not previously known or considered. The purpose is to develop new insights, new knowledge" (197). For this project, I chose the case study method because I wanted to explore and describe the literacy, educational and work-related experiences of professional adult students enrolled in a formal program of post-secondary study. The data for the study consists of extensive interviews with six research participants and samples of their writing across three domains: home/community, work, and school.

In assembling a framework for the interviewing process, I drew on the work of Lytle (1991), who argues for a more expansive methodology for investigations of adult literacy:

> we need to construct a richer conceptual framework for inquiring into the many facets of literacy development in adulthood, a framework that includes the cultural scripts adults bring to, and take from, learning; their family, school, and community histories; their specific and global intentions; their successful experiences learning and teaching in other facets of their lives; their knowledge of the world; and in particular, their tacit and shifting awareness of the forms and functions of written language, as experienced in the contexts of daily life. (378)

Lytle's framework focuses less on the "objective" measurement of students' literacy "skills" and more on what she calls the "dimensions of literacy development over time" (386), which I have summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Dimensions of Literacy Development

Dimension	**Includes**
Beliefs/History	"…adults' theories or knowledge about language, literacy, teaching, and learning," as well as the contexts in which these beliefs emerged—i.e. courses, teachers, employers, parents, community members, fellow students, etc.
Practices	"…the range and variation of learners' literacy related activities in their everyday lives."
Processes/Products	"…adult learners' repertoires of ways to manage…writing tasks and the products of these transactions."
Goals/Plans	"…what adults themselves indicate they want to learn, including their short- and long-term goals, and how they plan and interact to attain these goals" (386).

To gain greater insight into these dimensions, Lytle recommends that researchers collect data with adult students while they are enrolled in an educational program in order to examine the range and variation of each dimension as well as the interconnections between dimensions. In my study, I drew on Lytle's framework, but with two changes. First, I added the word "history" to the first dimension because I believe that our beliefs as regards issues of literacy are rooted in our specific histories and that in order to best assess one's beliefs, one should begin by examining the specific historical contexts in which literacy has developed. Second, I dropped half of Lytle's third dimension, "processes." I did so because I was less interested in professional adult students' composing processes than I was in the actual documents they produced across the domains. While I did collect writing samples and did talk, informally, with participants about their writing processes, I did not ask them to compose any new writing during our interviews.

Once I identified a framework for this study, I was faced with the task of developing protocols to follow at each interview session. Drawing on "life research" questioning strategies that have been used by literacy researchers such as Deborah Brandt *(Literacy in American Lives)* and Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher *(Literate Lives in the Information Age)*, I assembled a specific agenda for each one-hour session (all interview protocols can be found in Appendix A):

- Interview #1: Background: Family, School, Literacy, and Work Experience
- Interview #2: Literacy Memories and Literacy and Technology
- Interview #3 and 4: Literate Practices in Everyday Life (home/community, school, work)
- Interview #5: Plans/Goals for Literacy, Education, and Work

These five protocols were designed to provide enough structure to ensure that certain aspects of participants' experiences were touched upon, but not so much structure so as to prohibit spontaneous conversation. I tape-recorded each meeting with participants and later transcribed all of the tapes, producing, in sum, 279 pages of transcripts. All transcriptions were shared with research participants to ensure their accuracy. As compensation for their time, participants were paid

$10 per interview session and offered several one-hour tutoring sessions. Most participants accepted the $50 for the five interviews, none, however, took me up on the offer of writing assistance.

As a former NSC instructor, there were a few issues to consider as regards my positioning in this project. Having taught at NSC for two years, I went into this study with a good deal of insight as to the demographics of NSC students and the institutional culture of NSC itself. I was, in many ways, already an NSC "insider." Simultaneously, I often felt myself cast in the role of "outsider" during my visits to NSC's Barrington center, where I conducted my interviews in the afternoons or in evenings, before and after classes. While I possessed credentials that suggested that I was or had been a member of the NSC community, my absence from the school, affiliation with the state's flagship university, and identity as a researcher tagged me as an "outsider" among the NSC student population, faculty, and staff. Because NSC is a teaching institution with a powerfully pragmatic ethos, I sometimes felt a bit out of place and uncomfortable with my "researcher" label there during the time I was collecting data for this project. The divide between an institution like the one where I attend graduate school, where research is very much a part of the day-to-day business of the campus, and a school like NSC, where teaching is the primary professional activity, is considerable. So while I often sought to identify myself as an NSC "insider," I never failed to feel my "outsider" status each time I walked into the Barrington Center to conduct interviews.

There were few, if any, constraints on my access to participants and/or their writing. The only time I faced complications was during the sharing of workplace documents. One participant who wanted to avoid divulging important information about his employer brought in samples of texts that were similar in nature to the kinds of writing he was producing in his current job, but were culled from work with a past employer (who had since gone bankrupt). When reviewing documents that contained confidential information, for example the names of companies and or individuals, I asked participants to remove all relevant indicators ahead of time or removed them myself. In the end, at every turn, I tried to balance my need for access to participants' workplace writing with their need to preserve the anonymity of their employers and workplaces.

Participants

One of the most difficult aspects of conducting a study with professional adult students enrolled in programs of formal post-secondary study is simply finding enough of them to participate. Because students at NSC, like many such students across the U.S., are already busy juggling school, work, and family, I anticipated that I might have some difficulty finding a sufficient number of them to participate in this project. In December 2005, after receiving approval for my study from my school's IRB Board and the Dean of Students at NSC, I began to seek out research participants by contacting a few of my old colleagues at NSC to ask for assistance. They suggested that I begin my search by getting in touch with the various NSC Learning Services Coordinators; these individuals were able to help me identify two of my eventual six participants.

Next, I contacted NSC's Faculty and Educational Program Coordinator, who recommended that I visit classes at the NSC center nearest my home to recruit participants. During my class visits, I introduced myself, gave a brief overview of the project, and handed out copies of the Consent Letter (see Appendix B) to give students a sense of their potential involvement, should they decide to participate in the project. As students began to contact me in the days following my class visits, I emailed them back a one-page questionnaire (see Appendix C) which I asked them to complete electronically and return via email. As the demographic data from the questionnaires came in, I entered this information into a table that I used to keep track of potential participants. Table 2, below, contains the demographic information for the six participants who did, ultimately, become a part of this study.

Table 2. Case Study Participants

Name	Age	Race/Language	Program of Study	Years at NSC	Post-Secondary Education/Training
Lois Smith	45	White/English	Special Education	3	United States Air Force and Community College of the AF; AS (NSC)
Patsy McGee	44	White/English	General Education	1.5	One course at local community college; no AS
John Beech	43	White/English	IT Management	Just started	Clarkson University (unfinished), Extension school coursework, extensive workplace-based training; equivalent of AS
Sarah Knox	31	White/English	General Studies	3	None
Tony Vaccaro	39	White/English	Applied Technology	1	AS, EMS Services, community-technical college; extensive workplace-based training
Jennifer Jarvis	58	White/English	Applied Health Technology	Just started	AS, Dental Hygiene, URI (1969)

The criteria I used for selecting research participants were as follows:

Ideally, participants for this study:

1. will be recent arrivals at NSC, with some, but limited post-secondary schooling experience;
2. will have enrolled at NSC for reasons related to professional development (career change, workplace re-entry, or the need for increased credentials);

3. will represent a mixture of ethnicity and gender;
4. will be somewhere between the ages of 25-50;
5. will be enrolled at NSC full- or part-time and actively taking at least one course which requires extensive writing projects.

I devised this list of criteria for a number of reasons. First, I wanted participants to be recent or fairly recent arrivals at NSC because I wanted to capture the experiences of professional adult students as they were still in the process of immersing themselves in a program of post-secondary education. Second, because most studies of adult students find that they return to school for career-related reasons, I wanted to make sure that professional development played a role in participants' rationale for enrolling at NSC. Third, given statistics about shifting population demographics in America, generally, I felt it was important to try to recruit an ethnically and racially diverse group of participants. Fourth, because most researchers define college students as those between the ages of 18-24 and because, among adult learners, participation rates have been shown to begin to decline past the age of fifty, I tried to find participants in the middle stages of life when, statistically-speaking, they are most likely to enroll in a formal program of post-secondary study. Fifth, it was important to me that all participants be currently enrolled at NSC, regardless of completion status. Additionally, because I was and am principally interested in issues of literacy and composition, I hoped that I would find research participants who were engaged in courses that required a fair amount of writing so we could look at and talk about specific writing samples.

Of course, prior to beginning a study, a researcher devises a wish-list of criteria, like the one above, based on criteria that seem meaningful at the time. The meaningfulness of these criteria, however, can and probably do change as the study unfolds. Such was the case with my own project. As I reflect on the above five criteria now, I see my list, while still useful, as somewhat arbitrary. For example, in one way or another, all six of the adult learners who participated in this project were enrolled at NSC for reasons of professional development.[7] As for participants' age, all but one were within the range I had hoped for (twenty-five to fifty). But as I got to know each participant, age seemed to matter less and less. This first became apparent when the 58-year-old woman who did end up becoming a participant in this study and whom I profile in this dissertation raised her hand as I was attempting to solicit participants in her Human Biology class and asked, in front of a room containing many students who were over age fifty, why I was limiting my study to those under the age of fifty. I had no good answer and quickly revised this criterion.

As for the three other criteria, it became apparent to me early on in the data collection period that it mattered little how long students had been enrolled at NSC. What mattered was that they *were* enrolled and that they were working, ultimately, toward the completion of a Bachelor's degree. As the study evolved and my ongoing literature review revealed the dearth of information on

[7] As I waded further into the study, what became increasingly apparent was the diverse ways in which professional imperatives figured into participants' experiences. It was not the case, as I had perhaps hoped, that I would find participants whose jobs had recently been outsourced to India or made obsolete by technology. Participants' professional motivations for enrolling at NSC proved to be considerably more complex than I could have imagined. I have tried to capture this complexity in the three data chapters that follow.

professional adult students pursuing Bachelor's degrees, this became a perhaps more important criteria than I had at first imagined. Were I to revise my original list of criteria, I would add a requirement that participants be in the process of pursuing a Bachelor's degree (all six of the participants I interviewed were). Additionally, as I learned more about my participants, the idea that they should be "recent arrivals at NSC, with some, but limited post-secondary schooling experience" seemed less significant than the cumulative fact of their diversity of completion-status and their assorted and varied past post-secondary experiences. What mattered was that each participant had her own story of how she had come to this point in her educational journey, not that each was at roughly the same point of the journey.

Given the dearth of male students at NSC, generally,[8] I had a difficult time recruiting male participants for this study. In the end, I retained twice as many female participants as male. During the early stages of the recruitment process, when I feared that I would not be able to enlist any male participants, I recruited two male adult students from a nearby university and began to interview them. I couldn't help feeling, though, that I was complicating the project in ways that were not entirely true to the original design. Both of the two male students from the nearby university were pursuing their studies full-time and working only part-time (all six of the participants from NSC were doing the reverse). In the end, once I was finally able to recruit two male students at NSC, I terminated my relationship with the two students from the nearby university.

[8] According to Jim Miller, Director of Institutional Research at NSC, as of the fall semester, 2006, 76% of students were female.

Finally, despite attempts to recruit participants of diverse ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds, all participants who ultimately agreed to participate in this project were Caucasian native speakers of English, a fact that may reflect A) the general demographic picture at NSC,[9] B) the general demographic picture of the city in which the Barrington center is located,[10] and/or C) the general demographic picture of state in which NSC is located.[11] It does not, it should be pointed out, reflect participation patterns among adult students from minority groups in higher education more generally.

In the end, the process of recruiting participants for this study was time-consuming and messy. Because I was an outsider offering little compensation for participants' time, I feel lucky to have retained the commitments of as many students as I did. Still, the lack of racial and/or language diversity among my research participants is troubling. Further studies of professional adult students enrolled in formal programs of post-secondary study might investigate more fully the experiences of diverse student populations.

The process of choosing three of the six participants upon whom to focus in detail in this dissertation was a difficult one. All six participants had interesting and compelling stories of literacy, schooling, and work. In the end, one way that I narrowed the field was to look at the amount of school and workplace writing each participant was able to share with me. I was especially interested in

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[9] According to Jim Miller, Director of Institutional Research at NSC, as of the fall semester, 2006, whites make up 87% of the student body.

[10] As of the 2005 U.S. census, 80.2% of this city's residents were categorized as "white persons."

[11] As of the 2005 U.S. census, 96.1% of this state's residents were categorized as "white persons."

workplace writing. In choosing to focus on Jennifer Jarvis, Tony Vaccaro, and John Beech I felt that I could convey a sense of the complexity and diversity of composing tasks and strategies that some professional adult students produce on the job. Additionally, in the selection process, I thought about participants' life journeys. While I cannot and would not claim that Jennifer, Tony, and John's life experiences are representative of the adult student population, I do think their stories give a sense of the incredible diversity of experience that adult students bring to the post-secondary classroom. Their stories also capture, I think, the ways in which larger economic and cultural shifts have shaped Americans' lives during the latter half of the twentieth century and the early years of the 21st century.

Research Site

From the time when I first taught at NSC in the late 1990s, I have been fascinated by and drawn to the unique mix of students and distinctive institutional mission and profile of this school. When I combined this fascination with the fact that, in five years of graduate study, I never once came across an article or book discussing a school like NSC or its students, I knew that NSC was the right place to conduct my research. My former students at NSC were police officers, administrative assistants, salespeople, and teacher's aides. They were less often individuals trying to crack into the workforce than they were professionals already immersed in the labor market and trying to A) move ahead in their current line of work or B) transition into a new career. A college degree, for many, was the ticket to change. Many, if not most, were attempting to balance the demands of school, work, and family, with school sometimes taking a backseat to family and work. At every turn, NSC students and NSC itself seemed to defy easy categorization. It was for this reason, first and foremost, that I chose NSC as my research site.

There were at least two other factors that drew me to NSC. First, there was the issue of access. Because I live just fifteen minutes from NSC's Barrington Center, have worked there in the past, and am familiar with the staff, I felt as though NSC would be a convenient and accessible site at which to recruit participants and conduct interviews. Second, there was the issue of NSC's evolving institutional positioning within the shifting field of adult higher education, which continues to fascinate me. Until recently, NSC had a virtual monopoly on adult education in the state in which it is located. But in the past decade, with the rise of private educational providers such as the University of Phoenix or Capella University and a general proliferation in the number of "continuing studies" programs at more mainstream colleges and universities, tremendous competition has arisen for adult students' tuition dollars. NSC, as a long-time player in this market, has recently undergone serious restructuring to address this new reality.[12] Thus, in choosing NSC as my research site, I was also interested in the ways in which the school and its students were and are emblematic of larger shifts in the field of higher education. If it is true, as many have suggested, that

[12] For example, in 2002, NSC, which was previously an open-admissions institution, implemented a placement test called Accuplacer as a requirement for admission. Another change occurred in 2005, when the institution changed its name from The College for Lifelong Learning to Northeast State College, attempting to convey a renewed level of seriousness and rigor as regards its post-secondary mission. Finally, again in 2005, after several years of experimentation with online learning and course design, NSC launched its online degree program, which offers students the opportunity to complete entire programs of study online.

institutions of higher learning are no longer solely in the business of educating 18-24 year olds in the "liberal arts tradition," but are additionally and increasingly engaged in the project of credentialing and career advancement for adults across the lifespan, NSC is a site where this shift can be glimpsed.

There are a number of additional factors that make NSC a unique institution. In what follows, I will attempt to describe my research site, drawing on two resources—NSC's website and, more extensively, their recent "Institutional Self-Study," which was conducted during 2005-2006 and written for the purpose of re-accreditation. My aim here is two-fold. First, in any study of this kind, there is the need to provide contextual information about one's site of research. Second, beyond the imperative to describe my research site, I have crafted this section to try to convey a sense of what it is like to be a teacher or a student at a school like NSC and to underscore the ways in which NSC is an educational institution that is in many ways different from traditional four-year public or private colleges and universities. As changes in the wider society—population shifts, workplace transformations, global economic competition, technological advancement, and alterations in family and community structures—re-shape our conceptions of *who* college students are and *what* post-secondary institutions are for, it is useful, I would suggest, to begin to describe the diverse, sometimes off-the-map locations at which composition is and will be professed and to consider the demands that the students who inhabit these locations do and will make on us as teachers of writing. NSC offers a unique opportunity for doing so.

*   *   *

When we think of a college or university, we tend to imagine of at least four things: the campus, students, faculty, and courses. A school like NSC challenges us to rethink these four conceptions. According to its website, NSC's mission is "to expand access to public higher education to adults of all ages throughout the state." Founded in 1972, NSC offers students the opportunity to pursue a wide range of undergraduate degrees and/or professional certifications and serves over 4,000 part- and full-time students each year.[13] Since its inception, NSC has worked to provide high-quality post-secondary education to the citizens of the state in which it is located at a reasonable price.

Campus

When we think of the physical aspects of a college or university, the campus, certain images tend to spring to mind—a cluster of academic buildings, dormitories, the student union, playing fields, a library. Most importantly, we tend to picture a single centralized location at which university business takes place. This single-campus model has been in evidence for as long as we have had colleges and universities and still dominates our collective sense of the spatial aspects of post-secondary education. But what if there was no library, athletic fields, or dormitories? What if there was, in fact, no campus, or what if there were many campuses? With nine decentralized learning centers scattered around the

[13] According to Jim Miller, Director of Institutional Research at NSC, as of the fall semester, 2006, just 38% of NSC students were pursuing their degrees "full-time."

state, forty additional sites at which courses are occasionally offered,[14] and an online program located in cyberspace, NSC offers a glimpse into what such a school might look like. NSC's nine learning centers are the locations at which most students pursue their coursework, but this is changing as online enrollments grow. The learning centers lease space in local settings and almost all are located within close proximity, if not next door to, local businesses and community organizations. In this way, each of NSC's nine learning centers functions as a decentralized mini-campus, with classrooms, administrative offices, computer clusters, student lounges, and advising/counseling services all on site.

Students

In chapter one, I looked to national statistics on enrollment patterns at U.S. colleges and universities to suggest that post-secondary education is no longer primarily for the young and unemployed. And yet, the prevalent image of the college student as someone between the ages of 18-24 still persists. Despite the statistics, combinations of cultural and institutional factors often render adult students in higher education invisible. Thus, it is important to point out that, according Jim Miller, Director of Institutional Research at NSC, the mean age of NSC students as of the fall, 2006 term was 39 years old. Traditional-age students, between the ages of 18-24, made up just 13% of the student body at NSC while those between the ages of 30-50 made up over half of all students

[14] I once taught an expository writing course for NSC at the headquarters of a large, multi-national corporation. My students worked all day at their regular jobs and then joined me in a conference room in the late afternoon for class.

enrolled (and those between 40-49 made up one-quarter of the student population). Thus, while you will occasionally encounter a traditional-age student at NSC, their presence is low. The vast majority of NSC students are adults straddling middle-age. Nineteen percent are "first-time college students" and 81% are considered "transfer students." They bring with them a whole host of beliefs, values, and experiences that are in many ways different from those of traditional-age college students. In their recent "Self-Study," NSC composed the following profile of their typical student:

> Learners at Northeast State College are primarily female, working, first-generation college attendees, and live in-state. Approximately 77% have attended college elsewhere and are transferring some college credits. They juggle taking classes with family, work, and community responsibilities. Most are seeking an education for employment purposes, either to enter a new field or for advancement in their current work. Our students attend full-time some terms, part-time other terms. Some are interested in completing their degrees as quickly as possible and others enjoy exploring new content areas and are in no hurry to complete. Many depend on financial aid to help pay for their education (federal aid and/or employer reimbursement) while others prefer to self pay and not incur any loan debt. (6)

Faculty

It will not come as a revelation to many, especially in the field of composition studies, to point out that very few colleges and universities today employ a faculty made up entirely of tenure-track professors. Institutions of higher learning have been "outsourcing" teaching for years now. English Departments, in particular, have long depended on contingent faculty, lecturers, and adjunct instructors to teach lower division courses, especially first-year composition. What makes the faculty at NSC stand apart from that of a traditional college or university is the fact that, essentially, there is no faculty. NSC has taken the practice of outsourcing to its logical extreme: it hires *no* faculty members on a permanent or even semi-permanent basis. The 500 to 600 individuals who are considered NSC faculty are hired on a class-by-class, term-by-term basis. They hold professional degrees in their respective fields and often work full- or part-time teaching at other colleges and universities. Some work outside academia, in the private or public sectors.[15] NSC faculty are compensated $1800-2000 per course, depending on the level of their academic degree and their years of service at the school. Aside from teaching, NSC faculty have no service or research responsibilities.

Courses

The way in which students pursue coursework at NSC is, in many ways, reflective of broader shifts in course delivery practices taking place at colleges and universities across the U.S. and the western world. The standard NSC course still runs for one 12-week term and meets one night a week for three-and-a-half hours. But this is changing. In addition to traditional, classroom-based learning, NSC offers five other ways to pursue courses, as illustrated in Table 3.

[15] NSC does not hire graduate or teaching assistants.

Table 3. NSC Course-Delivery Methods

Delivery Method	Description
Online Interactive Courses (OICs)	The college began offering online courses in 1999 on a limited basis. These courses had face-to-face sessions on the first and last days of class but the bulk of the work was completed via an interactive virtual learning program/environment called WebCt. In 2005, NSC launched its BOLD (Bachelor's Online Degrees) program, which allows students to complete an entire degree online. In 1999, only 15 course sections were offered online. In 2007, it is estimated that approximately 157 course sections will be offered online.
Hybrid Courses	Hybrid courses combine virtual and face-to-face instruction.
Intensive or Alternate-Delivery Courses	These courses are condensed from the standard 12-week term to, for example, four concentrated weekends, one intensive week-long immersion, or an alternate-week delivery schedule. NSC began experimenting with intensive and alternate delivery options in 1995 offering just two sections. In 2006, 98 Intensive or Alternate Delivery course sections are being offered.
Field-Based Programs	NSC currently provides field-based programs of study in order for students in particular academic and professional areas to meet state certification requirements. For example, NSC offers a post-baccalaureate teacher certification program in General Special Education with several different specializations (e.g. Learning Disabilities and Emotionally and Behaviorally Handicapped).
Independent Learning Contracts (ILCs)	ILCs provide students the chance for independent study of either a topic of their own interest or a regularly offered course. They can be used to fulfill general education or major requirements or elective credit. The number of learning contracts being completed at NSC has almost doubled in the last 10 years (from 826 in 1995 to 1526 in 2005).

As this table suggests, NSC has been innovative in finding ways for busy students to pursue coursework. Course delivery at NSC is far from a one-sizefits-all formula and in many ways, this reflects the needs of its students, many of whom have considerable home and work responsibilities and often unpredictable schedules.

From its faculty to its course-delivery methods, from its students to its many campuses, NSC embodies a new kind of post-secondary institution. Dispersed, flexible, de-centralized, immersed in and highly adaptive to the world around it, NSC seeks to remain relevant as the idea of the university—who attends it, what it is for, and how it works—shifts in the broader culture.

Data Analysis

By the time I finished interviewing my six research participants for this project, I had just shy of three-hundred pages of interview transcripts and several hundred pages of writing samples. To analyze the transcripts, I began by creating a coding system which I used to sort through the various different kinds of information I had elicited during the interviewing process. This coding scheme emerged from Lytle's framework and through my process of pouring over the transcripts and reflecting on what I was observing.

As I continued coding the transcripts, I began to notice patterns across participants' experiences and also certain things that made individual participants unique. Much of what I noticed was shaped, I began to see, by my own assumptions about who adult learners are, where they come from, and where they are headed. So, for example, if I assumed that many adult learners had troubled educational backgrounds, as I sorted through the transcripts I looked to see where this assumption was borne out and where it perhaps was not (interestingly, most of my research participants had relatively successful educational experiences as children and adolescents). Once I had finished coding the interview transcripts, I created a brief profile or narrative of each participant, trying to get down the basics of their story and paying careful attention to what about each participant made them unique and what about them made them similar to other participants. After I created the individual profiles, I felt the need to represent what I was learning visually, so I created a series of tables in which I categorized participants' experiences according to certain themes (i.e., educational background, literacy experiences, workplace writing, etc.) and then I created one large table on which I attempted to represent what I was learning across all six participants. Having represented the data visually, I returned to the profiles and, drawing on Brandt's life-story strategy, began to develop longer narratives about the three participants, highlighting the aspects of their experiences in regard to schooling and literacy development that seemed most relevant.

At this point, I turned to the writing samples I had collected from participants. Drawing on the work of Dias et al., who have described in great detail the ways in which academic and professional writing differ from one another, I began to try to categorize and describe participants' outside-of-school writing. I thought about their professional roles at work and the ways in which their writing corresponded to these roles. My purpose was mostly descriptive: I wanted to illustrate some of the kinds of professional writing adult students produce on the job in order to see how these genres might be different from the kinds of composing they were being asked to produce in their classes, at NSC.

Having analyzed participants' workplace writing, I moved on to academic writing samples. Here, I wanted to see A) whether or not, as Dias et al. claim, professional and academic writing are "worlds apart" at a school like NSC, B) the kinds of writing tasks participants were being asked to complete in their coursework, C) how participants were making the transition from workplace writing to school writing. Thus, while my purpose in examining participants' workplace writing was mostly descriptive, when I turned to their classroom-based writing, I began to think more in terms of analysis: What did I make of their school texts? How well did my research participants write *as* students? Where were successful examples of academic writing? Where were there problems? (and why?) As I poured over bio-ethics reports, persuasive essays, and literary analysis papers, I tried to imagine what it was like for these students, producing forms of discourse that, in some cases, they hadn't produced in many years, and in other cases they had never produced well in the first place. I wanted to get a sense of their process or processes—that is, of what it was like to make the *reverse-commute*, to move from the comfortable workplace genres that they were so accustomed to producing to academic genres that, as they testified, often felt strange and new and different.

CHAPTER THREE

TRANSITIONS, TURNING POINTS, AND THIRD CAREERS

In the spring of 2006, at age 58, Jennifer Jarvis decided to return to college. She hadn't set foot in a classroom since 1967, when she graduated from the University of Rhode Island with an Associate's degree in dental hygiene. Having worked in several different industries over the course of her more than thirty years in the labor force, Jennifer found herself at a crossroads: her children were all grown and her current work as a sales and marketing associate at a local sign and stamp company was no longer professionally satisfying. It was, she decided, time for a change.

Not knowing exactly what that change would be, Jennifer quit her job in late 2005 and formed J & J Enterprises, an interim venture whose mission was to consult with her husband's construction company. "My job," Jennifer explained during our interviews, "is to add all those little touches that make his business look more professional." But J & J was only a part-time gig. Jennifer knew that, ultimately, she wanted to try to find a way back into the health care profession. She just didn't know how. After hearing an advertisement on the radio about NSC, she decided to enroll in a few classes to see if she could figure out where, professionally, she was headed next.

Growing Up Reading and Writing

Born in the city of Middleton, in northern New England, in 1947, Jennifer Jarvis was an early arrival in the baby-boom generation. For 48 years, her father, an optometrist, owned and operated his own practice right on Main Street in downtown Middleton, which, during this same period, underwent the pains of economic and industrial transformation. As Jennifer describes it, though the family was solidly middle-class, they never really prospered under her dad's business. "He was the kind of doctor who, if you couldn't afford to pay, you'd bring in a chicken or a dozen eggs. Some clients would just say, 'Can I catch up with you next time?' He was very much into his patients being his friends and family. He was never in it for the money." For most of her childhood, Jennifer's mother was a stay-at-home mom, but she was also a labor-and-delivery nurse who returned to work full-time around the time when Jennifer and her sister reached adolescence. The daughter of a doctor and a nurse, this early and intimate exposure to the world of medicine inspired in Jennifer a lifelong passion for issues related to health and personal well-being.

Growing up with two professional parents, there was no shortage of books, magazines, and newspapers around the house when Jennifer was a girl. During one of our interviews, she recalled that her mother "always seemed to have a book in her hands" and was "a very busy reader." Her mother kept a journal in which she wrote an entry every day of her life. Her father read a number of professional periodicals, what Jennifer called "optical/medical stuff," and when he wasn't reading for work, he was reading the local newspaper from cover-to-cover. “He was home every night at quarter to five,” Jennifer recollected, “we had supper at six and at quarter of seven he would sit down with the paper.” Her father also turned out to be an easy target for encyclopedia salesmen, and Jennifer recalled that every few years a fresh set would appear on the shelf at the house. “We always had lots of stuff to read,” Jennifer explained as she rattled off a long list of periodicals that came to the home. “I would say that reading was very important to my parents.”

Another powerful influence on Jennifer’s literacy development came from a close relationship with several female cousins who lived a few states away. Together, the group of girls engaged in a whole range of literate activities, passing books, magazines, and comics back and forth during regular visits. Sometimes the girls put on plays for the family in which they acted out scenes from the *Nancy Drew* series, which, Jennifer claims, they read in its entirety (along with the *Hardy Boys* series). The youngest of the group, Jennifer was always tagging along with the older girls, begging them to allow her to participate in whatever creative activity they were into next. She recalled one visit where the girls collected a stack of old *Reader’s Digests* that were laying around the house and set out to color in all the letters in one entire issue to see who could finish first. The girls also used the magazines to make crafts, like a paper mache Santa Claus. As they got older, they traded romance novels. “We were big on passing things on,” Jennifer explained. “Whether it was with the cousins or with friends nearby. We would give them a stack and they would give us a stack.” In between visits, Jennifer and her sister often wrote letters to the cousins, maintaining their relationships at a distance through the written word and the post office at a time when no one could have imagined email or Instant Messager.

Jennifer's memories of her early school experiences of reading and writing were not nearly as vivid as the experiences she shared with family and friends. There was a powerful memory of a matronly spinster, a 3rd grade teacher named Margaret D. Mashon, who taught for years at the local elementary school in Middleton. Jennifer became one of Ms. Mashon's favorites after scoring high on an aptitude test. In high school, Jennifer helped out on the staff of the school newspaper, occasionally editing articles and assisting with the design and layout of the paper. Unlike her mother, she was never much of a journal-keeper. "I liked English and I did well in English. But I didn't do well in writing," she recalled. One high school English teacher, early in her time at Middleton High, had a particularly deleterious effect on Jennifer's image of herself as a writer: "I remember her telling me that I had the worst writing in the world, telling me how absolutely horrible I was!" From that time on, Jennifer tended to think of writing as something at which "I was never going to be successful." Later, though, this would change. "Today, at my husband's company, I'm the one people bring their letters and memos to for editing," she explained.

Growing up in Middleton, Jennifer attended the local public schools and graduated from Middleton High in 1965. During her high school years, while working at her father's optometry office part-time after school, she first came into contact with the field of dental medicine. In the office above her father's, there was a dentist named Dr. Miller whom Jennifer got to know. Soon, Dr. Miller asked her to come to work in his office. "My dad wanted me to go into optometry, but I didn't really have a strong interest in that," she explained. "Dr. Miller was a wonderful dentist and I enjoyed working for him. I guess that's where my interest in dental hygiene began." After graduation, inspired by her work with Dr. Miller, Jennifer enrolled in the School of Dental Hygiene at the University of Rhode Island, where she earned an associates degree in 1967.

After graduating from URI, Jennifer returned to her home state, went to work as a dental hygienist, married, and started a family. She continued to work part-time for a local dentist and returned to full-time work as her children grew. In 1982, tragedy struck. Her husband was killed in an automobile accident. Two years later she remarried. Then, in 1989, after twenty years working as a dental hygienist, Jennifer decided to hang up her mask and go to work for her second husband, who was in the process of launching his own construction company. In this job, Jennifer wore many hats—from office manager to sales and marketing representative. But after just two years, in 1991, her husband decided to sell the business and it was at this point that she embarked on yet another career, going to work at a local sign and stamp shop in sales and marketing. In 1998, a few of her co-workers split off to form a new business and asked Jennifer to join them. At this new venture, she continued to work in sales and marketing but also expanded into work on the design and layout of the signs and stamps the firm was producing. After seven years at this company, she decided to move on and it was at this point, at age 58, that Jennifer formed J & J Enterprises and enrolled at NSC.

Reading and Writing at Work, Home, and School

Writing for Work

Four Guys Construction Company (FGCC), Jennifer's husband's construction company, is a small commercial outfit specializing in project management, design and build services, and pre-engineered structures. Jennifer's work there is diverse and wide-ranging. She plays three professional roles: personal or administrative assistant, office manager, and sales and marketing associate. Her literacy skills serve a variety of rhetorical purposes, but chiefly, at work, Jennifer's literate skills work toward the following purposes (which are recurrent and ongoing): documentation of various activities and processes, maintenance of new and existing business relationships, and communication with FGCC personnel.

Around the office, in her role as office manager and personal assistant, Jennifer documents everything—conversations with FGCC employees, commitments made to the company by outside vendors, communications with her husband about various projects, initiatives, and staff-related concerns. "I make notes constantly at work," she explained during our interviews, "and they have saved us on many an occasion. You know. I'll put down 'Just spoke to so-and-so and they will get back to us about this or that by this time.' It's one of my quirks. But it works." Jennifer's most involved process of documentation, however, stems from her work as a member of FGCC's sales and marketing team. In this capacity, she works to identify new construction projects and ventures for FGCC to pursue. The process begins with regular reading of several industry periodicals, where new construction jobs are advertised. As she reads, she makes notes about the various projects and keeps an eye out for the ones for which FGCC would be particularly well-suited.. Using a customer relationship management system called SalesPro, which allows her to store all of the information she collects about potential clients in one centralized online database, Jennifer documents her ongoing communications with potential clients, making notes about dates of initial and follow-up conversations, names of project coordinators, and descriptions of projects. In this way, her writing functions as a record of activity, documenting the ongoing process of bringing new business to FGCC.

Once she has made contact with a prospective client and discussed the scope of the project with her husband, if it appears that the venture is worth pursuing, Jennifer will attempt to gather more detailed information from the client using a document that she produced collaboratively with her husband, the "Questions on Initial Building Inquiry."

Writing Sample #1: Questions on Initial Building Inquiry

Questions on Initial Building Inquiry

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Building Location...

Size of Project (if known at this time)...

Town Approvals Secured?...

Has financing been secured?...

Do you have a site/building plan or sketch?...

What is expected use (Office / Warehouse Space)...

If warehouse space, how high will material be stacked...

Preferred Building Type...

How many people to occupy the space?...

Is this a phased project?...

Time Frame for construction....

CONSTRUCTION DIVISION QUESTIONS

What are site conditions? (flat, hilly, sand, ledge)...

Height for Clearance...

Septic & Well or Town provided...

Concrete (Office / truck)?...

What are finishes to be?...

Type of HVAC system?...

Fuel Type?...

Special exhaust/ventilation needs...

Whole building HVAC?

Window/Door needs...

______BUILDING CORP. TO PROVIDE:

Rough Budget

Some minor design work

Preliminary drawings and budget estimate (approx. $2,500) for projects that will be done.

______ to meet International Building Code, ___ Energy Code and all other applicable code requirements.

We offer pre-engineered building choices that all meet AISC (American Institute of Steel Construction) approvals.

As Jennifer explained during our interviews, there are certain kinds of information that a contractor needs in order to give the client a sense of what a project will cost. The "Questions on Initial Building Inquiry," a boilerplate that can be used and re-used on many occasions by FGCC staff, is intended to help assemble that information. "Using this document, my husband or one of the project managers can put together the bid," Jennifer explained. "Then, I can go back to the client and say 'This building is going to be an $800,000 project. Now is that in your budget? Is that something you can work with?' And we take it from there."

Thus, in the process of securing new business for FGCC, Jennifer engages in at least two kinds of documentation: she uses writing to track communications with potential clients and also to document the specifications of potential jobs for use in assembling the project bid. The stakes here are fairly high. As a young company, FGCC needs to ensure that it has enough new business coming in to cover its overhead and staffing costs. The company is not yet to the point where it has developed a large enough client base that finding new clients has become little more than a matter of trusting in word-of-mouth. Jennifer's sales and marketing work and the writing that she does in this capacity ensure the company's ongoing viability.

Jennifer's documentary writing often leads to a second kind of communication, which is writing that assists in managing client relationships. The culminating document produced in the client-identification process I described above is the "letter of interest," a standardized business letter that Jennifer customizes for each prospective client and which serves both informational and persuasive purposes (when it is sent out, it is packaged with a mailer containing information about FGCC, photographs of past jobs, and testimonials from past clients). On one level, the letter is designed to inform the client about FGCC's estimate and project plans. On another level, the letter works to establish a sense of *ethos* and to convince the client of FGCC's credibility, industry knowledge, and expertise. Ultimately, of course, the letter is intended to persuade the client to choose FGCC as their contractor. It is one of the most important pieces of writing Jennifer produces—as it seeks to establish an initial relationship with a potential client, which, should the client decide to move forward with the project, will then be maintained by a mixture of email and in-person and phone communication.

Writing Sample #2: FGCC Letter of Interest

Date

Company
Attn: xxxx
PO Box xxx
City, State Zip

Dear xxxxxxx,

Having read about your planned Storage Building (Pre-engineered) in Eliot, ME, I want to take this opportunity to introduce you to .... and express our interest in helping your project become a reality.

As president of .... and respected construction industry leader for the last 34 years, I am excited about building on the success that I have achieved to date with our experienced staff. We bring to the table a high level of construction excellence, attention to detail and dedication to customer service. We know that you will, and should, demand nothing less.

We can offer you a quality pre-engineered metal building that carries the American Institute of Steel Construction (AISC) certification and is a product of NCI Building Systems, "one of the largest integrated manufacturers and marketers of metal building components and engineered metal building systems in North America".

Our project experiences range from healthcare, manufacturing, banks, churches and educational facilities. References are available upon request. Our repeat customers, like XYZ Systems and XXXXX Company, are our best marketing tools.

We ask for your consideration to be one of the invited General Contractors, when the time is right. Please contact us, at 000-000-0000, my ext. #0 or Jennifer in marketing at ext. #0.

Sincerely,

xxxxxxxxx
President

In addition to initiating new relationships with clients, in her capacity as a sales and marketing associate and also as her husband's personal assistant, Jennifer is engaged in the somewhat messier activity of maintaining client relationships. A good example of the role that writing plays in this process can be seen in a recent business letter FGCC sent out to its clients about the company name change. Briefly, the story behind the document that has come to be known as the "What's in a Name? letter goes like this: in the late 1990s, the company that is now FGCC was incorporated under the name Pelican Builders Corporation (PBC). This was done for strategic reasons: Pelican Group, Inc. was, at that time, a large, well-respected construction outfit. A multi-million dollar company, Pelican Group regularly received project inquiries that because of their size and cost of overhead they had to turn away. PBC, so the plan went, would take on all those smaller jobs that Pelican Group found impractical. To make their relationship to and association with the well-known parent company clear, Jennifer's husband chose the name Pelican Builders Corporation.

Fast-forward several years, at which point Pelican Group, the parent company, declared bankruptcy. Suddenly, PBC's positive association had turned into a serious negative affiliation. Jennifer's husband picked up and moved his office to another town and now, with news of the bankruptcy spreading throughout the local industry, there was an urgent need to communicate with PBC's past and existing clients to inform them that PBC was not a part of Pelican Group's bankruptcy and was, in fact, alive and well and operating under a new name. To accomplish this objective Jennifer, her husband, and an outside consultant collaborated to produce the "What's in a Name?" letter.

Writing Sample #3: "What's in a Name?" Letter

July 21, 2005

Name
Company
PO Box .....
City, State, Zip

Dear ....,

What's in a name?

When XYZ Company (XYZ) was started six years ago to perform "smaller" projects, we chose the name as a way of capitalizing on our affiliation with the well-known and respected ABC Company.

Unfortunately, as you well know, a little more than a year ago, ABC Company encountered financial problems and has been entangled in Chapter 11 proceedings ever since. Though XYZ is in no way involved in those problems—we have always been a separate corporation—the similarity in names has resulted in confusion that has, in several instances, caused us to not be considered for projects for which we otherwise would likely have been selected.

After considerable thought, we decided that the best way to resolve the issue was to form a new company, DDD Company. DDD, which reflects what we are—Construction Managers and General Contractors, will deliver the same top quality work, performed in a fair, honest and timely manner by the same experienced staff, as you've come to expect from XYZ. I am the president and sole principal of the new firm and will oversee all operations.

Any existing contracts under the XYZ name will be fully completed and under warranty from XYZ. New work, however, will be contracted and performed under DDD Company. We will begin marketing the new company immediately.

I appreciate your ongoing support and offer my personal assurance that DDD Company will live up to the standards and reputation for integrity that I've worked so hard to earn during my 32 years in the construction industry. Please feel free to call me @ 555-5555 or 555-5552 - ext. 4 or our marketing department - ext. 7, if you have any questions at all. We'd appreciate your input.

Sincerely,

XXXXXXXX
President

P.S. Enclosed is my business card.

What's unique about this letter or different from the previously discussed "letter of interest," is the way in which it responds to a one-time-only rhetorical problem, but also, the way in which it illustrates the complex and highly contextual nature of workplace writing. Jennifer's task in this letter is how to carefully distinguish FGCC's identity from that of their former benefactor while at the same time assuring all of those with whom they have established relationships of their continued existence. I note the rhetorical sophistication of the document, the good-humored awareness of the complexity of the situation via the Shakespearean allusion, which Jennifer explained in this way during our interview: "My husband and I looked at it. I came up with some stuff, sent it to him and he said, 'I don't like the sound of that...let's do something with this...' We went back and forth until we finally came up with something that said, 'Okay, 'What's in a name?'—this is a kind of game we're playing here, you know?"

From the letter's first sentence, which seeks to frame the document's overall purpose while simultaneously playfully undermining the conventions of the business letter genre, one has a sense of a writer in full command of the rhetorical situation. The letter works to accomplish several important objectives. In the first two paragraphs, while briefly summarizing the debacle with the parent company, the authors reassure clients of the firm's continued existence. In the third paragraph, they inform clients of the firm's new name and confirm that, despite the name change, the people behind FGCC have not changed. In the fourth and fifth paragraphs, they confirm that the new company, FGCC, will honor all obligations and contracts that exist under the previously named company and reassert their reliability, integrity, and credibility. In sum, the letter illustrates the ways in which writing aids Jennifer and FGCC in the ongoing project of maintaining productive and profitable relationships with clients.

A third purpose for Jennifer's writing on the job is created within the context of her duel-roles as office manager and personal assistant. In these capacities, Jennifer creates and assists in the creation of a wide variety of internal communication documents that relay pertinent information to FGCC "staff" about day-to-day issues and concerns. Currently, FGCC employs about a dozen employees with whom Jennifer regularly communicates. On one occasion, for example, after a scare at a job site involving a small fire, she and her husband decided that they wanted all employees to carry fire extinguishers in their vehicles, so Jennifer was charged with drafting a memo to inform employees about this new policy and the rationale behind it. On another occasion, Jennifer headed up an effort to revise and rewrite the FGCC employee manual, outlining policies and procedures of conduct. Thus, as office manager and personal assistant, Jennifer's writing functions as a means of information exchange between FGCC management and staff. She writes to communicate new information, to provide reminders about deadlines, and to keep employees abreast of new developments. In many ways, her internal communication embodies the voice of management and keeps FGCC functioning on a day-to-day basis.

As we have seen, Jennifer's literacy skills are engaged to a considerable extent in her work as a consultant to FGCC. She wears several different professional "hats," each of which prompts certain genres of writing. In the documents I have shared and discussed, we see evidence for several of the claims made by those who study professional or workplace communication: documents such as the "letter of interest" and "Questions on Initial Building Inquiry" are recycled and used on multiple occasions by multiple staff members. Much of Jennifer's workplace writing, such as the "What's in the Name?" letter, is produced collaboratively, with her husband, the president of the company. Some texts, such as the "Questions on Initial Building Inquiry" or the "letter of interest" become boilerplates that are used and recycled by FGCC staff. All of Jennifer's workplace writing takes place in a complex system of activity in which writing fails to draw attention to itself and is always a means to some other task, be that documenting the myriad transactions of the day, working to establish or maintain business relationships, or communicating with FGCC staff about pertinent company information. The genres with which Jennifer interacts in the workplace—memos, email, business letters, reports—are all vehicles for "getting work done."

Writing for School

At the time when I interviewed Jennifer for this project, she was a fairly recent arrival at NSC and currently enrolled in her second term of coursework. Given the distance between the time when she enrolled at NSC and the last time she set foot in a college classroom, her plan was to take one course per term and work her way back into school gradually. Since she had already earned an Associate's degree, she needed sixty-five more credits to complete a Bachelor's degree. Her rationale for enrolling at NSC was strictly pragmatic: since leaving the world of medicine and hanging up her hygienist's mask almost twenty years ago, Jennifer's work activities had failed to engage her primary interest in health and personal well-being. It is for this reason that she returned to school: to try to bring her day-to-day professional life and her passion for medicine and personal well-being back into alignment.

At the time of our interviews, though, Jennifer was a bit unclear about how she was going to achieve such re-alignment. Her program of study was called Applied Health Technology, but Jennifer conceded that she wasn't totally sure what this phrase meant. Because she had spent a good part of her professional life working in the medical industry and was now hoping to return to some such work, the Applied Health and Technology major seemed to make sense. But when I asked Jennifer explain how or why this program of study connected with her professional plans, she had some difficulty. "I don't have a clear view of my plan of study at this point," she explained.

> Because I'm new to this and I haven't been in school for a while, I'm still uncertain as to where I need to be. I've narrowed it down with my advisor. I know I want to be in the health field, but I don't want to be in the finance end of it, I don't want to be in the managerial end. I want to be in the actual *take-part* end—whatever that is.

Increasingly, Jennifer was thinking that she might draw from her experience working in sales and marketing in the construction and stamp and sign industries to transition into a similar role in a health-related field. But when she began to investigate jobs selling medical products she found that a Bachelor's degree was a prerequisite in almost all cases. "There were a few positions to sell dental and medical products," she explained, "But all of them, without fail, said 'Bachelor's degree required.' You want to say to yourself, 'Okay, I've got a piece of paper that says I have a Bachelor's degree—but what really does that mean? Does that take precedence over X number of years being out in the field doing sales or whatever? Should it?" Thus, at the time of our interviews, Jennifer's academic and professional direction was not entirely clear. She had begun the process of checking off a series of "core" and General Education requirements at NSC and, like many traditional-age students, was waiting for the "right" path to present itself. "There's no rush to get done because at this stage of my life, there's no rush for anything," she explained. "Whatever happens along the way, as long as it's something I have an interest in and it's enjoyable and I'm learning, that's a good thing."

During our interviews, Jennifer shared with me several pieces of writing from two NSC courses. The first essay I discuss below, the bio-ethics report, was completed for the course in which she was currently enrolled, Human Biology,[16] a General Education course, but also one in which Jennifer had interest, given her fascination with medicine and the human body. The second essay, a persuasive

[16] The NSC course catalogue describes Human Biology in this way: "This course is an introductory level study of human anatomy and physiology providing a foundation in biological science and introducing developmental anatomy, correlation of structure and function, basic genetics and homeostasis. The building of a relevant vocabulary and of a foundation of facts, figures, and concepts provides the background needed for further understanding of developments in bioscience and biomedicine."

piece that was written for a debate on drilling in the Arctic Wildlife National Refuge (ANWR), was written for a class called “Critical Thinking,” a “core” requirement, which was the first course Jennifer took at NSC. In what follows, I present and discuss both writing samples which, I believe, provide a glimpse of the kinds of writing some adult learners like Jennifer are asked to produce at schools like NSC and also a sense of the distance between Jennifer’s academic and workplace writing.

The Human Biology course in which Jennifer was enrolled at the time of our interviews was, by her own admittance, one long exercise in confusion and frustration, much of which could be attributed to the fact that she spent most of the term puzzling over the various genres of writing her instructor was asking her and her classmates to produce. For example, the instructor asked the students to write a series of five “bio-ethics reports.” Initially, Jennifer and her classmates were confused about this assignment, as she illustrates in the following passage:

> I did the fluoride debate—it was a bioethics report. We said [to the instructor], “What does that mean?” “Well,” he said, “present both sides.” We said, “How long does it have to be?” “Well,” he said, “whatever you feel is necessary.” So you just sort of shoot from the hip and hope it’s right.

The striking thing is that even at the time of our interview, more than halfway into the term, Jennifer was still not clear on what a “bio-ethics” report was. When I asked her to explain her understanding of this genre, she replied, “I don’t know for sure. It’s a good question. One of the first things I did was go on the Internet and look up the term ‘bio-ethics.’ But that didn’t help too much.” Jennifer’s research lead her to believe that a bio-ethics report was supposed to describe a debate over a health-related topic. But still, she wasn't entirely sure how to produce one. Prior to writing "The Fluoride Debate," in which she considers the debate over adding fluoride to local water supplies, Jennifer says she was provided with no clear explanation that she can recall about who writes bio-ethics reports for what reason.[17] Nor, she said, was she given examples of bio-ethics reports or models written by professionals or students. As she explained it, she and her classmates were left entirely to themselves to puzzle over the conventions of the bio-ethics report genre.

[17] In this dissertation, when discussing writing assignments with which students have struggled, I have tried to give the benefit of the doubt to their instructors, assuming that there may have been a logic to assignments that students just didn't grasp. I would have liked to have interviewed NSC faculty to get their take on a number of different issues that arose during the interviewing process, but in an effort to keep the scope of the project under control, I chose not to.

Writing Sample #4: "The Fluoride Debate"

GSC

Presenting Both sides of an issue

Bioethics #1

Human Biology

THE FLUORIDE DEBATE

Fluoride is a naturally occurring compound found in varied, often minimal, amounts in most water sources. In the 1960's, it was endorsed by the American Dental Association (ADA) and was added to the ingredients that comprise commercially produced toothpaste. This endorsement is stated on all toothpaste containers and says " (Product Name) has been shown to be an effective decay preventing dentifrice when used in a conscientiously applied program of oral hygiene and regular professional care". A safe optimal level of concentration of fluoride has been established by the ADA as 1 part per million (ppm) which is equal to one part fluoride to one million parts of water or 1 milligram of fluoride per liter of water. Many communities have added fluoride to their water supplies if the natural concentration is not equal to the ADA's recommended level. Dental decay has been declared an infectious disease. The use of fluoride both topically and systemically has been proven to reduce or prevent and even reverse dental disease depending on the circumstances.

The opponents of fluoride view this additive as harmful to humans and another example of our government overstepping its boundaries. Their main objection is the addition of fluoride to a community water supply. They contend that fluoride contributes to the increase in cancer rates, is a poison and an industrial waste product as toxic as rat poison, does not reduce tooth decay, and is one of the biggest cases of fraud in the country. I have also read that their claim is that the contents of a family size tube of toothpaste can kill a small child. This is probably true, if allowed to happen.

After getting my hygiene degree and working for twenty four years in the dental industry as a Registered Dental Hygienist, I saw the impact and the benefits that fluoride had on the human dentition. Fluoride was introduced into toothpaste in the 1960's and is probably one of the most beneficial additives ever introduced to protect the human dentition. I am 100% convinced that fluoride is a safe product when used within the recommended guidelines which should not exceed 4ppm. The ADA is continually studying fluoride and re-evaluating the benefits and possible harm. No study to date that has been peer reviewed has concluded that any harm can occur if fluoride is consumed within the optimum levels set. Frankly, I have never read of any long term study on the harm from fluoride that has been peer reviewed. Fluoride as mentioned in my first paragraph is a naturally occurring compound in water. If a community water supply is found to have 1ppm of natural fluoride, nothing is added. Because fluoride can cause tooth mottling (discoloration) or dental fluorosis, a printed warning has been added to most toothpastes stating that, regarding children, no more than a pea size amount of toothpaste should be put on a child's toothbrush and that swallowing toothpaste can cause stomach upset. This is true. Calcium fluoride, the added ingredient in toothpaste is not to be ingested, certainly not by the tube! As a side note, I grew up in an average household with a mother and father, both with medical degrees. I did not consume large amounts of sugar but did have a substantial amount of decay as a child. I did not have the benefit of fluoridated toothpastes or adequately fluoridated city water. My three children however, did have all of the benefits of fluoride in their environment and are, even today, decay free and over thirty years old. This is not a coincidence. They also are healthy human beings with no physical or medical issues.

I am a strong proponent of fluoridation.

Given the considerable cognitive stress of producing a piece of writing she fundamentally didn't understand, it is perhaps not surprising that Jennifer chose a topic about which she already knew a great deal and on which she already held a strong opinion, as the following passage illustrates: "As a hygienist, I had learned about fluoride, had talked about fluoride, had talked in the practice about the benefits of fluoride. It was something that was very common and something I was very knowledgeable about." Reading over the bio-ethics report, one can see the considerable role that Jennifer's authority on the topic plays in the piece. She probably could have written the bio-ethics report on the fluoride debate without doing much actual research at all, which may be exactly why she chose this topic. During our interviews, Jennifer confessed that another one of her bio-ethics reports was about dental decay in children, a topic about which she also knew a great deal. Where possible, she explained, she tried to write about issues with which she was already familiar: "I was just trying to utilize my time as well as possible," she explained. This comment seems to capture the larger point: if the purpose of the bio-ethics report was to puzzle through a health-related issue, using research to weigh pros and cons in order to arrive at an informed level of opinion about a health-related issue—that is, to *learn* something—it appears that in the end, this purpose may have been undermined by Jennifer's desire to just get the assignment over with.

At FGCC, when Jennifer is confronted with an occasion for writing, for example, communicating with staff, she knows that the genre for doing so is either an email or a memo. When she and her husband were faced with the problem of conveying important information about their recent name change to past and future clients, they knew that to do so they would need to craft a business letter. At work, genres of writing are intended to respond to actual problems or exigencies and the same genres are often used again and again, despite the fact that the exigencies that call for them probably vary a great deal. At work, Jennifer uses writing to solve problems and she knows which genres correspond with which problems.

At school, as we see in the bio-ethics report, there are new genres to learn and these new genres do not always correspond to clear problems or tasks. Often, the only purpose for school genres, and I think the bio-ethics report illustrates this, is the facilitation of student learning. The problem, I think, is that this learning component can fall apart, as I think it does in this example, when students spend more time puzzling over *how* to write than *what* to write. When teachers fail to acknowledge the various genres with which they work and when, consequently, they fail to make the conventions of these genres explicit to students in assignments, it's not at all surprising that students craft essays like Jennifer's—essays that exist at the nexus of several seemingly different rhetorical intentions. "The Fluoride Debate" reveals, if it reveals anything, a writer who knows the various positions that have been taken in regard to her issue and who knows the argument she wants to make, but who is, nonetheless, unsure of the conventions of the genre in which she is supposed to be working and the consequent expectations of that genre. Given her considerable confusion about what a "bio-ethics report" was, Jennifer decided to write about an issue about which there was little for her to learn.[18] As she made clear during our interviews, writing bio-ethics reports, of which she had to produce five, became an activity to "get through" and not one which facilitated much actual learning. All of this underscores the importance of making the existence of academic genres explicit to students, especially adult students, many of whom, like Jennifer, arrive in the classroom with a working understanding of what genres are and how they work from their years of producing workplace writing. In this case, the very fact that Jennifer's instructor was asking his students to work in a particular academic genre with specific conventions and expectations that were familiar to him but perhaps not to them seems to have remained invisible to him and it may be this, more than anything else, which caused Jennifer to throw up her hands and view the entire assignment as little more than a hoop that she was going to have to jump through to pass the class.

A second example of school-based writing that Jennifer shared with me during our interviews came from the Critical Thinking class.[19] Critical Thinking, as Jennifer tells it, was an incredibly positive experience: "The course was wonderful and the instructor was marvelous. Week by week, she guided us through what we needed to do. She was wonderful to have as a first instructor

[18] And over which, if we are to be truthful, there is no longer much real debate.

[19] The NSC course catalogue describes Critical Thinking in this way: "Critical Thinking focuses on developing the ability to think clearly, logically, and analytically in a wide range of problem solving situations. Emphasizes the relationship between reading and critical thinking and gives learners a structured way of interpreting the content and organization of written materials. Involves frequent, active participation in increasingly complex individual and small group exercises requiring the use of appropriate intellectual strategies." This course should not be confused with NSC's first-year writing class, "The Writing Process," which Jennifer tested out of.

going back [to school] because she gave you an awful lot of confidence." The paper Jennifer chose to share with me from Critical Thinking—the first paper, she pointed out, that she "had written in over 30 years"—was the final piece of writing she produced for a larger project, a debate on oil-drilling in ANWR. Prior to conducting research on this debate, Jennifer conceded, "I didn't have a clue about what was happening [in ANWR], nor did I care about oil drilling. I didn't. Until I got into it and determined, 'Hey, this is really kind of interesting.'" The essay, which was both a final product, handed in for a grade,[20] and also a document that Jennifer and her debate partner used to defend their position, is too long to reproduce here in its entirety. To give readers a sense and feel of the piece, I will summarize and quote from the paper before going on to discuss it.

At the top of Jennifer's ANWR essay, which has no title, she has written her "Debate Position" in one clear, unambiguous sentence: "Oil drilling should not be allowed in the Arctic Wildlife National Refuge." Her introductory paragraph, persuasively crafted in 2005, when the Bush Administration and the Republican majority in Congress had once again placed oil exploration in ANWR on the national radar, reads as follows:

> The need to reduce our dependency on foreign oil is the heart of a very real energy problem facing our country, today and in the future. Exploration of and subsequent drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) are what our opponents and our government are proposing as a possible plan for solvency of this problem. In response to their proposition of policy to allow drilling, this paper makes an argument for maintaining the status quo of this pristine wilderness landscape, arguing against transforming it into what could become another industrial zone.

[20] Jennifer received an "A" on this paper and in the class, overall.

After this brief introduction, Jennifer goes on to provide background information on ANWR and then transitions into providing support for her argument. Among the reasons Jennifer provides to bolster her claim that the U.S. government should not allow oil exploration and/or drilling in ANWR is the region's "unique environment," ANWR being home to "many animal species including Porcupine Caribou, Beuafort Sea Polar Bears, Muskoxen, Bowhead Whales and many birds." Furthermore, "Other issues to be considered are the landscape, water systems, vegetation and the potential harm to them that would be caused by oil exploration and drilling." After spending a good deal of time outlining, in specific and compelling detail, how exactly oil exploration could harm the region, Jennifer goes on to enumerate a "second reason" to keep oil companies out of ANWR: no one really knows how much oil actually exists there. "No study, done to date, has been able to confirm how much technically recoverable oil is present [in ANWR]" she writes and then moves into a discussion of research studies which have attempted to measure oil capacity in the region, concluding that the actual amount of oil that could be extracted from ANWR is somewhat unclear. She concludes the essay by restating her main argument: "The overall plan to allow drilling in ANWR is risky and uncertain in a part of our country that currently exists as a rare, unique and unspoiled wilderness" and proposing that a smarter way to deal with our problem of oil dependency would be to increase the energy efficiency of our vehicles and to commit more federal funds to the exploration of alternative energy sources ("wood, natural gas, coal, nuclear power, wind power, hydroelectric and solar power"). Her paper concludes with this paragraph:

> Our plan and my conclusion are this. What America needs is a comprehensive energy policy that promotes clean, renewable energy, increases energy efficiency and better fuel economy. What we are doing in ANWR is putting the interest of oil companies ahead of clean, efficient technologies. It appears that we can not drill our way to energy independence. It also appears that by drilling in ANWR, we may sacrifice a very beautiful unspoiled region based on assumptions of what might be, thus producing a physical and lasting industrial scar that has the potential to grow. We need to preserve this wonderful piece of real estate to give our future generations a picture of what once was.

Unlike the bio-ethics report on fluoridation, in this longer piece on ANWR Jennifer appears to be on more solid footing. The activity of the debate, which prompted the creation of the paper in the first place, lent the essay a much more clear sense of purpose. Whereas in the bio-ethics report, Jennifer was ultimately unsure of what purpose her writing was supposed to serve, in this piece on ANWR, she is clearly out to persuade and she understands that persuasion is about making arguments and supporting them with reasoning and evidence. Persuasion, of course, is a goal with which Jennifer is intimately familiar, both through her wide reading in the health field and in her work at FGCC, where she engages in the act of persuasion each time she mails a "letter of interest" to a potential client.

In the ANWR essay, Jennifer makes a range of impressive rhetorical moves to assemble a persuasive argument against oil exploration in ANWR. She presents at least two reasons not to drill—environmental impact and uncertainty about the amount of recoverable oil. She uses several different kinds of sources to bolster her arguments—U.S. government surveys and reports, a book by an expert on the topic, and a newspaper article. And at the end of the essay, she proposes alternatives to drilling—better fuel efficiency standards in vehicles, increased federal spending on the development of alternative energy sources—and attempts to engage the larger debate of which ANWR is just one part: national energy policy. When she uses information from sources, Jennifer attempts to do so appropriately by providing footnotes with bibliographic information. She helpfully tries to guide her readers through the essay by providing transition or "guidepost" sentences like these: "Having outlined how and why the area was set up, the following are my reasons for..." "One major reason centers on..." and "Our plan and conclusion are this..." In sum, considering the length of time that has passed since the last time Jennifer wrote an academic paper of this kind, my sense is that there is a lot to admire about the piece. Perhaps most importantly, as Jennifer herself pointed out, she learned something from writing it; previously, she held no real opinion on the issue of whether or not to drill in ANWR. Through the process of researching and writing, she came to a more informed opinion about a topic of national significance. Her newfound belief that the U.S. government should not allow oil-exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is palpable throughout the essay. Thus, if a key purpose of academic writing is the facilitation of student learning, it would appear that Jennifer has learned a great deal from the experience of writing this paper and using it to prepare for the debate.

With the bio-ethics report, my sense was that Jennifer's composing struggles were linked to her lack of familiarity with the genre in which she was asked to work. With this persuasive piece on oil drilling in ANWR, I think we see something different and something equally important: we see the extent to which some adult students bring with them vestigial understandings of a generalized kind of academic writing, in this case, the generic persuasive essay. Unlike the traditional-age student "transitioning" into the workplace and arriving, usually, with little or no genre knowledge, when adult learners like Jennifer "transition" from the workplace back into academic contexts, they bring with them some sense, based on their early years of schooling or subsequent excursions into post-secondary education, of what academic writing is about and how it works. In some cases, if students have struggled with academic writing in the past, that awareness, if it exists at all, may not necessarily be helpful. Some adult learners may confront academic genres like the persuasive essay having failed to get them right the first time and therefore will probably have great difficulty getting them right a second time around without help.

But in Jennifer's case, I think we can see that her past awareness of the conventions of a generic kind of academic writing have benefited her and that, at the most, she is out of practice with this kind of writing—writing which is so very different from the kind(s) of composing she does in the workplace.[21] Her genre awareness in the case of the persuasive essay may be the very thing that allowed this to be an assignment that actually did facilitate Jennifer's learning. It's worth noting the juxtaposition here: in regard to the bio-ethics report, Jennifer

[21] I should also note two other potential reasons for Jennifer's success with this assignment. One, she spent a good deal of time on the phone with her daughter, a middle-school English teacher, discussing and working on this essay, thus suggesting the resourcefulness of adult learners and their willingness, perhaps unlike traditional-age students, to seek out help "early and often." Two, unlike the instructor in the Human Biology class, the Critical Thinking teacher was exhaustive in spelling out her expectations to students, to the point where, as I will show in a later chapter of this dissertation, the likelihood of students doing any real "critical thinking" may have been undermined by the necessity of following the teacher's meticulous instructions.

knew a lot about her topic, but very little about the genre of the bio-ethics report. In regard to the essay on ANWR, Jennifer knew very little about her topic, but a good deal about how to write persuasively. In this way, we see the importance of genre awareness. When students, regardless of their age, have a clear sense of what the genre of writing the teacher has asked for looks like or entails, they are perhaps more likely to write about topics which facilitate learning and perhaps less likely to fall back on topics about which there is nothing new for them to say. If a key goal of academic writing is to facilitate student learning, writing teachers want to be sure that students, regardless of their age, don't spend all their time puzzling over the conventions of the genre in which they have been asked to work, but instead, have a clear sense of the conventions of a particular genre so that they can spend their time learning by writing.

At work, Jennifer's writing serves specific real-world purposes and aides her in accomplishing specific tasks and goals (documenting, maintaining relationships, communicating with staff). She knows which genres will allow her to accomplish which jobs and she returns to these genres again and again. Her school writing, while skilled and often quite adroit, offers insight into the complex act of negotiation that some adult learners enact as they attempt to transition back into academic contexts and engage with academic genres of writing. As Jennifer's experience with the bio-ethics report and the persuasive essay on ANWR suggest, lack of genre knowledge and/or lack of practice with academic genres can play a role in adult learners' classroom success. Failure to make explicit to students, regardless of their age, 1) the existence of genres and 2) the ways in which genres elicit, organize, and structure writing both in and out of school can lead to confusion about the purposes for writing in the school domain and possible disillusionment about schooling itself.

Most of all, though, it's interesting to note the wide gulf that appears to exist between the ways that Jennifer uses writing at work and the ways she is asked to write in her classwork at NSC. The two classroom assignments I examined in this chapter ask students to engage in highly conservative school-based tasks—comparing and contrasting, making an argument and defending it, citing sources. These are undoubtedly important skills to learn in order to become successful at the production of academic writing. But, of course, Jennifer didn't enroll at NSC to improve her ability to produce academic writing. She enrolled with the hope of finding a way to transition into a new career in the health field. In what ways will the ability to master such forms of academic writing as the persuasive essay help her achieve this goal? In what ways will instruction in such generalized forms of writing as the persuasive essay help prepare her to write for the field she hopes to enter? Might it be the case that, for all intents and purposes, her professional writing in the construction industry will prove to be better preparation for the writing she will someday produce in a new workplace context?

Jennifer's experiences with writing at NSC thus far, I would suggest, raise important questions about the role of academic writing in a curriculum designed for adult learners. I don't mean to suggest that there must always be a direct correlation between the tasks one is asked to complete in school and the work one does or will do outside of school (although, it would seem that the relationship might be more direct when working with adult learners). But given Jennifer's past success with schooling, her current success with writing on the job, and her professional goals and objectives, what is the pedagogical rationale for asking her to produce generic forms of academic discourse of the kind we have seen in this chapter? Aside from the rationale of providing students with a broad liberal arts background of the kind that we still try to provide for traditional-age students, and this is the rationale at work at NSC, it is hard to say.

Discussion and Analysis

Jennifer's story of professional re-invention and post-secondary re-entry is a compelling one. It complicates assumptions about who professional adult students are, where they have come from, and where they are going. If, for example, it is true that when we think of adult learners, we often think of people who didn't get school "right" the first time or whose family and community circumstances, for whatever reasons, served as hindrances to their childhood and adolescent academic achievement, Jennifer's experience certainly refutes such notions. Jennifer got school "right" to the point that she was able to enroll at URI right out of high school to pursue her goal of becoming a dental hygienist. She grew up in an intact family with two parents, both of whom held post-secondary degrees at a time when such certifications were not necessarily the norm (especially among women). Her parents served as powerful sponsors of their daughters' literacy development—filling the home with books, magazines, encyclopedias and newspapers, encouraging serious engagement with school and exposing Jennifer and her sister to important social and professional networks which allowed them to pursue their educational and professional goals. Jennifer's early exposure to the field of medicine inspired in her a lifelong passion for issues of health, medicine, and personal well-being and gave her a concrete goal to pursue in her post-secondary studies.

Thus, throughout her life, Jennifer has held positive beliefs about the importance of education and literacy, beliefs which were shaped by her experiences growing up and which she later sought to instill in her own children, one of whom has gone on to earn a Ph.D. in psychology and another of whom has earned a Master's degree and become a middle school English teacher. Jennifer's motivation for enrolling at NSC, then, has less to do with the need for a "second chance" in school or in life, with overcoming the scars of earlier school and/or literacy experiences, or with a need for greater economic opportunity than it has to do with her gender and the vicissitudes of economic life in America during the later part of the twentieth century.

In the mid-1960s, when Jennifer graduated from high school and headed off to the University of Rhode Island to pursue an Associate's degree in dental hygiene, social mores as regards career opportunities for women were only just beginning to change. It may be striking to readers today that, as the daughter of a prominent optometrist and a nurse, Jennifer opted to become a dental hygienist and not a dentist, but such were the expectations for many American women during the time when Jennifer was growing up, especially in socially conservative enclaves like the northeastern city in which Jennifer and her family lived. Jennifer explains:

> A woman becoming a doctor was not that prevalent back then. I think that the assumption was that if you were going to go into the medical field, say, dentistry, you were going to become a hygienist or an assistant—more of a subservient role, because, there weren't any, not that I knew of, women dentists in those days. Women were nurses, assistants, office staff, and hygienists. Becoming a dentist just wasn't something that came to mind. In later years, I did, many times, think, 'Wow, I should have done it. I should have become a dentist.' But when you have a family and kids, those thoughts go out the window until everyone is gone. And when mine were gone, I didn't want to get my doctorate, I wasn't up to it.

Jennifer's story, I would suggest, is not all that uncommon among female professional adult learners who enroll in formal programs of post-secondary study at schools like NSC and is, I imagine, the reason why women tend to outnumber men in almost all forms of adult education.

During the years when Jennifer was in high school, the second wave of the women's movement was spreading across the country, beginning in the early 1960s in mostly urban and suburban areas, and finally infiltrating the more conservative rural regions by the mid- to late- 1980s. Jennifer's story of educational re-immersion is, in many ways, a part of that larger story.[22] Her experience illustrates the way in which decisions made during past periods of social and educational inequality continue to reach out into the future and shape the arc of people's lives and also the way in which social or cultural expectations

[22] I don't mean to suggest that it wasn't until 2005 that feminism finally reached Jennifer and her region of the country, just that the feminist project did not proceed in a neat, linear order.

around schooling, in Jennifer's day and in our own, shape the practical, day-to-day, educational decisions that individuals make.

The past constraints of gender, however, aren't the only factors to have shaped Jennifer's story. Her experience also highlights the way in which patterns of work and employment changed during the final quarter of the twentieth-century, calling for new ways of thinking about education. In 1967, at age twenty, Jennifer began her career as a dental hygienist. In 1989, at age forty-two, and twenty-two years into a career as a dental hygienist, Jennifer found herself wanting professional change and left the medical profession to enter the construction industry. In 2005, at age fifty-eight, Jennifer found herself again wanting professional change. This time, to help facilitate that change, she enrolled at NSC. In this way, Jennifer's professional experience illustrates the way in which, in the post-industrial age, individuals' professional lives are often subject to considerable and consistent transformation and evolution. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, it came to be more and more common that American workers would move not just between jobs within a single industry, but also between industries themselves. Jennifer's experience illustrates this. Combine all of this with the fact that Americans are living longer lives and staying in the workforce well into their sixties and Jennifer's story of multiple career changes and professional re-invention is in many ways characteristic of some of the larger economic and cultural shifts of our time.

At some point, of course, in a post-industrial economy movement within and between industries will likely lead one back to education and schooling. And so it was that in 2005, at age 58, after almost forty years of participation in the professional workforce, Jennifer turned to NSC to figure out what was next. Her experience illustrates the extent to which the decision to return to school, for some professional adult learners, is about exploring issues of professional redirection. As the wife of a successful businessman, Jennifer's return to school is driven less by economic need than any other participant in this study. But at age 58, she still wants to contribute to the family purse and, more importantly, she wants to find a meaningful way to re-connect her lifelong passion for issues of health and well-being with her day-to-day work life.

Unlike all of the other participants in this study, at the time when I interviewed her, Jennifer was leisurely exploring her academic interests at NSC, unsure, like many traditional-age undergraduates, where she was headed. If it is the case that most adult learners return to school for reasons connected with work, and that work is inextricably connected with issues of economics, Jennifer's experience may offer a counter-narrative, where finding meaningful employment is not foremost among her reasons for enrollment and paying the bills is perhaps further down her hierarchy of needs.

Epilogue

In the end, professional re-invention at age 58 is a complicated process. As of this writing, one year after I first met Jennifer and interviewed her for this project, she is no longer taking classes at NSC. After passing the Human Biology course during the winter 2006 term, Jennifer took and passed one additional course, another "core" requirement called Software Tools, in the spring term. In keeping with her original plan, she chose to take a break from coursework during the summer. When fall rolled around, that break began to seem a bit more permanent as Jennifer took off another term and then decided to discontinue her studies at NSC all together.

During a recent phone interview, Jennifer explained that there are at least two reasons why she has chosen to discontinue her studies at NSC, one personal, and one professional. First, a sister-in-law living in a distant state recently contracted cancer. As a result, Jennifer has spent a good deal of time traveling back and forth to visit and a good deal more time online, researching the disease and trying to serve as a patient-advocate for her sister-in-law. Second, work at FGCC has gotten busier and Jennifer has decided to focus all her energy on helping her husband expand the business. "I decided that at age 60, I probably won't use the Bachelor's degree," she explained. "What I really want is to help people and when I looked at it and saw all the stuff that's going on with my husband's business, I decided that helping him really would make a big difference."

Interestingly, Jennifer is still taking courses, just not at NSC. "I'm taking some classes with the Sandler Sales Institute, Dale Carnegie, and through the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), which is a national organization for contractors in the industrial and commercial sectors," she explained. "I don't think at this point I would ever not be involved in some kind of education." For now, though, she has put aside her goal of finding work in the healthcare industry and tried to find ways to put her passion for health-related issues to other uses, like helping her sister-in-law. She hopes the classes she is taking will help in her immediate, day-to-day job, which is bringing new construction projects to FGCC: "It makes a whole lot more sense for me to take courses that will benefit both of us," she explained, "My husband didn't have someone doing sales and marketing and I was sort of freelancing it on the side while taking courses at NSC. I decided, wait a minute, maybe this is where I need to be."

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM LIGHTS AND SIRENS TO "DRIVING THE DESK"

In 2005, one year after transitioning into a new position as the Education and Training Coordinator for ACME Ambulance Company, the largest Emergency Medical Service (EMS) provider in the state, Tony Vaccaro enrolled at NSC to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Applied Technology with a focus in education. He was thirty-nine years old and had been working in the EMS field since 1992, when he earned his first Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) Basic certification. When he enrolled at NSC, it had been six years since he had last set foot in a college classroom, having graduated in 1999 from a local community-technical college.

Throughout the 1990s, Tony worked his way up through the EMS ranks, from EMT-Basic to Intermediate and, finally, in 1999, to Paramedic. His educational endeavors were closely linked with a desire for increased responsibility, stature, and pay. In the mid-1990s, he began collecting instructor certifications. Soon, he was traveling around the state, giving presentations and talks on different aspects of emergency medical care and teaching classes to lower-level EMTs. In 2004, he was hired on as ACME's Education and Training Coordinator. For the first time in his professional life, Tony was no longer driving in an ambulance. He was, as he put it, now "driving the desk."

In some ways, this was all part of the plan. In the years leading up to the move at ACME, two important things had happened in Tony's professional life. First, he realized that he loved to teach, was fascinated by learning, and wanted to become a full-time emergency medical educator. Second, after a dozen years working in the emergency medical field, he was beginning to see that the day-to-day realities of being a paramedic were changing, but that the ways in which paramedics were being trained and educated were not. First and foremost was his concern that, while just about every other profession in America had come to view the Bachelor's degree as a minimal standard of competence, most paramedics were still getting their training in non-degree related certificate programs. As he read more deeply into EMS educational literature and met and talked with medical educators around the state, Tony came to believe that the ways in which EMS providers were being trained was going to need to change and he decided that he wanted to be a part of that change: "I want to be there at the ground level," he explained during one of our interviews, "especially with the teaching. I want to be a catalyst to promote this field and help it grow to the next level."

In order to become this "catalyst," Tony first lobbied for and then was hired to serve as the Education and Training Coordinator for ACME. Next, he enrolled at NSC and began work on a Bachelor's degree—a certification that he sees as a necessary first-step toward gaining the professional credentials he will need to achieve his professional goals: to help transform the way emergency medical providers are trained and educated and, ultimately, to help transform the way emergency medical care is delivered.

Growing Up Reading and Writing

Tony Vaccaro was born on an Air Force base in the northeastern United States in the fall of 1966. His parents divorced when he was ten and from that point on, he lived with his mother—a single-mom who worked full-time as an auditor and took courses at the local state college in the evenings. Tony saw very little of his father, who taught industrial arts at a vocational high school. He spent most of the hours he wasn't in school at his grandparents' house and developed an especially close relationship with his grandfather. During our interviews, Tony recalled fond memories of their daily ritual—each day after school his grandpa would give him a few dollars to run to the store and pick up a pack of cigarettes and a copy of the local paper. "Grandpa used to read the paper in his chair every afternoon," Tony recalled. "He was born, grew up, and died in the same town. He read the local paper from cover to cover all the years I knew him and he cussed at the politicians as he read."

As for Tony's own childhood reading, it was mostly limited to comic books about imaginary characters like Ghost Rider or G.I. Joe. He has very few positive memories of early reading or writing experiences. "I didn't do a whole lot of reading. It never really interested me," he explained. "I always associated reading with school and I didn't really care for school." During our interviews, Tony could recall only one or two books from his childhood, *The Phantom Tollbooth* and *The*

Wrinkle in Time, books that today, with children of his own, he has purchased to pass along. As for positive memories having to do with writing, Tony could remember none. "Writing was just not my thing," he explained. "If I needed to communicate with someone, I'd use the phone."

With the exception of a brief stint at a nearby preparatory school, Tony attended the local public schools and graduated from high school in June 1984. As he reflected on his childhood during our interviews, he described himself as a bit of a "loner," an "outside kid" who spent every daylight hour that he wasn't required to be sitting in a classroom outdoors—playing, investigating, and exploring. The hours he did have to be at school Tony described as monotonous and torturous: "I had no desire to go to school," he explained, "the only reason I even graduated from high school was that I needed a diploma to get into the Marines."

Thus, Tony's school years were marked by frustration, disappointment, and occasional failure, much of which could be attributed to his ongoing struggles with reading and writing. In high school, for example, Tony failed Junior English twice—once during his actual junior year and then again during summer school. He spent his senior year simultaneously enrolled in Junior and Senior English. When I asked him to tell me some stories about his high school English courses, only one stood out—Mr. Sokolowski's class, one of the two English classes he took during his senior year. Sokolowski, or "Sock" as the students called him "was great because he didn't teach the way English teachers usually teach." For example, Tony explained,

> We used to play vocabulary football. You started on the 20-yard line and for every answer you got right, you moved up so many yards. If you weren't a strong student, he'd throw you an easy one so you weren't always the downfall of the team. He encouraged his students to do their best and he made learning fun. I actually looked forward to his class and if I was going to skip a class, it definitely wasn't his—and it wasn't because I was afraid I was going to get in trouble. I just didn't want to miss anything.

According to Tony, Mr. Sockoloski was the exception and not the rule as far as English teachers went. He summed up his experiences with most English teachers in this way:

> The teacher would say, "Here's the work." I'd say, "I don't understand this." He'd say, "Well, what don't you understand?" I'd say, "I'm not sure." He'd say, "Well, go back and read it again." And that's how it went. Look, as a paramedic, I can give you bits and pieces about, for example, the human body and then I can say, "Do you understand this?" And you say, "Not really." So I say, "Well, do you have any questions?" And you say, "No." So I say, "Oh, well then you understand it?" And you say, "No, not really." In order to formulate a question, you have to have some knowledge, right? If you have no knowledge, you can't even ask a question.

I asked Tony if this was how things went for him with English teachers or with all teachers. He explained that it wasn't just English teachers who were the problem, but that they probably came in for special criticism because he "always went into English classes with a negative attitude." Where did this negative attitude come from?

> I think it all started in grammar school because they started talking about nouns and pronouns and adverbs and I didn't understand. And if you don't understand at the beginning, the more they progress, you just kind of sit right there and start floundering. You think, "I can't catch up now, I'm too far behind." When I was younger I was very timid. I was afraid to speak up, to say, "Hey, I really don't understand this!" So you just start thinking, "I hope I catch up. I hope someone helps me understand this." And once you find out that you've missed the boat, that the boat is off there in the

> distance, you're like, "Well, I'll just sit out here and float around and go where the current takes me."

Why hadn't someone thrown him a life-jacket?

> It was a public school and public schools often teach to the middle. My mother was too busy trying to put a roof over our heads and food on the table. My grandfather only had an 8^{th} grade education. His philosophy was, "If you can't work with your mind, you work with your muscles." I grew up in a blue-collar family and back then that was the mentality.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Tony became an expert at the art of treading academic waters: "There are people who can improvise just enough to get by," he explained. "And that was me. That's still me. I can get by."

Tony didn't struggle with every subject the way he struggled with English, but because all of the other courses he took depended, to some degree, on skills one develops and refines in English class, there were many challenges. But there were also successes. Math and science weren't usually a problem because he could see connections in the materials he was studying and could visualize how they worked. "English, you can't really visualize," he explained. By far, the most memorable and powerful experience Tony had in high school had to do with computers. When he was in 8^{th} grade, his mother bought a Texas Instruments 99; a few years later, she upgraded to an Apple IIe. On rainy days and in the evenings, Tony could be found seated in front of the computer, experimenting with programming and tooling around on some of the earliest video games. Mostly, though, the machines presented endless opportunities for tinkering: "I always wanted to program and write my own stuff. And I did pretty well, too. But I was more interested in, 'How does this work? What can make it faster? What more can we make this thing do?'" He even went so far as to purchase and read several computer manuals to try to understand how computers worked.

During his junior and senior years, these outside-of-school interests lead Tony to enroll in a few computer classes. "I didn't do well in high school, as you know," he explained, "but my computer classes were what I excelled in." Through computers, Tony made a close connection with one teacher, Mr. Greek. Sensing Tony's growing competence with the machines, Mr. Greek got him a job working in the school district's computer room, which was in the basement of the high school. "I used to load the reader for the attendance cards," he explained. "I de-collated paper. The computer room housed the mainframe for all the schools in the entire city. I loved working down there." But this love of computers was not enough to spur Tony on to college or any other form of post-secondary education. "I absolutely hated school," Tony explained, time and again. "I knew I was going into the Marines."

After high school, Tony spent the next four years in the Marines, where he worked in an artillery division. After he was discharged, he worked for a few years in construction and then in industrial security before being laid off in the early 1990s. An upstairs neighbor who was an EMT suggested that he enroll in an EMS education program and get certified. After toying around with the idea a bit, Tony borrowed some money from his grandmother and enrolled in an EMT-Basic course at a local university. A year later, he landed his first job and began work as an EMS provider. "It was one of those things that—the situation was right and I had the right motivation at the time to do it," Tony explained. "I had always kind of wanted to be an EMT because of the lights and sirens, but up until that point, I never had a strong enough desire to actually pursue it."

Tony loved working on the ambulance, he loved the lights and sirens and the daily "adrenaline rollercoaster" that is an inevitable part of emergency medical care. During our interviews, he recalled incredible stories about these early impressionable days "driving the truck." He was frequently amazed, not necessarily by the medical emergencies to which he was responding, but by the people who called for his help and by the glimpses into their lives that EMS providers, by the very nature of their work, are granted. He recalled one story, in particular, that changed the way he looked at his profession:

> I'll never forget this one call we made, back before we had portable radios for communicating with one another. We walked up to this house, knocked on the door, and the guy says, "Come in." We opened the door and the guy's sitting in the middle of the living room holding a shotgun. As we approached, he put his mouth over the gun and pulled the trigger. It was a humbling experience. I saw that EMS really isn't about me—it's about the patient. Most guys who come into EMS, it's all about the ego. But after this incident, I had this sort of gradual realization. You start to think about what you do and why you are doing it. Everything we learn, practice, work towards—the terminal end of everything we do—is the patient. If you take the patient out of the equation, there's no reason for you to even be here.

A few years later, something unexpected happened. One of the community services that EMS provides is CPR training. As Tony received more and more requests to teach CPR classes, he began to sense an opportunity to earn some extra money during the hours when he wasn't on-call. So he got certified to teach and got to work. After a few classes, he started to notice how much he enjoyed teaching: "It wasn't just like, 'Oh, I'm going to do this for some extra money.' I really had the urge to teach," he explained. "I found that, after a while, I started to love it, and then I started to yearn for it. It really was something that I found to be fun."

Soon, as Tony explained, "things just started growing." A friend who was an instructor would ask him to come out to an EMT-Basic class to help model some skill component; a friend of a friend would ask him to deliver a presentation on a new life-saving procedure. Next thing he knew, local EMS educators were calling, asking if Tony could teach entire courses. Finally, he got involved in curriculum development. By the time he entered the local community-technical college to pursue an Associate's degree and his paramedic certification in the late 1990s, Tony's career plans had begun to clarify themselves. He still enjoyed working on the truck, he still loved the lights and sirens, but three important changes had taken place. First, he had come to a fuller appreciation of the sense of calling behind being an EMS provider. Second, he had stumbled upon a new love: teaching. Third, now that he was teaching classes, he found himself thinking more and more about the connections (or lack thereof) between the way EMS providers were being educated and the shifting demands of their jobs. In sum, he was beginning to develop a larger vision of the field and starting to imagine the role he might play in helping to transform it.

In 1999, after graduating from the community-technical college, Tony worked for a few more years on the truck and taught courses in the evenings and on the weekends. He picked up additional instructor certifications, and then he was hired as the Education and Training Coordinator at ACME, a position that he hoped would allow him the opportunity to create new educational programs for the company and its employees. He got right to work, re-tooling the employee orientation program, creating a competency manual to track the progress of new hires, and writing a proposal for, and later developing and implementing curriculum through, an online education system.

Ultimately, Tony hopes to work part-time as a Paramedic and part-time as an instructor of emergency medical education in a college or university. "I'm getting my Bachelor's degree so that I can do something different," he explained during our interviews.

> I'm not looking to make six-figures a year. The reason why I'm in school is so that I can do what I desire to do, which is to teach and design curriculum for EMS education. After I graduate from NSC, I'll go on to pursue a Master's degree because, I hate to say it, but the letters at the end of your name matter. You walk in with your Master's or your Ph.D. and somebody is going to listen to you, as opposed to some guy like me who just has an A.S. or a B.S. Ultimately, I want to be an educator, a good educator.

Reading and Writing at Work, Home, and School

Writing for Work

ACME Ambulance, Tony's employer, provides emergency medical care to the state's two largest cities, serving a population of around 220,000 people and answering over 17,000 emergency calls per year. As Education and Training Coordinator, Tony's principle responsibility is training and monitoring the performance of all new ACME EMS providers. In the two years he has worked in this capacity, he has trained and oriented over 130 "new hires." He oversees a staff of eight Field Training Officers (FTOs) who assist him in this work. He still goes "out in the truck" from time to time but far less these days than in the past.

Tony wears at least three professional hats in his work at ACME, administrator, educator, and EMS provider, each of which prompts different kinds of writing. For example, when Tony goes out on the truck and responds to calls, his literacy skills serve, primarily, as a form of documentation, a written record of what happened at each of the calls to which he has responded. As an administrator, Tony is engaged in various forms of communication and documentation with regard to the day-to-day work of monitoring the professional development and performance of all of ACME's 140+ EMS providers. Finally, as an educator, both in and outside ACME, Tony uses writing for pedagogical purposes—to create documents to aid in the process of training new hires, to design curriculum, and to produce various assessment and evaluative documents. Like most of the participants I interviewed for this study, Tony is immersed in literate tasks and activities at work, especially since he moved into the Education and Training Coordinator position. "As a Paramedic," he explained, "email was about all the writing I did. Email and run-reports. I do a lot more writing and reading now. It's a lot more emails, memos, outlines, reports. It was kind of shocking at first. I was like, 'Oh my gosh, I've got to type up another report?'" At several points during our interviews, Tony emphasized that he was still adjusting to his new role as an administrator, a role that, as he says, requires constant writing. "Today, I'm responsible to a lot of people," he explained, "When the Director of Operations goes 'Hey, I want to know about this or that person—

why isn't he working out?' I say, 'Well, it's this, this, and that.' And then he says, 'Do you have any documentation on him? We can't do anything if we don't have documentation.' And I'm like, 'Argh.' I hate paperwork with a passion."

As an administrator, Tony spends a significant amount of his time engaged in communicative tasks, usually via email, with audiences both internal and external to the company. He is in continual communication with state employees at the Bureau of EMS, staff members and administrators at local hospitals and public health centers, members of local police and fire departments, and fellow EMS educators around the state. In addition to emails, from time to time Tony crafts various memos to communicate pertinent information to internal staff ACME, such as the following "recertification" memo.

Writing Sample #5: "Recerting" Memo

Education and Training

Memo

To: All Personnel Recerting

From: [redacted]

CC: [redacted]

Date: [redacted]

Re: Recerting in 2006

It is recert time again and those who are going to expire on [redacted] you need to start putting your documentation together, including all of your con-ed certificates. The procedure for recerting will be simple. *Please send me your completed National Registry form along with a copy of your refresher* certificate. I will sign it and obtain the medical director's signature and return it back to you. When you receive your new National Registry card please forward me a copy along with a completed state provider's license form. I will obtain [redacted] signature and forward it on to the state. It will be at that time [redacted] will consider you recerted. If you choose to use another method that is your choice, but if [redacted] does not have a current provider's license on [redacted] you be removed from the schedule until one is produced. Tracking licenses and certifications is a daunting task, please help in making this task a little less difficult. To paraphrase [redacted] "Recertifying is ultimately *your* responsibility."

When filling out your National Registry forms please remember that only half of your con-ed can come from distributive education, ie computer websites, magazines, etc. Anything that you obtain from our on-line education system under [redacted] is considered distributive education and should be logged as such. Anything that was obtained under [redacted] Monthly Education of the HIPPA Training should be logged as In-Service, **not distributive education.** Please pay attention to this so you don't encounter any problems with the registry. Remember that any programs completed from [redacted] the certificates can be printed off by signing on to the system and from you home page click on my certificates. You will then be able to print them by click on each one and print them from the pdf that comes up on the screen.

Please note that you may have to take a protocol test prior to being re-licensed. I am still waiting on the word from [redacted] and the state. If you have any questions feel free to contact me.

Regards,

[redacted]

1

Like much of the writing Tony creates at work, this memo was produced collaboratively. When I asked him about his composing process for the memo, he explained that typically, he begins by drafting a document himself, just to get down the basic outline of what he wants to say. Then he passes the document along to ACME's Executive Director who, as Tony put it, "puts his magic on it." The Executive Director "doctors it up a little, makes the sentences read a bit more smoothly" and returns the document with suggestions. If Tony is the only one writing the document, he examines the suggestions, incorporating them where he feels they make sense, and if all looks good, prints and distributes or emails the document to its intended audience(s). Occasionally, Tony creates documents with other ACME staff members who bring their various levels of expertise to a project. In these cases, he writes his section, forwards it to the Executive Director for editing, and then passes it along to his collaborator(s).

When possible—and in his current administrative capacity, this is proving increasingly impossible—Tony prefers to steer clear of writing tasks that require more than a few sentences or a paragraph, such as the recertification memo. "I don't send out that many memos" he explained, "or, I try not to send any more than necessary." Instead, Tony describes himself as a consummate PowerPoint user. "PowerPoint presentations are easy because everything is bulleted," he explained during one interview. "You're not writing compositions in PowerPoint and if you are, then you're using the software all wrong." Over the years, Tony has become convinced that his fundamental problem with writing, at work or anywhere else, stems from a basic inability to visualize the various parts of a sentence. "For me, in order to write mechanically and grammatically correct, I need to see it. I need to look at the sentence structure and see how it's put together. My problem is, I can't visualize it. When I look at a piece of writing, I can't see, for example, the independent clause. I will not be able to write correctly until I can see that." This perceived difficulty with mechanics and grammar causes Tony a good deal of frustration at work, as he explains here:

> I mean I write and I get through it, but as far as correctness and grammar and punctuation, I'm terrible. It's embarrassing when you can't write a memo without a million grammatical errors because, first of all, I'm supposed to be an educator and second of all, I'm in management and I can't even write a simple letter. So it does get embarrassing. I've been finding ways to compensate for many years. But, the reality is, I just can't do it. And now I've come to the conclusion that I need to do it.

Recently, Tony bought a book called *Grammar in 24-Hours*, which he planned to complete over the summer and which, he hoped, would once-and-for-all cure all his writing ills.

For all his frustration about and concern over grammatical and mechanical correctness, Tony has clearly found strategies for getting by when it comes to his day-to-day written work as Education and Training Coordinator. Where he is at his best is in the design and creation of teaching and training documents, when he has his educator's cap on. During his brief tenure as Education and Training Coordinator, Tony has developed several documents that have helped transform the orientation program at ACME, bringing a level of accountability and professionalism to the training process that was not previously in evidence. One such document is the Competency Manual, a 26-page bound document that contains a series of 24 competencies in which providers must demonstrate proficiency during their first 90 days on the job. The following is an example of one such competency.

Writing Sample #6: Competency Manual (sample page)

[redacted]

COMPETENCY CHECKLIST

NAME: [redacted] QI #: [redacted] DEPT: [redacted] DATE________________	**KEY TO COMPETENCY EVALUATION METHOD** RD Return Demonstration CS Case Studies PR Peer Review MS Mock Survey SA Self Assessment DG Discussion Group PT Post Test OODW Observation of Daily Work EX Exemplars Presentation QIM QI Monitor

COMPETENCY: **Documentation**

PERFORMANCE CRITERIA	COMPLETED BY STAFF YES	COMPLETED BY STAFF NO	EVALUATION METHOD	COMMENTS
Completes PCRs properly and without errors			RD	
Complies with HIPPA standards			RD	
Completes pt. refusal and no transport documentation properly and without errors			RD	
Captures appropriate billing information			RD	
Captures all necessary signatures on all forms			RD	
Explains the significance of a swap and time off request			DG	
Correctly completes a swap and time off request			RD	
Explains the purpose of an incident report			DG	
Correctly documents an incident			RD	
Explains the purpose of an online event report			DG	
Explains legal competency and consent			DG	
Explains DNR orders, advanced directives and living wills and procedures with dealing with them			DG	
Completes detail and contract services paperwork			RD	

Observer's Signature ________________________________ Date:____________

Observer's Name ________________________________
(Print legibly)

Written: 1/20/06
Revised:

Prior to the time when Tony took over as Education and Training Coordinator, there was no official orientation documentation at ACME. Neither the Competency Manual nor the Orientation Manual, which I will discuss in a moment, existed. The reasons why Tony felt the need to create such documents came from his years of employment at ACME, during which time he had come to believe that the backgrounds and skills of its providers were not always up to par. When he became Education and Training Coordinator, he found himself in a position to do something about this:

> What I found when I really started looking at it was that we had paramedics coming through that weren't functioning at the level we function at. We're a busy and diversified system and we get a lot of critical care patients. Some of the paramedics we hire might be fresh out of school or they might be coming from a small town where they don't do the call volume that they're going to do with us. So, these new employees, we really didn't have a way of finding out where they were, what their skill level was.

After doing some reading in the professional literature, Tony came up with the idea for the Competency Manual. He got together with his FTOs to determine, first, what minimum skills and knowledge all ACME providers should possess. The group came up with a list of twenty-four competencies, including everything from how to operate radios and communications devices to how to effectively deploy specific medical equipment. Once they identified the key competencies, they got to work drafting the manual. Tony assigned several of the FTOs to write specific competencies and he wrote some himself. He edited the manual, created a cover page, and bound a stack of manuals for distribution. "It was a collaborative effort to figure out what we needed to put in the manual," Tony explained during our interviews. "The more brains you've got the better. We put the entire thing together in two weeks."

As a result of this project, today, at the conclusion of the mandatory week-long orientation, all ACME new-hires are given a Competency Manual which they have until their ninety-day review to complete. "The Competency Manual does a couple of things," Tony explained. "One, if new employees are not coming up to spec, we have documentation to prove this. Two, the new guys understand what we expect from them. It's standardized. Three, it's a teaching tool, a way to identify a problem so we can do remediation to bring those who are struggling up to speed."

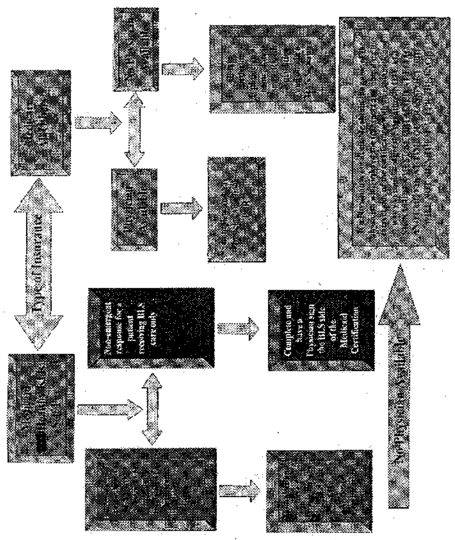
I was curious about the actual production of the Competency Manual. Had Tony created the design and layout himself? How was the text drafted and formatted? It was at this point that Tony introduced me to the composing strategy that he says guides almost all of the writing he produces on the job, right-click-steal. Here, Tony explains how he deployed right-click-steal to produce the Orientation Manual:

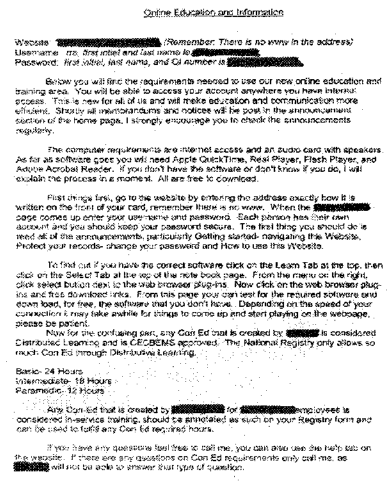
> I actually got the template for the manual from the hospital and then made a few modifications. They've got a whole website full of competencies. So, let's say you're looking for one on rhythm interpretation, you can go on and if there is a competency posted you can just right-click-steal it and then modify it to suit your purposes. I took their logo off and put ours on, I changed a few of the headers and I changed the actual wording for each of the competencies. I kept their grid. The hospital didn't have any of the competencies that I needed so in the end, we created all of them from scratch.

As Tony sees it, right-click-steal is an efficient and effective way of authoring documents. He right-click-steals text and images from disparate sources and uses them to help produce new documents. Perhaps not surprisingly, in Tony's world, right-click-steal goes both ways. Shortly after he completed the Competency Manual, the hospital whose template he right-click-stole purchased a piece of medical equipment that Tony's EMS providers were already using and for which Tony had already written a competency. The hospital asked if they could use his competency to train their personnel. "I share stuff with the hospital all the time," he explained. "I tell them, right-click-steal. It's really more like right-click-borrow. I share anything I have with anybody. I don't try to capitalize on anything."

The second teaching and training document Tony has created during his tenure as Education and Training Coordinator at ACME is the Orientation manual. Currently, Tony conducts orientation sessions with new hires at ACME about every two weeks, each of which lasts roughly a week, depending on the number of new hires with whom he has to work and their various levels of certification. The orientations place demands on Tony's literacy skills in two significant ways. First, there is the orientation process itself. For three days he works with the new hires "in-house," providing live and video lectures on a wide range of policies and procedures and with the help of several PowerPoint presentations, walking them through certain key processes (such as how to fill out a run-report, which I describe in more detail below). Second, there is the Orientation Manual, which Tony has created from scratch and which is a work-in-progress. A work-in-progress, the manual is an exhaustive compilation of important company information and policy, containing everything from ACME's mission statement to staff bios, lists of important contact numbers, and detailed instructions on how to complete "run reports." Tony created the organizing structure for the document and devised a system of sequencing which works around the daily orientation schedule. He generated some of the text contained in the manual, for example, the "Information Sheet," which contains lists of contact information, and the "Online Education and Information" page, which provides instructions on how to access and use the online education program. But much of the material he right-click-borrowed from other sources (e.g. a chart of ACME's organizational structure, the company history, profiles of staff members, statements of policy and procedure). In this way, the Orientation Manual, like the Competency Manual, is a fusion of borrowed and original texts. There is a kind of *hybridity* in these documents that is rarely in evidence in school-based writing—texts and images are borrowed, shared, mixed together, assembled and reassembled. Original text or imagery is created only when and where necessary. As Tony sees it, the Orientation Manual serves two key purposes. First, it helps guide new-hires through the orientation process. Second, it serves as a reference should they have questions once the official orientation has ended.

Writing Sample #7: Excerpts from Orientation Manual





Online Education and Information

Website: [redacted] *(Remember: There is no www in the address)*
Username: *ms, first initial and last name is* [redacted]
Password: *first initial, last name, and CI number is* [redacted]

Below you will find the requirements needed to use our new online education and training area. You will be able to access your account anywhere you have internet access. This is new for all of us and will make education and communication more efficient. Shortly all memorandums and notices will be post in the announcement section of the home page. I strongly encourage you to check the announcements regularly.

The computer requirements are internet access and an audio card with speakers. As far as software goes you will need Apple QuickTime, Real Player, Flash Player, and Adobe Acrobat Reader. If you don't have the software or don't know if you do, I will explain the process in a moment. All are free to download.

First things first, go to the website by entering the address exactly how it is written on the front of your card, remember there is no www. When the [redacted] page comes up enter your username and password. Each person has their own account and you should keep your password secure. The first thing you should do is read all of the announcements, particularly Getting started- navigating the Website, Protect your records- change your password and How to use this Website.

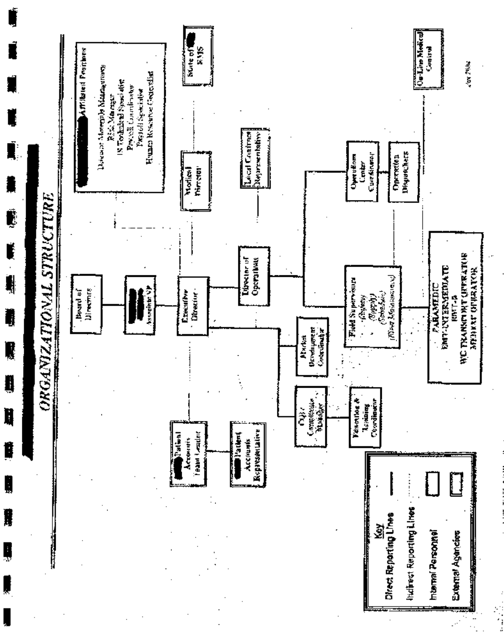
To find out if you have the correct software click on the Learn Tab at the top, then click on the Select Tab at the top of the note book page. From the menu on the right, click select button next to the web browser plug-ins. Now click on the web browser plug-ins and free download links. From this page your can test for the required software and down load, for free, the software that you don't have. Depending on the speed of your connection it may take awhile for things to come up and start playing on the webpage, please be patient.

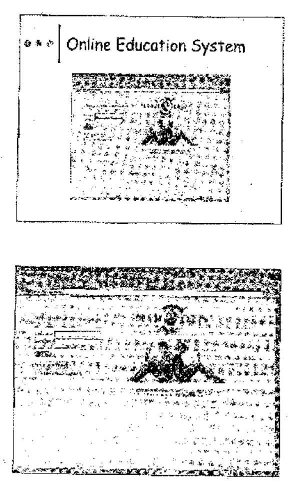
Now for the confusing part, any Con Ed that is created by [redacted] is considered Distributed Learning and is CECBEMS approved. The National Registry only allows so much Con Ed through Distributive Learning.

Basic- 24 Hours
Intermediate- 18 Hours
Paramedic- 12 Hours

Any Con-Ed that is created by [redacted] for [redacted] employees is considered in-service training, should be annotated as such on your Registry form and can be used to fulfill any Con Ed required hours.

If you have any questions feel free to call me, you can also use the help tab on the website. If there are any questions on Con Ed requirements only call me, as [redacted] will not be able to answer that type of question.





As we discussed the Orientation Manual during our interviews, Tony demonstrated his rhetorical knowledge and understanding of the importance of such issues as purpose and audience when he tried to describe his ongoing process of revision: "I don't have the orientation exactly the way I want it yet," he explained at one point. "The Orientation Manual is a living document. Every time I rearrange the orientation, I end up changing the whole Manual around. What I do is, I make small trials. I'll make a little change, put it out for a couple of orientations, wait a couple months, see how it works." In order to assess the success of his orientation program, during the time of our interviews, Tony was in the process of designing an evaluation document for all new-hires to fill out at the end of the week-long orientation. He is in a state of continual self-evaluation as regards the rhetorical effectiveness of the orientations, as he illustrates in the following passage: "With revision, you look at what your needs are—you look at what you still feel is not working. When you roll something out or you do something, you can tell that you have these people captured or they're kind of just looking at you and you're not making the connection."

Because there was no orientation process or Orientation Manual in place prior to the time when Tony assumed the Education and Training Coordinator position, I was curious how, without a template or a model to go on, he had created the Manual. Tony explained that it's been mostly "trial-by-error," but that he's also drawn on the ideas of other EMS medical educators. An important source of information in this regard has been a publication called *Domain*[3], which bills itself as "The official quarterly scholarly publication of the National

Association of EMS Educators." Pieces in a recent issue of *Domain³* included an article on how and why to conduct a "training needs assessment," an essay on grant writing, an article on the use of human subjects in research, "A Framework for Distance Learning Design" (replete with an exhaustive list of references), an article on the application of learning theories, and a short book review. *Domain³*, upon closer examination, provides a fascinating glimpse into the world of EMS education. It is regular reading for Tony, keeping him abreast of new developments in the field and giving practical advice on a whole range of issues and problems. Having spent some time with *Domain³*, it's not hard to see how this small journal is shaping Tony's literate practices at work, and, as we will see later, in school.[23]

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[23] *Domain³* is also shaping Tony's writing goals and aspirations. Of all the participants in this study, he was the only one to express writing goals, of which he has two. First, Tony has a dream of someday submitting an article to a professional publication such as *Domain³*. Second, he wants to gain control over the formal elements of grammar, believing that only in so doing will he finally become a competent writer.

Writing Sample #8: *Domain³*

WINTER 2006

National Association of EMS Educators

TM

Providing a "Voice for EMS Educators"

DOMAIN³

THE OFFICIAL QUARTERLY SCHOLARLY PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EMS EDUCATORS

Mass Casualty Incident Management Training: Where Are We Now?

Steven E. Kanarian

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001 there was a surge in support and funding for training in terrorism awareness, the incident command system and response to weapons of mass destruction incidents. Local emergency managers have conducted drills to measure the readiness of cities to respond to biological and chemical attacks. For EMS educators the question should be asked: How prepared are EMS providers to meet the patient care challenges of Mass Casualty Incidents (MCIs) and terrorist attacks that we may face in the future?

The attacks of the Murrah Federal building in Oklahoma City and the World Trade Center in New York City brought large-scale *terrorism to the United States*. The difference in these terrorist events from MCIs prior to these attacks was both the magnitude of injury and the element of *intentional harm*. During terrorist attacks terrorists actively seek to injure the public and first responders.

The challenges of the future are uncertain, and just as Hurricane Katrina was worse than Hurricane Andrew; each terrorist *MCI has a way of exceeding expectations and* planning. The element of intentional harm and the magnitude of patient severity at terror related MCIs underscores the need to train EMTs, paramedics and medical first responders to take appropriate first actions and deliver effective patient care. We can evaluate the training we provide EMTs and paramedics to prepare them to handle MCIs by comparing our training to the best practices and research available on MCI management.

First actions

The actions of the first arriving EMS units lay the foundation for incident management to build as the incident escalates. EMTs and paramedics should be trained how to assess an incident for hazards, take protective actions, give a concise radio report and implement EMS operations. Responders need to be trained to recognize real hazards and take protective actions so they can survive an event. Training should include the protective actions to take for specific hazards. I call the safety actions to take the "Rules to Live and Stay Alive By" to underscore the imperative nature of MCI safety. *Safety training should have an all hazards approach* to focus EMTs and paramedics on the hazards presented and the appropriate safety action, rather than trying to determine the actual cause of the event.

Teaching students on a chalkboard or PowerPoint presentation alone are not adequate methods of training responders in safety, triage or MCI management. Adequate safety training should include simulation of *scenarios to give EMTs and paramedics an opportunity to* assess hazards and learn lessons in a controlled environment. Safety training should be conducted in an educational facility where hazards can be simulated with smoke, fumes or a tactical situation. The realistic simulation of these types of mass casualty incidents is critical in developing cognitive and psychomotor ability to perform safety size-up and first actions at an MCI. Learning lessons of safety and MCI management are much more vivid when a scenario evolves with moulage, critically injured patients and the stress of a mass casualty incident.

Give your students experiences to learn from before they have to learn from first hand experience. What would you prefer as a student? A "chalk and talk" lecture about triage and scene safety or a day at the fire training center with realistic hazards, fire and police responders handling an incident treating moulaged patients that give students a chance to learn and develop their skills?

EMS providers should be put in scenarios with real and evolving hazards and taught to delay response until hazards are mitigated. The process of "stop-look-listen and think" is necessary for terror related MCIs. EMTs and medics need to be trained in simulated situations like the Columbine Shooting or the Olympic Park Bombing and be

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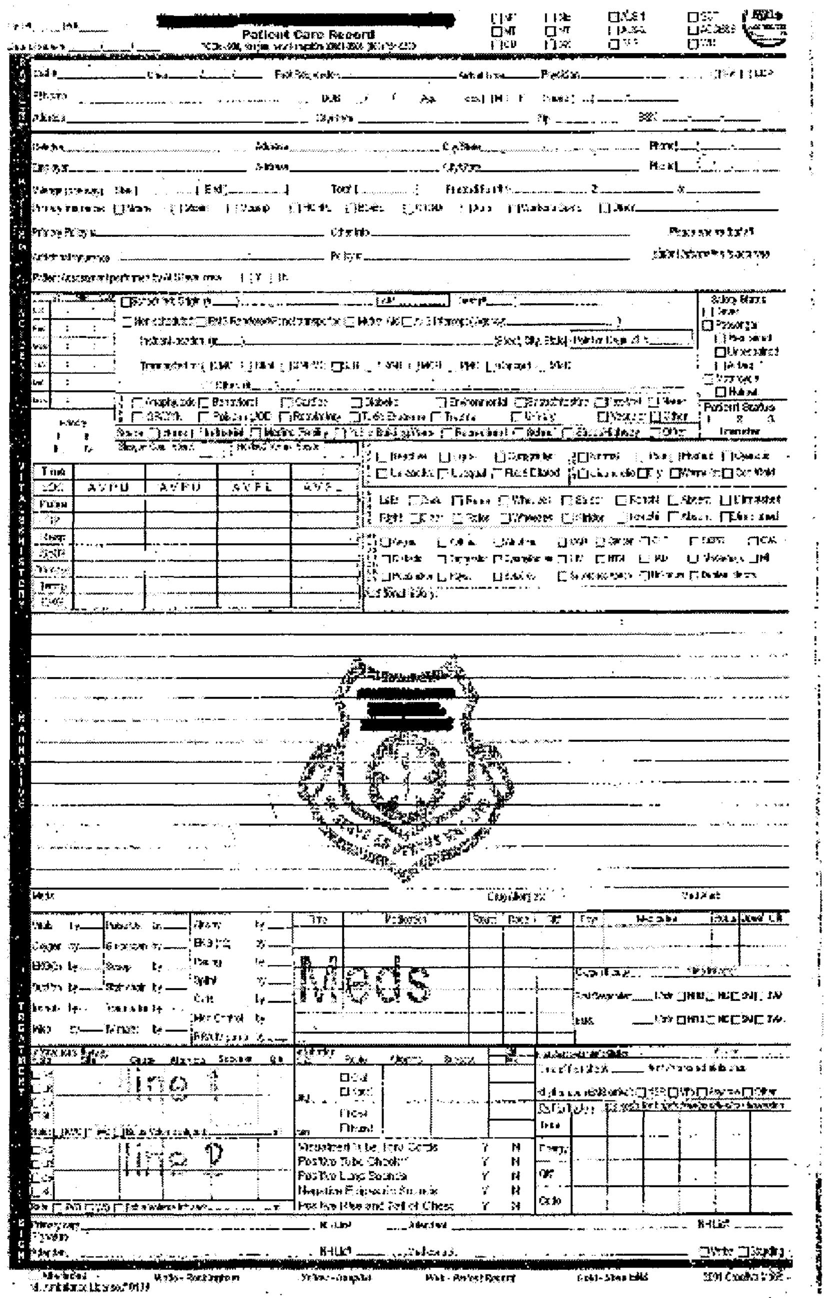
Another context for Tony's literacy use on the job, one that emerges out of his role as an administer and also as an EMS educator, comes from of his work with an online education program called CentreLearn. Similar in scope to familiar online education programs in use at most colleges and universities (e.g. Blackboard, Web CT), CentreLearn is the means by which Tony maintains communication with his providers and assists a decentralized and dispersed workforce with the process of ongoing training and certification. According to its website, CentreLearn allows instructors or administrators to communicate with their students or staff (via online chats, discussion boards, and email); design and deliver online examinations; create and facilitate program evaluations and surveys; track student performances via an online gradebook; and conduct live audio/video web conferencing. CentreLearn also provides instructors and administrators access to a library of online interactive courses that EMS, Fire Safety, and OSHA workers can complete in order to earn continuing education or recertification credits.[24] Tony uses CentreLearn for several purposes: he uses discussion boards to talk with his eight FTOs about various workplace issues related to new-hires; he uses the email feature to communicate with all ACME EMS providers about a range of different day-to-day issues; and he uses CentreLearn in combination with another program, Articulate, to design curriculum and create interactive PowerPoint presentations which he delivers as part of the ongoing training and re-certification process (most recently, he

[24] A quick skim of the catalogue of listings for EMS providers reveals over seventy-five course offerings, including "Seizure Management for the Paramedic," "Emergency Childbirth," and "Submersion Injuries."

created a piece to train EMS providers working local professional sporting events).

As an EMS provider, Tony does less writing than in his two other professional roles. But still, there's a lot more documentation in the field of emergency medicine these days than in the past. Tony explains: "If I knew when I got into EMS that I was going to write so much, I probably never would have come into the field. Every patient contact you have has to be documented. A lot less can be assumed. It actually has to be written down." The primary document that EMS providers use to create a record of their interactions with patients, and a document that Tony, in his capacity as Education and Training Coordinator, teaches them to produce correctly, is the "Patient Care Record" or what the guys on the truck call the "run-report."

Writing Sample #9: Patient-Care or “Run” Report


[redacted]

Patient Care Report

Meds

line 1

line 2

According to Tony, the run-report serves at least three purposes and addresses three different audiences. First, it provides a narrative of patient care. The EMS provider must be able to articulate to the doctors and nurses to whom he hands over his patient the nature of the care that was given between the time when he arrived on the accident scene and the moment when he reached the hospital. Second, the run-report provides documentation for insurance purposes. Third, in the event that a lawsuit is filed as a result of care provided by EMS personnel, the run-report serves as a form of legal documentation. Providers must complete one run-report for each patient with whom they come into contact at an accident scene, even if the patient is not seriously injured and does not need substantive medical care. Tony estimates that during an average shift a provider will produce around eight or nine run-reports, each of which takes between ten and fifteen minutes to complete. Shifts usually run eight hours, so a conservative estimate of the amount of time EMS providers spend writing on the job each day comes to about one hour and twenty minutes or between fifteen and twenty-percent of their shift. "On the few occasions when I go out on a truck as a Paramedic and something happens, I am documenting probably three times more information today than I did when I first came into this field," Tony explained during our interviews. "I've done fourteen calls in twenty-four hours. Fourteen calls could be as many as seventeen run-reports, depending on if you have multiple-patient contacts on a call. I once did a motor-vehicle accident, a six-car pile-up, where we had to fill out eighteen patient contacts between the two of us. And that was just one call on our shift."

During orientation, Tony spends roughly three-and-a-half hours teaching new-hires how to fill out the run-report to ACME's standards. He has created an entire PowerPoint presentation in which he has broken the run-report down into manageable chunks. He uses this presentation to go through each section of the report, one section at a time. Soon, he explained during our interviews, the paper version of the run-report is going to become a thing of the past. "Next year, we're going to a paperless system. The providers will be given these digital tablets that sort of guide them through the process electronically," he explained. "I'm hoping this will cut down on the amount of time guys spend writing and help us achieve greater uniformity and consistency as far as the information collected goes." Despite the hassle of the increased quantity of writing required by the patient-care reports, as the person responsibility for teaching ACME's new-hires how to complete them, Tony has found one additional purpose for the reports, a pedagogical purpose: they serve as a tool for ensuring that providers actually follow all the necessary steps in assessing a patient's condition: "Once you start thinking about all the steps of your patient assessment," he explained, "it actually reinforces what you need to do."

During one of our final interviews, after we had discussed the multiple "hats" Tony wears at ACME Ambulance, I pointed out that he really does a lot of reading and writing on the job. "Yeah, I don't do it well, but I do it," he replied. In his capacity as Education and Training Coordinator at ACME, Tony's literacy skills are engaged in ways he never could have anticipated when he first joined the field of EMS over a dozen years ago. He writes to and for multiple audiences, internal and external to ACME, for multiple purposes. As a professional writer, Tony knows his strengths (locating, borrowing, and synthesizing the work of others, designing and delivering curriculum and oral presentations) and he knows where and when to ask for help. He continues to find ways to compensate for his perceived shortcomings by enlisting the assistance of his colleagues. He successfully utilizes and frequently experiments with a number of different electronic writing technologies to achieve his communicative purposes. He regularly employs his right-click-steal strategy to create training documents such as the Competency and Orientation Manuals. He engages in the national conversation about EMS education by reading professional publications such as *Domain*[3] and keeps abreast of developments within the local EMS community by attending and participating in various conferences and seminars. Most significantly, Tony's literacy skills are engaged in the day-to-day task of ensuring that ACME Ambulance Company's EMS providers administer the highest-level critical care to their patients.

Writing for School

When Tony enrolled at NSC, he had already earned an Associate's degree in emergency medicine from a local community-technical college. His plan was to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Applied Technology with a focus on education and training and then go on for a Master's degree in education. During our time together, Tony shared with me several examples of school-based writing. The first piece, below, was produced for a class called American Popular Culture, which Tony was taking to fulfill one of NSC's General Education requirements.[25] Though brief, this piece serves as an intriguing entry point into Tony's academic writing.

[25] According to the course catalogue, American Popular Culture seeks to examine "the origin, nature, and social impact of popular culture in America."

Writing Sample #10: Boomers vs. Xers

Are twentysomething workers spoiled or just demanding? I believe that it is more than just the twentysomethings that fall into this culture. I have been calling it the "entitlement generation" for about three, or more, years. There has been an ever-increasing trend in the work force that is being typified by the younger generation. They want top dollar and an exuberant ? healthy ? benefit package; yet what do they have to offer? They bring to the table little to no true experience and only the theory that they learned in college, providing they even went to college.

Dr. Mel Levine attributes a portion of this mentality to coddling parents and academia which ~~has~~ have not properly prepared students on the realities of life. When anyone is shown the golden ring, they are told that all they need to do to obtain it is to get a good job and it will be yours. These people have been given the cliff notes on how to obtain the golden ring. There are many important parts that are left out. For example, they need to gain valuable experience, display loyalty, demonstrate a good work ethic, and show attention to detail, just to name a few. good!

Most of today's employers want to see how the "product" is going to perform prior to placing a vast amount of resources into them. With 401k's and a very diversified work force, we are seeing a dramatic decrease in longevity within the working world. Employers are reluctant to pay high wages and provide benefit packages to those who are going to use the company as a stepping stone.

I believe that the young adults ~~that~~ who are entering the workforce today are smarter and hungrier than in the past. They are self-motivators and self-starters.

They have placed a high value on their self-worth and are not afraid to show it. I know of a person that after graduating college with a BS in information systems, applied for a job with a small company. During the interview he was asked how much he wanted for a salary. He did his homework before the interview and stated that he really wanted to work for this company. He would be willing to accept $30,000 a year. The interviewer asked, "That's it?" He replied, "No, I want to be guaranteed a $20,000 increase on my annual review if I am able to meet the follow conditions." The interviewer was taken back by the approach, but after looking at the conditions, the interviewer replied, "I believe this is fair and honest of the money and expectations." He was subsequently offered the job and he is still employed by the very same company.

good. So

I feel that we should be educating the work force, not only the ones entering it, that to reach for the golden ring you have to have self-worth, but you also want the chance to prove yourself. Employers and employees need to meet in the middle, with realistic expectations, in order for all to benefit equally. The baby-boomers and the generation Xers are sick of working for "the man" with nothing to show for it. The entitlement generation wants everything for nothing, per se. I feel that we can learn from both sides and apply what we learned to benefit all. This is all theoretical, but I am willing to try it out.

explanation the meaning of the story above

yes?

good. bravo [redacted] the presentation of what ~~generations~~ ~~have~~ values boomers + Xers have in common, and what makes them different.

At the time of our interviews, Tony could not recall the exact purpose of this assignment, but his instructor's end-comments lead me to believe that in her mind, the purpose of this assignment was to compare and contrast the value systems of two generations, the Baby Boomers and the members of Generation X. But there's very little in the essay that suggests that this was Tony's purpose. By the end of the first paragraph, the piece already feels like an extended rant by a member of one generation (the Baby Boomers) about the members of another (Gen. Xers, or what Tony refers to as "the entitlement generation"). My guess is that the back-story for this essay comes from Tony's experience as an EMS educator and as the Education and Training Coordinator at ACME. From our interviews, I know that in both these capacities, he regularly comes into contact with assertive and perhaps overly confident young people, some of whom, understandably, may lack humility about their "place" in the workplace. With this in mind, my developing sense of the piece, as I distance myself from Tony's instructor's reading, is that it has less to do with theoretical problems between the value systems of two generational groups than it does the real-life workplace problems that Tony encounters on the job as an EMS educator.

In one sense, I think what we see in this piece is Tony's difficulty with the conventions of the academic genre in which he has been asked to work—the generic compare and contrast/cultural commentary essay. Rather than compare and contrast two American generations with an eye towards the production of some kind of commentary on the status of the ongoing generational struggle in America, a typical academic exercise, Tony, a fifteen-year EMS veteran and

Education and Training Coordinator at ACME, may have attempted to write on a topic about which he knows something concrete—the ongoing struggles between newcomers and veterans in the workplace. My sense is that it's not a coincidence that the key terms that were important to Tony's instructor, "boomers" and "Xers," are replaced almost entirely by Tony's own workplace terms: "boomers" become "employers" and "gen Xers" become "employees." His instructor's key terms, in fact, appear only once in the piece, at the very end, almost as an afterthought.

So what is Tony up to here? A careful reading of *Domain³*, the professional publication for EMS educators that Tony reads regularly, may shed light on where and how Tony has gone wrong, or, perhaps, gone right. After perusing a few issues, I was able to discern that for the most part, articles in *Domain³* follow a fairly straightforward three-part format: they begin with the identification of a problem, move on to a discussion of the problem (its origin, its causes) and conclude, not surprisingly, with a solution.[26] In this way, *Domain³* is a practical, pragmatic publication intended to help its readers, EMS educators like Tony, solve problems and address issues they face on the job.

When we return to Tony's essay on the "entitlement generation" with the conventions of *Domain³* in mind, I would suggest that we begin to see something

[26] For example, one recent article posed the question, "How prepared are EMS providers to meet the patient care challenges of Mass Casualty Incidents (MCIs) and terrorist attacks that we may face in the future?" Concluding that they are not prepared enough, the author of the article then goes on to speculate about why and how the field might remedy such a situation. Another article begins with a scenario whereby the reader has "recently been appointed as the training officer" for a department that has seen little education and training in the past. "Recently, there have been several incidents where members of your department have performed poorly on calls," the scenario continues. As the new training officer, it's your job to remedy this problem. What do you do?" (The answer: You create a "Training Needs Assessment" and this article will show you how.)

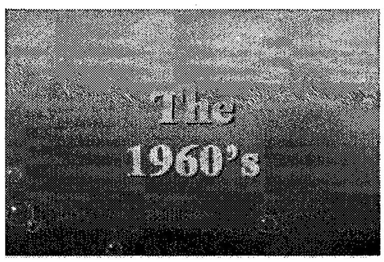
different, that is, we begin to see the way in which workplace genre knowledge can influence writing created in other contexts. Like the pieces in *Domain*[3], Tony begins his "entitlement generation" essay by identifying a problem, which is stated in the form of a half-humorous question: "Are twentysomething workers spoiled or just demanding?" He goes on to explain that it's not just the "twentysomethings" that are the problem, though. "There has been an ever-increasing trend in the work force that is being typified by the younger generation," he writes. "They want top dollar and an exuberant benefit package; yet what do they have to offer?" In this way, Tony effectively introduces the issue he will address in the rest of essay (and it's no surprise that the problem is work-related): too many workers have an unrealistic sense of their own economic value.

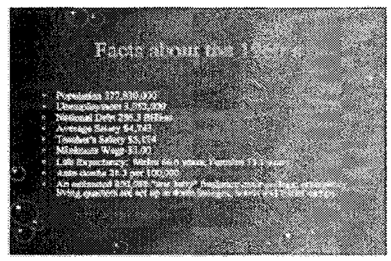
Having identified the problem, Tony moves on to elaborate: he sites the opinion of an expert, he points out some of the skills that workers need to develop (experience, loyalty, work ethic, attention-to-detail) and he relates an amusing anecdote about one entitled young worker's outlandish compensation requests. Then he moves on to solutions. In the concluding paragraph, he offers two clear suggestions for how to deal with the problem of "entitlement" in the workforce. First, "we should be educating the work force, not only the ones entering it, that to reach for the golden ring you have to have self-worth, but you also want the chance to prove yourself." Second, "Employers and employees need to meet in the middle, with realistic expectations, in order for all to benefit equally." In the very next sentence, however, Tony falters. It seems that the fact that he has not completed the assignment he set out to complete finally catches up with him as he writes, seemingly out of nowhere, "The baby-boomers and the generation Xers are sick of working for 'the man' with nothing to show for it." In this way, he tries to suggest something the two generations, whom he has failed to mention in the paper up to this point, share in common. But in the next sentence, he's back on track, returning to and reiterating the main problem he set out to address in the essay, entitlement in the workplace. In the final two sentences, he adopts a tone of resolution, stating, first, "I feel that we can learn from both sides and apply what we learned to benefit all" and second "This is all theoretical, but I am willing to try it out." This final sentence bolsters my suspicion that what Tony is up to here is a rehearsal of the genre conventions of the articles found in *Domain³*. His use of the word "theoretical" implies that he has been in the process of "theorizing" about a particular problem and his use of the phrase "I am willing to try it out" further supports this notion. In the end, the only sentence that doesn't fit into his concluding paragraph is the only one that actually includes the terms that seem to have mattered most to his instructor.

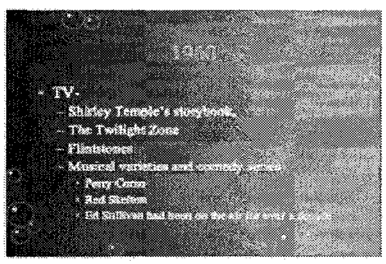
It's not hard to imagine an essay like Tony's "entitlement generation" piece, with some revision, appearing in a professional publication like *Domain³*, where virtually any topic relating to the work of training and educating EMS professionals, including relationships between newcomers and old-timers, might be up for discussion. In the "entitlement generation" piece, I would suggest, we see the extent to which Tony has internalized the conventions of the emergency medical educator journal article and we see him trying on these conventions in his own writing. We see the ways in which workplace genres can creep into academic contexts. And we gain a sense of the importance of making explicit to students, especially professional adult students like Tony who often return to the classroom with a considerable degree of discursive knowledge, the existence of genres, both academic and professional, so that, when appropriate, they can draw on this knowledge to complete writing tasks, and when not appropriate, they can recognize the necessity of learning new genres.

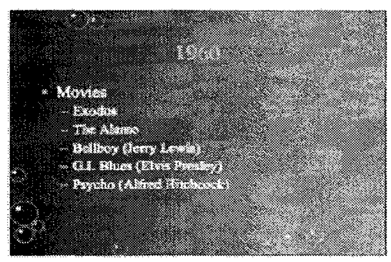
Given his affinity for and competence with various computer technologies, it is perhaps not surprising that when I asked Tony to share with me several examples of academic writing, the first item he produced was a CD containing a PowerPoint presentation on "The 1960s" that he had assembled for the American Popular Culture class. The gesture seemed meaningless at the time, but it was, upon further reflection, a gesture imbued with meaning. PowerPoint is the technology, and the PowerPoint presentation, the genre, in which Tony regularly works in his capacity as a EMS educator. It is, by his own admission, his *preferred* medium. His predominant workplace writing strategy, what he calls "right-click-steal," is a strategy that is borne out of a PowerPoint epistemology. Right-click-steal, as Tony describes it, is a way of bringing a document together—manufacturing it, assembling it, and synthesizing it. We saw the concrete results of the right-click-steal strategy in the Competency and Orientation Manuals. What "The 1960s" presentation allows us to glimpse, I think, is a moment when Tony tries to deploy the right-click-steal strategy, so effective in the workplace, in an an academic context. In this way we see, again, the potential power of workplace genres and composing strategies in shaping academic writing.

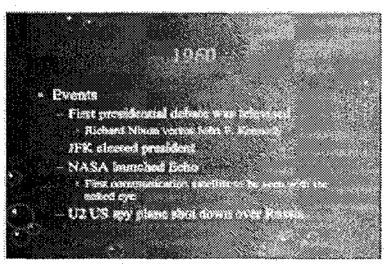
Writing Sample # 11: PowerPoint Presentation on "The 1960s"

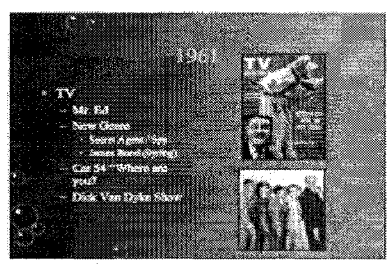












1

The first point I would make about Tony's "The 1960s" presentation is that it contains very little, if any, original material. The writing that he has generated for this document is similar to the writing he produced for the Competency and Orientation Manuals, which is to say, minimal. The work—and there was some degree of work involved, as anyone who has attempted to manage a 50+ slide PowerPoint presentation will tell you—came in the act of synthesis. After choosing a background template, a transition from slide to slide, a layout, and fonts, Tony created an organizational framework for the content of the document/presentation and then a categorization system.[27] A quick glance at the information contained on the slides raises the suspicion that the content for the presentation was right-click-stolen from an outside source, and in fact, when I asked Tony how he gathered the actual data for the presentation, he explained that he went to a search engine, typed in "American Pop Culture and 1960s" and used whatever information the search yielded.[28] Thus, the slides themselves are chock-full of Trivial Pursuitesque information that Tony has borrowed, organized, and bulleted and delivered in short bits, as the genre requires. The final slide contains the longest piece of what appears to be original prose in the entire presentation:[29]

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[27] Not surprisingly, he organized the content around individual years, thus, each series of slides following the first two summarizes developments in popular culture for a single year (e.g., 1960, 1961, 1962) and each year is allotted between two and five slides. The actual content is organized around headings such as "music," "television," "film," or "current events."

[28] I did a similar search while writing this chapter and found some of the exact information Tony used in his presentation at a website hosted by the Kingwood College Library, <http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/decade60.html>.

[29] However this, too, appears to be a paraphrase from the Kingwood College Library page.

> The 1960's saw many changes. Pop culture was moving from the older generation to the younger generation. This was most clearly seen in 1967 with the "Us" versus "Them" attitudes. There were many events throughout the decade that helped shape the pop culture of the time.

Like the Competency and Orientation Manuals, "The 1960s" is an original production only in the sense that it synthesizes a variety of forms of media. It is, undoubtedly, a right-click-steal production and while it may satisfy the demands of the workplace, where "reinventing-the-wheel" is almost always discouraged, documents are often hybrids of other documents and frequently "recycled" by various "authors," the piece raises serious questions in academic contexts about issues of originality and plagiarism. From the academic perspective, I would argue, Tony has come up short with this presentation because, in most such contexts, it is insufficient to simply copy and paste information into a document, organize it, and hand it in.[30] In most academic contexts, this process contains little, if any, value.

Of equal concern is the fact that nowhere in the document/presentation does Tony follow the conventions of an academic citation system. This is not entirely surprising because A) lists of references are rarely explicit components of workplace genres and B) were Tony to create a bibliography or works cited for this presentation, in doing so he might accidentally draw attention to ethical questions regarding source citation about which he would probably rather not draw attention (also, of course, creating a reference list would require the additional work of learning an academic citation system and then learning how to use it). Thus, "The 1960s" circumvents the very foundation upon which the

[30] Tony could not recall the grade he received on "The 1960s" presentation.

academic enterprise is constructed, that is, the idea that one builds one's work on the ideas and theories of those who have come before and in so-doing, carefully, thoughtfully, and explicitly cites these ideas and theories and their authors.

In sum, I would suggest that "The 1960s" illustrates not just the ways in which genres and the strategies individuals develop to create them can jump contexts, but also the ways in which genres and composing strategies which function effectively in some contexts (e.g., the workplace) may fail to function effectively in others (e.g., the school). In both of the writing samples I have discussed from Tony's school writing, the compare and contrast piece on the "entitlement" generation and "The 1960s," we see the power of professional genres and the composing strategies individuals develop to create those genres in professional adult students' lives.

Discussion and Analysis

Unlike most of the other participants in this study, Tony Vaccaro did not have many positive experiences with schooling, and in particular, literacy, while he was growing up. Unlike Jennifer Jarvis, who grew up in a home lined with books, magazines, and newspapers and whose father purchased a new set of encyclopedias for the home every few years, Tony was not immersed in literacy as a child, and, in fact, avoided it whenever possible. As a result, he carries with him a lack of confidence, especially in regard to writing, that would be difficult for anyone with his background to shake.

Despite early struggles with literacy and schooling, Tony has done quite well for himself professionally, and has been in and out of a number of different kinds of classrooms for the past dozen or more years. As an adult, education has been an ongoing part of his life. His experience illustrates the way that, for many Americans, post-secondary education of one kind or another has become not so much something one does *prior* to entering the workforce, but instead, a process of continual enrollment and re-enrollment, most, if not all of which is linked to the need for increased certification and/or credentialing.

As a veteran EMS provider and educator, Tony has clear professional goals and a definitive sense of vision about the field of emergency medical education and the role he wants to play in its evolution. This vision and these goals emerged over an extended period of time *through* work, as a result of countless professional experiences and encounters. *Work has led Tony to school, and not the other way around.* In fact, in both Tony and Jennifer's stories, we see the way in which academic undertakings are often shaped by professional experiences. When she was younger, Jennifer enrolled in the dentistry program at URI for the sole reason that she wanted to become a dental hygienist. She came to this goal, not through her schoolwork, but through the world outside of school, during the afternoons she spent working as an office assistant for a local dentist.

When Tony was growing up, like so many young people, he didn't know where he was headed. Lacking a sense of "the big picture," as so many adolescents do, Tony saw schooling as something from which to escape as soon as the opportunity presented itself. Whereas Jennifer had the good fortune of having a professional experience that clarified her educational goals *prior* to the time when she graduated from high school (and a family and social structure that facilitated her early literacy development), Tony was not so lucky. Only after his "official" years of schooling had ended was he able to find a way to link school with professional goals. The point is that in both cases, we see the extent to which having a *reason* for schooling and literacy instruction can be essential. For many students like Tony and Jennifer, regardless of their age, when school is seen as *leading somewhere*, towards some concrete personal and/or professional goal, it seems to gain increased meaning and relevance.

Tony's experience also highlights the increased demands for literacy that so many Americans are experiencing in their day-to-day lives. As an administrator, his literacy skills are being challenged in ways he never could have imagined when he first entered the field of emergency medicine a dozen or more years ago. As an EMS educator, reading and writing are essential to his ability to craft meaningful curriculum and assessment. Even in his role as a paramedic, where his sole responsibility is saving lives, reading and writing have become essential tools as the medical and legal worlds with their myriad processes of documentation have encroached further and further into the business of saving lives.

Finally, Tony's story of ongoing educational immersion illustrates the way in which life happens on its own schedule for each of us, regardless of the schedules the society and its various institutions have set out for us to follow. It also illustrates the ironies of life. Given the difficulties he experienced with school as a child, I couldn't help asking Tony about the incongruity of his current situation: the kid who hated school while he was growing up was now a teacher. What did he make of this?

> Back in the early 1990s, if you had asked me if I wanted to have anything to do with medicine, I would have told you no, absolutely not. A year or two later, I'm in medicine. And if you had ever asked me if I wanted to be a teacher or something like that, I would have asked you if you were out of your mind! Now, of course, the ironic thing is that I'm teaching medicine. I'm doing two things that I never *ever* thought I would be doing.

How does he explain it? How did he get to this point?

> Well, you have preconceived notions. You say, "I'm not interested in that." But people become interested in things through the back door. With EMS, I looked at it from the rescue aspect. It wasn't administering medicine to people or that type of care. It was rescuing people and saving lives. And running a CPR class, it's not really teaching. I don't look at it as if I'm the teacher in the traditional sense. I just see myself doing something I really enjoy and want to do a good job at.

Epilogue

One year after I interviewed Tony for this project, he was the only one of the three participants I have profiled in this dissertation who was still enrolled at NSC. At this time, Tony is still taking classes part-time and trying to finish up his Bachelor's degree so he can apply to graduate school. As of this writing, he is also still the Education and Training coordinator at ACME Ambulance, but this job and its never-ending stream of paperwork has begun to wear him down. Recently, Tony began the process of starting his own medical training school at which he plans to teach classes and offer certifications for individuals seeking entry-level positions in the medical field (e.g., nurse's assistants, phlebotomists, and EKG technicians). In the short-term, he hopes to step down as Education and Training coordinator at ACME, return to full-time work as a paramedic, and run and teach classes at his school when he's not on-call. In the long-term, he hopes to graduate from NSC, enroll in a graduate program in education, and eventually help create and teach an undergraduate curriculum for paramedics.

CHAPTER FIVE

BEGINNING TO FINISH SOMETHING

In July 2004, with revenues the previous year of approximately $220 million, EMI Technologies, which specialized in network infrastructure and technology solutions and services, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. At the time of EMI's bankruptcy, John Beech was the Director of Information Systems and Operations, a position that represented the culmination of a twenty-plus year climb through the ranks of the corporate IT chain-of-command. Having weathered past moments of unemployment with ease, John expected that he would find a job quickly and began his search for work in the late summer of 2004.

What happened next was inexplicable: John couldn't find a job. Since leaving Clarkson University in the early 1980s without his degree, he had been continually employed, working for a half dozen or more technology-related companies over the course of his career. The lack of what John refers to as "that piece of paper" had never been a hindrance before. "I never, *never* had a problem getting a job," he recalled during our interviews. "And typically, when the decision was made that the company I was at was either not right or that there were other issues, it would be a week, at the *most,* before I landed something new."

Not only hadn't John had trouble finding employment, he had spent the past twenty years advancing—taking on new responsibilities, stature, and pay. By the late 1980s, working as a project manager for a multi-national corporation, he was traveling the world, setting up office networks at remote locations. In the 1990s, as a network consultant, he flew around the country, working with a diverse array of corporate clients on a variety of long-term technology-related projects. In 1999, he spent a good part of the year on special-assignment in New York City, working on Y2K-compliance issues. In March 2000, he was hired on at EMI where in a short time, he rose from Network Manager to Director of Information Systems and Operations. The trajectory of John's career throughout the 1980s and 1990s was unmistakably upward, a fact that he credits to a combination of good luck, hard work, and a booming technology industry. "When I first got involved in IT back in the 1980s, things were booming," he explained. "Back then, there was so much going on, it was easier to get in and prove yourself without the degree or the background."

After things went sour at EMI, John spent the rest of 2004 and all of 2005 pounding the pavement, looking for work and trying to keep busy with projects around the house. He started a weblog. He retiled his kitchen. He helped his oldest daughter with college applications. And he went on job interview after job interview, but nothing materialized. As the hunt wore on, John began to develop the creeping feeling that his lack of a college diploma had finally caught up with him. "No one said, outright, during the time that I was searching for a job, that they weren't hiring me because I didn't have a degree," he explained. "But if you look through the job ads, there are a lot that say 'This level of education required.' I decided it was time to eliminate that factor as a possible reason why I was not getting hired." So in the fall of 2005, over a year into a debilitating job search, John began looking into online degree programs. One day he heard a news story on the radio about NSC and decided to give it a shot. In January 2006, at age 42, John enrolled at NSC, declared a major in the School of Management with a focus on Information Systems, and began his process of, as he put it, "beginning to finish something."

Growing Up Reading and Writing

During our interviews, when John spoke about his childhood, what stood out were mostly memories of family. "Every Sunday we went over to my grandparents' house with all seven of my mother's brothers and sisters, their spouses and their children—my cousins," he explained wistfully as he recalled growing up in a large, close-knit Italian family. There was church on Sunday mornings and big family meals on Sunday afternoons. His parents were both first-generation Americans, his father an electro-mechanical technician at a prominent university and his mother a secretary at the corporate offices of a local supermarket chain.

When I asked John about the role of literacy in his childhood and adolescence he explained that reading and writing weren't really on his radar, but nor were they entirely off it: "Back in the 1970s, [literacy] wasn't something that was really focused on a lot, at least not in relationship to what I see my kids going through today," he explained. The family subscribed to several newspapers that his parents read on a regular basis. There were magazines, too, that came to the home—*Woman's Day* for his mother as well as several of the newsweeklies. One memory of a family-related literacy activity which stood out to John during our interviews involved the reading of the weekend comics: "Sunday mornings, my mother would do breakfast and we'd go off to the living room and my father would start in with the comics. We'd all go through the funnies with him and then he'd finish reading the paper while we went off to play." John's mother had a penchant for puzzles—"cross-words, cryptograms, sidukos, things like that"—and sometimes he worked with her on solving these brainteasers. His mother also kept an extensive collection of cookbooks and liked to write out recipes on index cards, John explained as he recalled "a lot of Sundays spent helping my mother in the kitchen."

Like many boys, reading didn't really turn John on much while he was growing up. "I never had problems reading," he explained, "but it was not something that I enjoyed a lot of the time. I read what I liked to read. If I was given something that I had to read, I usually didn't enjoy it and probably didn't see it through." What John did like to read were comic books, spy novels, and sports books. An older cousin introduced him to *MAD* magazine and soon, John and his brother had drawers full of them. Asked if he could recall what appealed to him about *MAD*, he explained, "The humor. It was more off-beat and there was something about the magazine that seemed older—it was something that the older boys were doing." During our interviews, John recalled trips to the drug store to pick up the newest copy of *MAD* and Sunday afternoons spent discussing and trading the magazines with his cousins at family gatherings.

As a boy, John spent a good deal of time playing sports, especially hockey. This, combined with the fact that his younger brother was a sports fanatic who was constantly bringing home books on his favorite athletes, lead to an interest in reading about sports. The two boys collected trading cards growing up and frequently discussed the merits of teams and players. Later, in high school, John discovered a few novels that made an impression, books he has continued to enjoy to this day such as Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, George Orwell's *1984,* and Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Universe*. Stephen King's *The Stand*, which came out while John was in high school, "was and continues to be one of my favorite books." As for writing, John did very little of it "that wasn't required for school" and all the school-based writing that he could recall from English classes was writing about literature. "English classes focused more on literature and not writing," he recalled. "If any writing was involved, it was about form—sentences, paragraphs, that sort of thing." As we talked about high school English classes, John revealed no specific negative memories of teachers or assignments, but an overall sense of confusion about the purpose of English and a general distaste for the enterprise. "All I remember is that they were strict. English classes were repetitive and focused on the rules," John recalled. Furthermore,

> The English teachers never made, in my mind, a good argument for why we needed to do a lot of the different things we did. For example, classical or medieval literature, Chaucer—there's obviously something there to be appreciated, but you have to know what to appreciate. We were just given

> this text that was very hard to comprehend and you can't understand any of the words. I got decent grades. I never hated English class, but let's put it this way, for the things I liked, I would go the extra mile. I never did that with English classes.

Despite these frustrations, John graduated from high school in the spring of 1980 and left that fall for Clarkson. Like so many young people, he wasn't entirely sure where, at age eighteen, he was headed or what, finally, he wanted to do with his life. Like Tony Vaccaro, John had nurtured a growing fascination with computers during his high school years, taking a few computer classes in school and tinkering with a home computer in his free time. But unlike Tony, John's experiences with school were mostly positive and so it wasn't so difficult to imagine four more years of education. Still, only two years after enrolling at Clarkson, the first in his family to attend college, John returned home without a degree. "I wasn't ready for college," he explained during our interviews. "I was probably a little immature. It was my first time out of the house and I got a little too caught up in college life."

Upon returning home, John went to work full-time for a medical-billing company. "I started in basic operations, working nights," he explained. "It was ground-up kind of stuff. I was a computer operator, doing nightly back-ups, systems maintenance, that sort of thing." Meanwhile, he continued to take courses at a local university, hoping not to fall too far behind and fully intending to complete his degree. From 1982 until around 1986, when John met his wife, got married, and began a family, he followed this plan, working full-time, taking a few classes a semester, and chipping away at a degree. But by the late 1980s, with work taking up more and more of his time and family responsibilities taking up whatever time was leftover, John was forced to abandon his academic plans. He didn't set foot in a college classroom again until he enrolled at NSC in late 2005. But his training at work was ongoing. Throughout his career, John has participated in countless workplace-based courses, from seminars on new software applications to multi-week training programs on network and infrastructure development. "The minute I began in the professional workplace in IT, training was involved right from the start," John explained. "Onsite, offsite, certificate programs, the works. I've been going through twenty-years of it."

Reading and Writing at Work, Home, and School

Writing for Work

As an IT specialist, John's work can be quite varied, but it almost always involves computers and technology. John is the guy in the organization who makes sure that the software, hardware, and computer networks are running smoothly and doing what they are supposed to be doing. In his former job at EMI, he did this work internally, at the corporate headquarters. But in past jobs, he worked for IT consulting firms, contracting with external clients to address problems related to technology and network systems. In language characteristically saturated with the discourse of the IT world, John explained his role as an IT consultant in this way: "My role was to go out and engage with clients and architect solutions, deploy technologies, anything to do with PCs, networking, servers, stuff like that." At EMI, prior to the time when the company closed its doors, John was responsible for the connectivity between all the corporate offices, the design of the computer networks, and the maintenance of all servers, desktops, and software. He oversaw the user-support system and headed up all projects related to telecommunication.

As an IT specialist, John writes for multiple purposes and audiences and occupies an interesting rhetorical space. While he is not directly involved in business strategy or decision-making, as the individual responsible for building and maintaining the technological infrastructure, he is made familiar with and granted access to important and confidential information about a company's operations at the highest level. Out of this rhetorical positioning, he writes for those "above" him (emails, memos, assessment reports) and those "below" (emails, memos, company policy statements, technology deployment guides). He writes for audiences internal to the company (executives and managers as well as colleagues in the IT department) as well as those external (vendors, job applicants, colleagues in the IT field). John devised this analogy when explaining his rhetorical positioning during our interviews: "Let's say you're going on a trip. You bring your car into the mechanic and you say, 'Okay, I'm going to be driving 5,000 miles, just give it a good going over. Tell me what's good and what's bad and what I need to do to the vehicle to complete the trip." If we carry the analogy forward, we see that as the resident IT specialist, John, as the mechanic, is responsible for insuring that the vehicle, the company, has the technological infrastructure in place to successfully complete its trip or strategic objectives.

During our interviews, John shared with me several documents that he had created at previous jobs, including during his tenure at EMI. Aside from day-to-day internal and external communication, the composing John does on the job tends to serve one primary purpose, and that is advising the firm on its technological needs. His writing in this capacity is analytical and evaluative: the firm needs to make a decision about some new product, service, or restructuring so they call John in to guide the technical aspects of the change. As the resident IT expert, John evaluates options and makes suggestions to ensure a smooth "trip." To achieve his objectives, almost regardless of the project, John has come to rely on a three-part writing template, what he calls a "project engagement model," that is adaptable for many different rhetorical situations. He refers to the model, simply, as *desired state/current state/plan-to-move-forward* and he uses it to assess or evaluate a wide range of situations and problems—everything from small issues such as which software product to purchase to larger issues, such as the one illustrated below, in which John was charged with evaluating the entire IT infrastructure of the company.

Writing Sample #12: US Preliminary IT Assessment

US Preliminary IT Assessment

The purpose of this document is to summarize an initial assessment of two key areas in IT and to identify some of the more evident issues observed. The key areas to be reviewed encompass infrastructure and resources.

Infrastructure

The network, which includes LANs, WANs, remote access, servers, desktops and laptops, is a functional mix of technologies that provides basic services to the user community. The company is presently in the midst of a technology revitalization that is being driven by the pending IT Centralization project. Over the next six to nine months, the landscape of the IT Department and the overall infrastructure will be changing dramatically.

Technologies

Active Directory

The deployment of Microsoft Active Directory is relatively new. The Active Directory design implanted is a single forest, single tree, multiple domain model. This model effectively segments the company in to three major IT regions. Management and configuration of each of the individual domains occurs relatively independently.

Implementation of this model has two characteristics that could be considered drawbacks.

- Additional resources and complexity

  To manage this Active Directory model additional servers are required for the root level domain which in effect provides very little service functionality. The root level domain controllers, by design, have no account information or any other active directory objects. At the root level, the only Active Directory roles managed are the Schema Master and Domain Naming Master. Along with this additional layer of servers comes a relatively complex Active Directory replication which presently appears to be having some sporadic problems. In a much larger environment, the Active Directory model implemented at the company would be more appropriate but with so few users and such a small world-wide IT staff this implementation is inefficient. Based on the requirements outlined in the Management Wish List for Active Directory at the company, everything could have been achieved with a simple single domain model with any necessary segmentation handled at the Organizational Unit level.
- Ineffective use of IT resources

  Due to the added complexity of the Active Directory design, IT resources need to spend additional time managing the extra layer of servers. In addition because of the segmentation, it is not as easy to use IT resources on a global level. Again, a simple single domain approach managed with Organizational Units and Group Policies would have allowed for a more global approach to IT while still maintaining a flavor of regional independence.

Simplifying the environment, though possible, would be a major undertaking. Because the design has been deployed in to production, it is not recommended any redesign changes be undertaken at this time.

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During our interviews, I asked John what he needed to know, as the "mechanic," to create a document like the US Preliminary IT Assessment. He explained that the document had been created shortly after he started at a new job, where he was charged with evaluating the company's technological infrastructure (the "IT Centralization project") in order to complete a "technology revitalization." John explains:

> When I was brought in, I talked about some of the things that I wanted to do and one of them was an assessment of the current IT group and infrastructure. I identified a lot of problems just walking in the door. Then I went over and met with my boss and we went through a list of upcoming projects, priorities, things of that nature. Based on that conversation, a few items floated to the top and they were pretty high priorities, so that's what I based a lot of my assessment and analysis on. Ultimately, I needed to decide what were the key areas to look at in terms of the IT infrastructure so that I could start to address the problems with the IT group and drive those larger initiatives forward.

The purpose of the US Preliminary IT Assessment Report, then, was to evaluate the existing staff and technological infrastructure at the company in order to "feed that information up the chain and then start building a plan to make changes so we could start moving in the right direction." The audience for this particular document was John's bosses—the company's vice presidents and top executives.

As for the process by which the Assessment was composed, John began, as the above passage suggests, with the "desired state" stage. Ultimately, in order to build the IT infrastructure the company would need to achieve its objectives, he needed to know where they were headed. John put it this way: "All the initiatives, all the projects that were going on, that's what I needed to know—

what's coming up in the short-term, the long-term...what's high-priority, what's low-priority?" Accordingly, the first step in the production of the Assessment Report, as John explained, involved meeting with company leaders to assess goals and objectives. Next came the "current state" stage, where John sought to assess the company's existing "network environment." This meant researching and investigating two aspects of the IT infrastructure—technology and personnel. "I was pretty much given the keys to the kingdom," he explained as he described the piles of data he amassed during his visits to the various corporate locations. Having met with company leaders to assess goals and priorities (desired state) and performed a thorough analysis of the existing "network environment" (current state), John moved on to the final step in the production process, the plan-to-move-forward. In this final section of the report, John brought his considerable experience and expertise to bear on the problem of rebuilding the IT infrastructure. The US Preliminary IT Assessment, then, is both *informative* and *persuasive*. In it, John seeks to describe the specific conditions of the IT infrastructure as it currently exists and, ultimately, to persuade those above him of a proper course of action as regards the IT Centralization project.

As I peruse the US Preliminary IT Assessment, which runs to five single-spaced pages, a few things stand out. First, I note its sheer length and its originality of production. Unlike, for example, Tony's Orientation and Competency Manuals, the US Preliminary IT Assessment was not produced utilizing a right-click-steal strategy, but was assembled from scratch, as John spent days and weeks gathering relevant data and information to be included in the report. Very little, if any, of the US Preliminary IT Assessment report could be grabbed from somewhere else and pasted together with some original content. In comparison with all of the other workplace documents I have discussed in this dissertation, the US Preliminary IT Assessment contains, quite simply, a considerable quantity of original writing.

Perusing the document, I also notice its explicit organizational structure, the way that John announces the purpose and rationale for the report as well as the terrain that will be covered within it. I notice the way he provides clear sign-posts and contextual tools throughout the document, employing headings and subheadings, bold text, underlining, italics, and a series of bulleted lists to create a sense of structure and organization. I note the over-arcing framework of the piece, in which, under the heading "Issues Observed," John comments on particular aspects of the infrastructure, say the "End-User Computing Environment" and then, under the heading "Recommendations," proposes potential alternatives or solutions to problems or trouble-spots. I note, in particular, the logical, rational, authoritative tone of the report—a mix of technocratic and bureaucratic jargon that simultaneously reflects the values of the contemporary corporation and John's knowledge of and dexterity with technological discourse. A kind of "corporate techno-speak" abounds, as the following excerpts illustrate:

- The Active Directory design implanted is a single forest, single tree, multiple domain model.
- Issues identified through an initial discovery process are relatively minor in nature but are degrading the performance of the network.

- This suggestion will likely result in pushback from the end-user community but possibly can have the greatest positive impact for end-user support.

There is, in sum, very little sense of authorial presence in the US Preliminary IT Assessment, and yet a sense of *authority* is pervasive and ubiquitous.

Finally, I note the sensitivity with which John attempts to discuss the very real human topic of existing IT personnel (and also his unwillingness to drop the corporate techno-speak, despite the fact that his subject—humans, now, not computers—has shifted). "The U.S. team at the company is comprised of a dedicated group of individuals," he begins in the final section of the Assessment, called "Resources." "An initial informal skill set assessment has shown," he continues, "for the most part, only a low to mid level of proficiency in the use of tools and solutions deployed by IT." But, he explains, "This, I believe, in large part [is] due to lack of ownership of the solutions in place…" Still, "in some cases, a solid technical foundation does not exist to build additional skills and make natural career progressions." Thus, "Additional resources are being brought in to augment the staff" and "a formal management structure is being put in place to help address the issues of staff management, ownership responsibility, mentoring and team building." In sum, then, the rhetorical components, organizational structure, and tone of the US Preliminary IT Assessment suggest or construct a writer who is a knowledgeable insider in the corporate world and field of information technology, an apt swimmer in the ocean of techno-corporate discourse and a competent navigator of the "report" genre in which he is working.

I have taken a great deal of space to discuss the US Preliminary IT Assessment because according to John, it is emblematic of much of the workplace writing he produces. Other documents with which he presented me at our interview confirm this. One other document, an "Implementation Plan" for a new security hardware product, exemplifies the way in which John utilizes the desired state/current state/plan-to-move-forward template to address a problem that is considerably less "global" than in the case of the US Preliminary IT Assessment.

Writing Sample #13: HP ProCurve Implementation Plan

Overview

[redacted] Technologies's LAN infrastructure in all but one location is entirely based on HP ProCurve networking technology. It is the company's goal to implement a secure environment through the use of 802.1x technology. Of the solutions that were investigated, it was felt HP security offerings best matched the goals [redacted] is trying to achieve.

After discussing our goals and the desire to leverage our ProCurve infrastructure with HP resources, we learned the edge switches which service our users can not be used in an HP 802.1x solution.

Nevertheless, we believe the HP security solution best meets [redacted] Technologies' requirements for comprehensive security architecture. The purpose of this document is to outline the existing infrastructure and to present a plan for a migration to a ProCurve solution that will support an 802.1x security model.

Current State

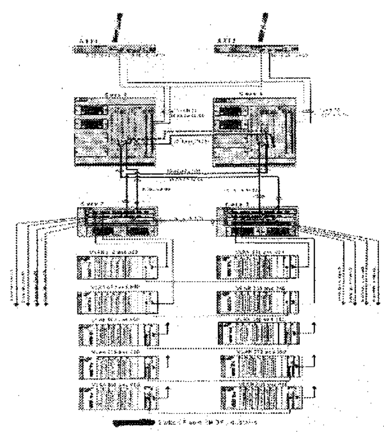
[redacted] uses four ProCurve models that are common across our LAN infrastructure. [redacted], being the corporate headquarters and IT center for the company, has a network design based on providing a highly reliable, completely redundant data center model. The Visio drawing on the next page depicts a portion of the [redacted] network. At the core of the network is a pair of redundant HP ProCurve 9308m routing switches. To service the user community, the 9308m units feed a pair of HP ProCurve 9304m routing switches which in turn feed a farm of Hp ProCurve 4000m switches. As the drawing depicts, the 4000m switches have dual failover capability in the event of hardware malfunction.

Remote offices have a scaled down version of this design with a HP ProCurve 6308m at the core of each office that feeds HP ProCurve 4000m switches.

The estimated inventory of edge switches and related components broken down by site is as follows:

Site	J4121A	J4111A	J4113A	J4115B	J4119A
[redacted]	12	21	12	12	12
[redacted] Spares	14			4	
Houston	4	12	4	4	4
Dallas	4	12	4	4	4
El Paso	2	6	2	2	2
Tampa	2	6	2	2	2
Cerritos	1	4			1

Houston, Dallas, El Paso and Tamp also have one 6508m switch each.



Desired State

In order to implement 802.1x security features based on HP ProCurve technology, all HP ProCurve 4000m units must be replaced with newer technology. To ensure the same level of redundancy, the following replacement hardware would be necessary for [redacted].

Product Name	ProCurve 5372xl	ProCurve Mini-GBIC	ProCurve 10/100
Part Number	J4848A	J4878A	J4820A
Quantity	4	2	2
List Cost Per Unit	$7129	$1299	$2379

Total retail cost for implementing new HP ProCurve technology in [redacted] is $35,872

In all remote offices, existing ProCurve technology could be replaced with HP ProCurve 2650 series switches for the sole purpose of implementing 802.1x security. If redundancy in the remote offices is a requirement, then a pair of ProCurve 2650 switches would be required otherwise a single unit in each office would suffice. A single switch per office design could be implemented as an initial phase with a second switch added in the future to enable redundancy.

Each ProCurve 2650 switch has a retail cost of $1569. Deploying to 6 remote offices would have an end-cost of $9414. Adding redundancy to the remote offices would bring the total cost for remote office infrastructure to $18818.

The total retail cost for deploying new switches to enable 802.1x security is $45286 for a total solution with no redundancy in remote offices or $54700 for total redundancy.

Recommendation

The HP 802.1x security model best meets the needs of [redacted] and will allow for future design enhancements. Also, because the solution is based on an architecture and platform with which we have a high degree of expertise, the deployment should be achievable very quickly with minimal disruption to the business.

I recommend this project be undertaken as soon as the true cost can be determined, taking in to consideration all savings realized through partner programs. [redacted] should be deployed initially followed by Houston, Dallas, El Paso, Tampa, Santa Clara and Cerritos. It will be possible for the deployment at each site to be completed over an evening after hours or during a weekend.

Deployment

Phase 1 - Design

Because the existing LAN design was based on a high growth plan, implementing new ProCurve edge switches presents an opportunity to re-engineer the current VLAN layout.

The existing design works well in our environment but contains more VLANs than we need and provides no significant benefit to the organization. Reducing the number of VLANs will simplify LAN routing and DHCP scope management.

Review, design and definition of standards will take approximately two weeks.

During the period that the LAN review and design is occurring, a parallel effort will take place to engineer the client infrastructure necessary to support 802.1x based security. Modifications to the RADIUS server, distribution and configuration of the 802.1x client component and certificate creation and management will be addressed at this level.

Phase 2 - Testing

The second phase is pre-deployment testing to ensure all components work as designed. Network authentication, client configuration and certificate compliance handling will be the main areas of interest. Each of these tests will validate the 802.1x security design's goal of keeping unauthorized devices off of the network.

Testing of the solution should take approximately one week.

Phase 3 - Implementation

[redacted]

Upon completion of the testing phase, implementation can occur in one of two ways. The first and preferable choice would be a weekend deployment that would entail distributing the client component and physically cutting all connections over to the new switches. The second choice would be a slower deploy during business hours. The benefit to the weekend implementation would be an immediate realization of the 802.1x security benefits. The downside would be a potential upsurge in end-user support requests on the first post-deploy business day. The second option would address the end-user support issue but the full security benefits would not be realized until the deployment is complete.

Remote Locations

The use of [redacted] or local resources for deploying the new switches will determine how quickly the remaining sites can be implemented. Because the size of each of the remote offices is relatively small compared to [redacted], deployment can occur very quickly if all local resources are used and the project is managed from [redacted]. If it is not practical to use remote resources, someone from the IS Operations group will need to travel to do the install.

The first thing I note about the Implementation Plan is the way in which John has actually used his key terms, explicitly, to organize the document (but changed the order of Current and Desired State, simplified plan-to-move-forward with "Recommendation," and added a final section on implementation called "Deployment"). Like the US Preliminary IT Assessment, the Implementation Plan falls under the genre of the business report and also like that document, both informs and persuades. Ultimately, the purpose of the report is to evaluate various security technologies to determine which product best meets the company's goals and budget. Unlike the US Preliminary IT Assessment, the Implementation Plan combines textual and graphic representations. The second page features an elaborate diagram that illustrates the "current state" of the EMI network. John created this diagram using Visio, a Microsoft product that allows users to represent information visually or graphically. During our interviews, he explained that he frequently uses Visio to give his readers, especially those with some technical know-how, a visual sense of some existing part of the corporate IT network, or of the change to the network that he is proposing.

In addition to producing evaluative and analytical reports, John's workplace writing serves several other purposes, which I will briefly summarize here. Aside from email, which he uses to communicate with audiences in and outside the company, John's writing serves as a record of policy, as he has occasionally produced company guidelines for technology-use. His writing also serves as a means of instruction in the form of "Deployment Guides," which are used by IT personnel to install new equipment and technology (e.g., "We need to do this work, we need to do it on a large scale, it's a repetitive process, here are the steps you need to go through"). Finally, in certain positions he has held in the past, John's writing has functioned in a kind of public relations capacity, as he has occasionally been responsible for posting employment opportunity ads and corresponding with potential candidates during job searches. Most, if not all, of the writing John does at work is individual in nature. As the head of IT, he rarely collaborates in the actual writing of documents, but IT staff do occasionally assist him in the process of gathering information for evaluative and analytic report-writing.

As an IT professional, John's writing moves up the chain-of-command and down, circulating both within his own organization and traveling outside. He writes to multiple audiences for multiple purposes out of multiple contexts. In the creation of a document such as the US Preliminary IT Assessment, John's writing is high stakes: "Essentially, what I'm doing," he explained, "is taking the company business plan for the next five years and creating an IT plan that supports it." Over the years, John has refined a writing strategy, current state/desired state/plan-to-move-forward that can be utilized for many different kinds of writing occasions. While the context of his writing may change, the strategy, generally, does not and it is the strategy or template that helps to structure John's response to a particular problem, providing a way to begin and a reliable framework for his analysis and recommendations. John's ongoing use of the current state/desired state/plan-to-move-forward composing strategy underscores the idea, well-known among those who study professional communication, that workplace writing is often a repetitive process whereby certain documents or composing strategies are used and re-used, cycled and recycled, to address a wide range of rhetorical problems and situations. In sum, in his capacity as an IT specialist, writing helps John solve complex technology-related problems and advise his employers on how to meet global strategic objectives and goals.

Neither Work nor School

Unlike Jennifer Jarvis, who rarely engages in writing for its own sake outside of work or school, or Tony Vaccaro who, perhaps not surprisingly, only writes when he absolutely has to (regardless of the context), John Beech has experimented a bit with writing when he's not at work or enrolled in classes. John's non-work, non-school writing is nothing that he has pursued in any kind of systematic way. But at different times in his life he has taken up the pen, or, more accurately, the keyboard, to get down his thoughts. Most recently, he tried something totally new, but not surprising given his line of work: John began writing an online weblog or blog.

Writing Sample #14: "in my sights"

Blogger [redacted] BlogThis! [redacted]

in my sights

WELCOME TO MY BRAIN DUMP. THIS IS MY LITTLE CORNER OF THE WEB WHERE I GET TO STAND UP ON MY SOAP BOX AND PRESENT MY POINT OF VIEW. I'M A TECHNOLOGIST (AKA GEEK) BUT THE TOPICS I WILL BE WRITING ABOUT WILL BE MOSTLY CENTERED ON NEWS AND POLITICS. I HOPE YOU ENJOY READING MY BLOGS AND IF NOT, I AT LEAST HOPE THEY MAKE YOU THINK.

wednesday, february 08, 2006

Education in America

As a reader of this blog, you may have noticed that I write with a somewhat critical point of view. I don't deny this at all. I do this not only to bring to light issues I believe are blights on the American and the world societies, but also to provoke thought. Obviously I have put some thought in to what I am presenting to you but I am but one voice scratching the surface of these issues. My goal is simply to create a spark and then hope enough of an intellectual breeze occurs around it to help ignite that spark in to a flame that becomes bright enough to enlighten.

To be enlightened, there must be understanding and to have understanding there must be education. Education and knowledge are the seeds that allow us as individuals, groups, societies, countries and humanity as a whole to grow. Why then, is the public education system in the United States in such turmoil? Common sense dictates that there is a higher potential for someone who is educated to be a greater asset to society. Conversely, a person who is not educated is a possible liability or detriment. If we can agree on that basic premise then does is make any sense at all that the latest federal budget proposal cuts education funding, raises defense spending and continues to support tax cuts that mainly benefit the wealthy? Programs such as Head Start have been labeled as "non performing". It's a know fact that a person's capacity for learning diminishes over time and that capacity is greatest during early childhood. Eliminating a program like Head Start means an opportunity is being missed to take advantage of utilizing that higher capacity.

I'd like to frame part of my argument around an issue that we are being exposed to incessantly twenty four hours a day. That issue is the defense

about me

Sagacious

[redacted]

I'm 43 years old, married and have 4 kids, a German Shepherd and a cat. I grew up just outside of [redacted] and graduated from the public school system there in 1980. I studied Computer Science in college and have worked and consulted primarily in the [redacted] area. We moved over the border in to [redacted] in 1998 and have enjoyed life in a rural setting since. I have two girls and two boys. My oldest daughter is graduating high school this year and is currently trying to decide which colleges she will be applying. Her plans are following up her undergraduate degree with a medical degree and becoming a doctor. My other children are just as ambitious and already have plans to persue careers in architecture, writing and programming respectively.

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John started “in my sights” in the fall of 2005 and the project was somewhat short-lived (as of this writing, he has only posted three entries). The fact of his abandoning “in my sights” is less interesting, though, than the fact of his having started it at all. Neither Jennifer nor Tony were experimenting with this new online genre of writing. In fact, none of the five other participants I interviewed for this project were writing blogs, although two did write frequently for their own purposes outside of work or school. I see “in my sights” as John’s attempt to simultaneously experiment with a new medium or genre of writing and, as he put it in his introduction “stand up on my soap box and present my point of view.”

The idea for “in my sights” came to John one day while he was listening to a radio show on blogging. He had never kept a journal or a diary in his life. At this time, he was already a frequent visitor of a number of technology-related blogs, but because John is a bit of political junky, he decided to focus his blog on “news and politics.” Entries in “in my sights” address such topics as education, national defense, energy policy, health care, technological innovation, and campaign finance reform. Here is an excerpt from an entry on “Campaign Finance”:

> Welcome to my first blog. I thought I'd take out the big guns and aim at a topic that drives me absolutely insane. The way we allow our politicians to raise cash and fund their campaigns is absolutely criminal, or it should be. I'm not going to present a lot of facts here because frankly I don't have the time to do a lot of research. If you've followed elections at all you have most likely heard about the fantastic amounts of monies that are raised. In the 2004 presidential elections Bush and Kerry combined raised close to **1 BILLION dollars** for their campaigns. Is it just me or does it seem completely absurd that a billion dollars would be spent on trying to get elected to a job that pays $400,000 a year?

Each of the three entries in "in my sights" reads pretty much like this one. Unlike his workplace writing, John's blog writing is much more process-oriented, free-ranging, and unstructured. His tone is informal. He speculates. He asks questions. He expresses disapproval and surprise. Unlike his workplace writing, he frequently employs the first-person pronoun, *I*, to convey a sense of the man behind the words. In one entry he wonders, "does it make any sense at all that the latest federal budget proposal cuts education funding, raises defense spending and continues to support tax cuts that mainly benefit the wealthy?" Later, as he discusses math and science education, he sites a *Washington Post* article on "the results of the PISA [Programme for International Student Assessment] study" and marvels that, of the 29 countries surveyed for the study, "the United States, arguably the most powerful, privileged and affluent country in the world, scored 24^{th}." He scoffs at the Bush administration's proposal to fly a man to Mars and points out that just buying hybrid automobiles is not going to solve our national energy problem. Whereas his workplace writing tends to be highly structured and organized, his blog entries are fast and furious, his sentences quick, uncorrected, and final. All of this constructs a writer hardly taking a moment to come up for air, so engaged is he in the process of getting his thoughts down on the page.

In "in my sights," too, John is a competent and savvy rhetor, self-consciously aware of the specific social, cultural, and historic circumstances out of which he is writing. Take, for example, the following passage about national security: "I'd like to frame part of my argument around an issue that we are being exposed to twenty-four hours a day. That issue is the defense and security of our country. I first want to state that I believe the United States needs a strong defense and security infrastructure." Writing in a political climate in which those who criticized the foreign policy decisions of the Bush Administration were accused of lacking sufficient patriotism and labeled soft on terrorism, John understands the importance of foregrounding his commitment to U.S. "defense and security" before moving on to his argument, where he claims that military force, alone, is an insufficient foreign policy tool. "If we understand the language and culture of people who may be a potential threat then we stand a better chance of being able to defend ourselves," he writes. "More important than defense is diplomacy which depends greatly on understanding." John's criticisms of the Bush administration, like this one, run throughout "in my sights," but they are rarely inflammatory. In another entry he writes, "We see innovation and ingenuity every day but it is not embraced as a policy of our government the way it should be." While his words seem to come fast and furious, John's discourse rises above the level of the current regime of culture warriors and talk-show know-it-alls—his tone, while provocative, is measured, restrained, and thoughtful.

Yet, like many amateur blogs about news and politics, "in my sights" sometimes has a "sky is falling" feel to it. As anyone who has read a blog by a friend, family member, or colleague will tell you, blogs written by nonprofessionals lend themselves particularly well to rants, to extended gripes about *the current state of things*. "in my sights" is no exception. Here, for example, is John on our educational system:

> Education and knowledge are the seeds that allow us as individuals, groups, societies, countries and humanity as a whole to grow. Why then, is the public education system in the United States in such turmoil?

And campaign finance:

> Is this nation really a nation of the people, by the people and for the people? How can it be if the people who run our country are bought and paid for by corporations and special interest groups?

And just about everything else:

> It seems to me that this country, and perhaps the entire world, is approaching a perfect storm conditions that will possibly lead to catastrophic economic upheaval. Huge amounts of consumer debt, record unemployment, skyrocketing energy, fuel and food prices, and industry (specifically automotive and transportation) that has not significantly progressed in 50 years are all major factors in what I believe will be the imminent demise of any meaningful standard of living unless something is done.

Importantly, though, John doesn't just rant. He also speculates about how to fix the problems he gripes about. To the problem of a diplomacy that is too quick to jump to military action, he offers the alternative of "cultural understanding." To the problem of our current, privately funded campaign finance system, he advocates an end to private campaign contributions and a return to a publicly funded system ("Lets get campaigning back to grass roots."). To the problem of the gathering "perfect storm" of "consumer debt, record unemployment, skyrocketing energy, fuel and food prices, and industry (specifically automotive and transportation) that has not significantly progressed in 50 years," he argues for "a 21st century version of The New Deal." Importantly, then, John sees writing, and writing "in my sights," as a means of democratic participation:

> Identifying problems like this is only half the battle. Anyone can point at some issue or injustice and say "that sucks" and then keep

> on walking by…I don't want to fall into that category. We're in an information age and have the ability to create and share ideas more efficiently and effectively than ever before through the Internet, blogging, and podcasting. Each and every one of us has the ability to have our voices heard now and all we need to do is get up off of our asses and speak out.

"in my sights," then, is not just an opportunity to experiment with a new genre and not just a forum for thinking through issues, but also a way of taking action. Despite the optimism of that final line, a perhaps naïve belief in the transformative power of technology, clearly, "in my sights" is John's effort to put his money where his mouth is—to have his voice heard, to get up off *his* ass and identify problems and solutions.

Writing for School

During the time when I interviewed John, he was enrolled in his first course at NSC, Critical Thinking, one of the four "core" courses all students must take (or test out of). Thus, the amount of school-based writing he could share with me was somewhat limited. Two of the essays that John produced in Critical Thinking struck me as particularly interesting and it is to these two pieces that I will now turn. The first, the title of which is, simply, "Steinbeck Assignment," seems to be a standard literary analysis essay of the type that one might produce in a lower-level introductory literature course. The second, which has no title other than "Research Essay," appears to be persuasive in nature and takes as its focus the U.S. campaign finance system. The outline that I have included with John's Steinbeck paper (below) was a required part of the assignment. John produced an almost identical outline for the persuasive piece on campaign finance reform and explained to me during our interviews that he and his classmates were instructed to use the Issue/Conclusion/Reasons/Evidence template in virtually all of their written work in Critical Thinking.

Writing Sample #15: Steinbeck Assignment (with outline)

[redacted]
Critical Thinking
Steinbeck Assignment

March 14, 2006

Does the land take on the qualities and characteristics of a woman to Joseph? Steinbeck, throughout his novel To a God Unknown, writes about the land as if it is a woman. He describes the land as having feminine features no only overtly but also using underlying tones.

Joseph Wayne, in his thoughts, views the land as having womanly features. Both when he is traveling back to his property after recording his homestead and when he is returning after taking Elizabeth as his wife we see evidence of this. After recording his deed and while returning to his land, Joseph dresses in new clothes as if to make a good impression but he is going back to nobody but his homestead. Also, as he approaches, he feels as if he is meeting with a wise and beautiful woman. As he is returning with Elizabeth after they have wed, Joseph in his mind compares the pass to the womb as he and Elizabeth, the sperm and the egg, pass through and in to it. Time after time whenever the land is referenced, it is either openly described or alluded to as having various womanly qualities.

Joseph is also openly lustful towards his land. Not only does he see it as having feminine characteristics, there is also has a physical effect it has on him. Upon his return for the first time as he gazes over the countryside and looks in to the valley, which in itself could have sexual overtones, Joseph experiences an orgasm. These lustful actions continue when he gets back to his tent and actually throws himself on the earth and makes love to it. Joseph also feels not only a sense of ownership but also a great feeling of responsibility which could be interpreted as a partnership or marriage. The lust and love Joseph displays is not something that would ever be applied to an inanimate object and in generally reserved for the bond between man and woman and for procreation.

Another prominent theme, which supports the representation of the land as having features of a woman, is the cycles we observe. The land can almost be seen as having a menstrual cycle. We are taken through periods of fertility when the land produces an overabundance of food and hay and the animal increase in numbers. Like a woman who is pregnant, the land is thought to have a special glow during this fruitful period. Drought and barrenness follow as the second stage in the cycle. During this stage nothing reproduces and the fruitfulness of the land seems to withdraw. This could be associated with a post-ovulation period in a woman after the peak of the reproduction cycle has ended. Finally the cycle is completed with the flow of blood. Once the blood has flowed, as in the menstrual cycle, fertility returns. Granted it is Joseph's blood that completes the cycle and brings the fertility back but it can be seen as more than symbolism because as he is dying he has a self realization that he is the land.

The description of the land and the cycles it went through represent a woman both through analogy and direct comparison. Joseph is unequivocally affected by these strong characteristics and reacts in a physical way as he would with a woman. The repeated references and view of the land having female like characteristics combined with Joseph's overt lust for it and the cycle we see it go through provide extremely strong evidence to Steinbeck's representation of the land as a woman.

[redacted]
Critical Thinking
Steinbeck Outline

March 14, 2006

Issue: Does the land in Steinbeck's novel "To a God Unknown" represent woman?
Conclusion: Yes

Reason 1: Joseph sees and describes the land in feminine terms
Evidence:

- After recording title Joseph went back to his land dressed to make a good appearance. (p. 4)
- Joseph is anxious upon returning to his land for the first time and has a feeling described as going to meet a beautiful and wise woman. (p. 5)
- The land is described as having a feminine quality. (p. 5, p. 52, p. 54)

Reason 2: Joseph is lustful for the land
Evidence:

- Joseph orgasms after taking possession of the land and returning for the first time. (p. 7)
- Joseph feels a strong sense of responsibility towards the land. (p. 7)
- Joseph made love to the land. (p. 8)

Reason 3: The fertility of the land has cycles like a woman's fertility
Evidence:

- The land goes through a period of fertility, then drought and returns to fertility only after the flow of blood.

Summary: Steinbeck both through direct comparison and analogy gives the land a strong womanly characteristic.

If we think of John's essay on Steinbeck's *To A God Unknown* as we thought of Jennifer Jarvis' persuasive piece on oil exploration in ANWR, which is to say as an approximation or a rough performance of a particular genre of academic writing, in this case, the literary analysis essay, there is much to notice. His knowledge of the generic New Critical essay, based, most likely, on years of writing similar such pieces in high school English classes, appears to have stayed with him as he tries, in this piece, to tease out the ways in which Steinbeck invests "the land" with feminine traits.[31] With the help of his instructor's Issue/Conclusion/Reasons/Evidence template, John seems to understand the basic rhetorical moves he must make to work within this genre. I note, in particular, the clarity with which John makes his argument, an argument that he states in the first paragraph (second sentence) and the last paragraph (final sentence), thus beginning and ending his essay with a clear and unambiguous thesis statement, as so many of us are taught to do when we learn how to write the five-paragraph theme in high school (John's Steinbeck essay, perhaps not surprisingly, is exactly five paragraphs).

John also understands the importance of looking to the literary text itself to locate "evidence" to support one's assertions. He mostly points to scenes. There is the scene where the main character, Joseph, goes to get the deed for his land, the scene where he returns home to his land with his wife, the scene where he "gazes over the countryside" and "experiences an orgasm," and the scene where

[31] The problem, of course, is that aside from high school students writing for standardized exams and/or old-fashioned English teachers, very few, if any, of those who profess literature write literary analysis essays like this anymore. Thus, to some extent, and by no fault of his own, John is working in a kind of non-genre—that is, a genre that is no longer produced by an actual discourse community.

he "throws himself on the earth and makes love to it." Two of John's three middle or "body" paragraphs are devoted to textual evidence. In the third "body" paragraph, he leaves textual references behind to speculate about the connections between the cycle of the earth's seasons and a woman's menstrual cycle, thus bolstering or elaborating his argument about the ways in which the land is a symbol of femininity in the novel.

In this short piece on *To A God Unknown*, I would suggest that in many ways, John is successful in his effort to work within the conventions of the generic New Critical literary genre. A big part of writing about literature, of course, is making arguments and supplying evidence, both of which John does competently (perhaps due to his instructor's template). When I asked him what grade he received on this assignment, John explained that he received an "A" on the essay and an "A" in the course. This is not necessarily surprising as John did what his teacher asked: he identified an issue ("Does the land in Steinbeck's "To a God Unknown" represent woman?"), reached a conclusion ("Yes"), supplied reasons ("Joseph sees and describes the land in feminine terms," "Joseph if lustful for the land," "The fertility of the land has cycles like a woman's fertility"), and provided evidence (multiple passages and scenes). In this way, John fulfilled the terms of the assignment.[32] Strangely, in this instance, writing in the school

[32] The extent to which he met the conventions of the genre, however, is another question. Regardless of his ability to persuade readers about the ways in which "the land take[s] on the qualities and characteristics of a woman" in *To A God Unknown*, John comes up short in one important way: he doesn't answer the "so what?" question. So Steinbeck gives the land "womanly features"—what are we to do with this information? Why does it matter? What, in comparing the land to a woman, is Steinbeck up to? How does this analogy aid us in our developing understanding of the novel? In this way, John is able to make one of the two moves that are important to the genre (or non-genre): he is able to play with the notion of symbols or symbolism.

context proves to be quite similar to the way in which John writes on the job: one identifies a pre-arranged template or formula and simply plugs in the relevant information as one goes. John's teacher's Issue/Conclusion/Reason/Evidence template is hardly different from his own desired state/current state/plan-to-move-forward outline. In this way, oddly, John's workplace writing may have prepared him well for the demands of academic writing. The larger message from this assignment seems to be that in school, as in the workplace, writing is mostly formulaic—that, unlike the writing that appears, for example, in John's blog, writing in school is less a tool for "critical thinking" than it is the written representation of thinking-already-completed.

The second example of academic writing John shared with me during our interviews, an essay that is too long to reprint here its entirety, was a four-and-a-half page piece on the U.S. campaign finance system. This essay was the cumulative project of the Critical Thinking course. Students could write on any topic of interest, so long as they utilized the Issue/Conclusion/Reason/Evidence template. In John's essay on campaign finance reform, we see much of the same material that we have already seen in his blog. His argument, for example, is essentially unchanged:

> Creating a system of campaign financing, funded by the public in conjunction with a program of strict lobbying control and fact checking of claims made and data presented, will force our politicians to focus on and serve the people of the United States, their true constituents, and not the large corporations and special interests.

But he is unable to make the second and more significant move, which is to use his analysis to comment on the overarching meaning or meanings of the work.

As in his blog, in John's campaign finance essay we again see the compelling data about the amount of money spent on elections. And again, we gain a sense of John's considerable political knowledge as he references the myriad ways in which money has come to play a troubling role in public life.[33]

The idea that writing is a rhetorical process may get lost in these two examples of John's academic writing from the Critical Thinking class. While John was able to use his instructor's template to structure both of the two essays he shared with me and was rewarded for doing so with a good grade, the extent to which that structure helped him improve his writing in ways that might have been meaningful to him or helpful in other academic contexts seems unclear. There is a tension, I think, between John's ability to think critically, an activity at which he is more than competent, and his teacher's expectation that he use the same Issue/Conclusion/Reason/Evidence template in all of his written work in the class. As I think back on the outlines John crafted and the essays he subsequently produced for Critical Thinking, I'm struck by the fact that what may have mattered most was not what John had to say, but rather, whether or not he could follow instructions and effectively use the template to organize his writing.

I'm also struck by the contrast between John's writing in and out of school. In his blog and workplace writing, John uses writing to "think critically" about a whole range of social, political, and professional problems. In particular, as his US Preliminary IT Assessment illustrates, on the job, John is a problem-solver, using writing to address all kinds of high-stakes questions: How should a

[33] He cites the smear campaigns leveled against John McCain in the 2000 Republican primary and John Kerry in the 2004 general election; the Bush Administration's attempts at buying off members of the media; the rise of the K Street Project; and the Jack Abramoff scandal.

company restructure its IT infrastructure? Which technologies will ensure that a company's computer networks remain secure? What are the policies and procedures by which all employees must abide in their daily use of technology? There is, of course, a kind of "critical thinking" involved in answering all of these questions, but it is not the kind of "critical thinking" that those of us who teach in colleges and universities might think of when we use the term.

Discussion and Analysis

In his book, *The Work of Nations*, former Clinton Administration Labor Secretary Robert Reich identifies the "three jobs of the future": routine production services, in-person services, and symbolic-analytic services. The final item in the list, symbolic-analytic services, Reich describes as the vocation of the post-industrial economy. Symbolic-analysts (e.g., management consultants, strategic planners, and systems analysts), he explains, "sit before computer terminals—examining words and numbers, moving them, altering them, trying out new words and numbers, formulating and testing hypotheses, designing and strategizing" (179). They create "reports, plans, designs, drafts, memoranda, layouts, renderings, scripts, or projections" and their "Income depends on the quality, originality, cleverness, and occasionally, speed with which they solve, identify, or broker new problems." (179) Thus, symbolic analysts trade on their ability to manipulate symbols, data, words, oral and visual representations. They are, according to Reich, the "knowledge workers" driving the "new economy."

Of all the participants I interviewed for this study, John Beech most exemplifies Reich's symbolic-analyst. As an IT specialist, he spends his days reading, writing, researching and representing. He is in a continual state of learning, constantly confronting and analyzing new problems and questions and trying to devise solutions. He regularly browses IT message boards, technology websites like www.cnet.com, and high-tech periodicals such as *Information Week* in order to keep up with developments in the IT industry. Because there are always new problems to solve in the IT world and always new products to use in solving them, John's learning on the job and the application of that learning never ends.

Enrolling at NSC began a new process of learning for John and a new process of personal problem-solving. If we ask the simple question, *Why is John in school?*, the answer is complicated. On one level, he's in school because he had an employment scare. Prior to the time when his former employer, EMI, filed for bankruptcy, John was serving as the company's Director of Information Systems and Operations, overseeing, at one point, a staff of up to thirty IT professionals. When he enrolled at NSC, then, it wasn't because, like Jennifer Jarvis, he was trying to transition into a new career or, like Tony Vaccaro, because he needed a college diploma to achieve his immediate professional goals. It was because he was concerned that his lack of a college diploma had finally caught up with him and was going to prevent him from finding gainful employment.

In many ways, as we have seen, John had already achieved many of his professional goals prior to the time when he enrolled at NSC. Over a twenty-year career, he worked his way up through the ranks. He started out in the IT industry with entry-level work, moved into consulting, and then reached management or administration. In this way, we might imagine John's story as a kind of pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps tale of success. But it's also a story, as he pointed out during our interviews, about a particular industry, a particular historical moment, and a particular geographical location and what happens when one's talents and interests align in a fortuitous way with these three factors. Over the course of American history, there have been periods when rapid economic developments have interfered with the "official" processes of credentialing. One thinks here of Bill Gates of Microsoft or Steve Jobs of Apple, neither of whom followed the traditional route towards professional credentialing but have still achieved enormouse professional success. In addition to their considerable talent and business acumen, these men must attribute a sizeable portion of their achievement to simply being in the right place at the right time. Their stories illustrate the ways in which certain individuals with certain talents living in certain places at certain times are able to bypass the traditional routes of credentialing and professional certification and still succeed.

John's story, while on one level a narrative about hard work and determination, is, on another level, a part of this larger narrative. "I've made it to a relatively high level in my career without having completed my degree," he explained during our interviews.

> Back [in the 1980s and 90s], there was so much going on. The IT and computer industries, especially around the city in which I was living, were just booming. There was a high demand for employees and I found out early on in my career that a lot people I was working with didn't even have technical training. A lot of them actually had backgrounds in music! It was easier to get in and prove yourself without the degree or the background in those days.

It may still be possible to "get in and prove yourself without the degree" in the IT industry these days, but what one can accomplish without a degree may, eventually, have its limits. While on one level, John enrolled at NSC during the winter of 2005-06 because he needed to solve the short-term problem of finding a job, on another level, he was trying to solve a much bigger problem and that was where, professionally, he was headed over the long-term of his career. John's basic problem is this: without a college degree, or at this point, a graduate degree, he may finally have hit a professional ceiling. While some of his colleagues have gone off to pursue MBAs, allowing them to move farther up the IT management ladder or to go off and join larger firms, John has realized that in order to join them he, too, will need some kind of graduate degree. But unlike his colleagues, before he can begin to pursue such a degree, he's going to have to first complete his Bachelor's degree. "To go to the next level and beyond, that is most likely not going to be possible, or at least it won't be anywhere near as easy," John explained during our interviews.

In this way John's story suggests the way in which global and national economic transformations shape individual's lives, but perhaps not always in the ways we imagine. The "boom" years of the computer and technology industries allowed John and, presumably, many millions of workers like him, to bypass a process of credentialing that was all but mandatory for Americans seeking to gain access to the professional workplace and the professional class. Ultimately, however, as John's experience illustrates, there may be a limit to how much one can achieve working outside the official credentialing system. For John, then, a Bachelor's degree is little more than a means to that larger goal, a graduate degree and, ultimately, the ability to reach "the next level," whatever that may be. Undoubtedly, he has the workplace experience and knowledge to pursue such a degree. What's holding him back from doing so, oddly, is the academic credential, a Bachelor's degree, which he does not have. In this way, perhaps more than any of the other participants in this study, John's story illustrates the messy and often circuitous routes by which some professional adult learners arrive in the post-secondary classroom as well as the considerable professional knowledge and experience some such students bring to their educational endeavors. My guess is that there are many professional adult students out there with stories like John's, stories which may not be quite the same in the particulars of their details, but which suggest the often untidy reality of individual's professional lives and the ways in which many professional adult students, like John, are in a continual process of "beginning to finish something."

Epilogue

One year after interviewing him for this project, John Beech was working for a company called TEK Consulting, serving as their Network Manager. When I spoke with him during a follow-up interview, John explained that he loved his job, but that getting to it was nearly killing him as TEK's offices, one state away, required a daily commute of between three and four hours (by car, by train, by light rail, and by foot). Needless to say, John is no longer enrolled at NSC. After completing the Critical Thinking course, he enrolled in a second class, The Writing Process, but dropped out when it became apparent to him that with his daily commute and a new national and international travel regiment, it was going to be impossible to work full-time and still pursue classes part-time at NSC. One year after enrolling at NSC, John has no plans to re-enroll at the school or anywhere else. As he explained, "[A Bachelor's degree] is probably an upside down investment for me at this point." Still, he is aware, as he has always been, of the symbiotic relationship between education and professional advancement, especially in a field like information technology: "I have at least 20 years left in the work force, so developing and broadening my academic skills will ultimately be the only way for me to diversify my career options or excel past the level I have already achieved." For now, though, it seems as though life has once again gotten in the way of John's ability to complete his degree.

CHAPTER SIX

LEARNING FROM PROFESSIONAL ADULT STUDENTS

> I am writing to draw on the collective wisdom and knowledge base of the people on this list one more time, so that I may best assist our College of Professional Studies in developing a hybrid writing course...CPS courses are taken exclusively by people who have a full-time job, who are attending college to earn a BA in order to be eligible for promotion and/or an alternative career. The students are usually mature individuals who must retain their full-time employment to support their families. I'm looking for materials grounded in mature experience of working life, which also have a strong critical thinking/theory component, as the students' writing course will be introducing them not simply to genre but critical thinking and problem solving.
>
> Christine Ross, posting to WPA-L (3/5/07)

> While we view the different perspectives that older students bring as resources, teaching them well will likely require that we rethink our notion of whom we teach and our assumptions about them. Having older students may ultimately affect our assignment-making, class discussions, and dynamics inside and outside the classroom just as having students from a variety of linguistic and ethnic backgrounds often does.
>
> Beverly J. Moss and Keith Walters, "Rethinking Diversity: Axes of Difference in the Writing Classroom" (452)

In her chapter on case study research, MacNealy (1999) writes,

> [E]mpirical researchers use the term [case study] to refer to a carefully designed project to systematically collect information about an event, situation, or small group of persons or objects for the purpose of exploring, describing, and/or explaining aspects not previously known or considered. The purpose is to develop new insights, new knowledge. (197)

With this goal of developing "new insights" in mind, in this chapter I suggest implications of my study for composition researchers and teachers as well as colleges and universities that serve populations of professional adult students. I do so cautiously, well aware that, as MacNealy reminds us, findings from case studies "can rarely be generalized," but confident, nonetheless, that the stories I have told in this dissertation of literacy, school, and work have much to teach us about the experiences and expectations of professional adult students like Jennifer Jarvis, Tony Vaccaro and John Beech.

Disciplinary Implications

There are, I believe, important disciplinary implications of this dissertation for the field of composition studies. One must begin with the relative absence of scholarly work about students like Jennifer, Tony, and John—working adult learners who are pursuing the bachelor's degree for reasons of professional development and/or transition. The obvious question, given changing demographics of the college student population, is how professional adult students have remained under our collective scholarly radar for so long. There may be institutional factors at work here. As Paul Matsuda points out in his article "The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in U.S. College Composition," over time, teachers develop a sense of their "imagined audience" based on the students they know and teach day-after-day, year-in and year-out. Since many researchers in the field of composition studies work at institutions where the student population tends toward the traditional, one could suggest that when composition scholars plan research studies, their "imagined audiences" for such projects are often traditional-age students.[34] If this is true, it may not be surprising that we see so few professional adult learners in our body of scholarly work: many such students enroll at alternative kinds of post-secondary institutions, where the community of composition scholars and researchers are often absent, for example, so-called "for-profit" schools like the University of Phoenix, "nontraditional" public institutions like NSC, or the increasingly ubiquitous programs of "Continuing Studies" that colleges and universities who serve traditional-age student populations are developing to capture a piece of the growing adult learner market. In sum, when we think about the dearth of research on professional adult students like Jennifer, Tony, and John, one reason for this absence could be that such students are simply not often within the sights of those in our field in a position to write about them.

But then, there may be more complex forces at work in obscuring the presence of professional adult students from composition researchers and, consequently, the field of composition. As I pointed out in my Introduction, certain kinds of adult learners have shown up in our research for years (e.g. non-native speakers, those with so-called "low levels" of literacy). One wonders why we have shown such great interest in these adult students, both in and outside the official curriculum, and not professional adult students such as Jennifer, Tony, and John. Like any other discourse community, of course, certain stories resonate with those of us who profess composition more than others. My sense

[34] According to the 2003 NCES report "Participation Trends and Patterns in Adult Education: 1991-1999," at public four-year institutions, 42.5% of undergraduates are what we might think of as traditional students. At private colleges and universities, that percentage is even higher.

is that since our disciplinary emergence in the early 1960s, and with the exception of the recent growth and expansion of the field of technical and professional communication, compositionists have tended to place a high value on stories, or more accurately, scholarship, that examines the ways in which literacy and literacy instruction contribute to personal or social empowerment and/or transformation. As Thomas Newkirk points out in his article, "The Dogma of Transformation," one of our key goals as teachers of writing has often been to encourage students "to name, to question, and to actively resist," the various discourses that seek to construct them (266). In this way, we have attempted to work towards larger goals such as social justice, racial equality, and political empowerment. Our scholarship, with adult and traditional-age students alike, is replete with stories of "lives on the boundary"—that is, stories where literacy functions as a crucial tool in helping to turn lives around.[35]

Before I continue, let me be clear on two points: First, I am not arguing that we should stop working with and researching the experiences of disadvantaged or underserved populations of adult students or any students, for that matter. On the contrary, our desire to reach out to such populations is one of the things that makes the field of composition unique and about which we should feel proud. Second, I am not arguing that we should abandon the sense of social and/or political mission behind so much of our work. I would not have entered

[35] Of course, I'm referring here to Mike Rose's compelling book, *Lives on the Boundary*, which serves as an excellent extended illustration of this notion of the "transformative" trope. Throughout *Lives on the Boundary*, literacy is positioned as a tool of individual and social empowerment, in the lives of traditional-age and adult students alike.

this field, nor, I suspect, would have many others, had a commitment to social action and political and economic justice been absent.

What I *am* trying to point out is the way in which our own disciplinary values and preference for certain kinds of stories about literacy and literacy instruction can sometimes obscure other kinds of narratives, in the case of this dissertation, stories of professional adult students like Jennifer, Tony, and John, that is, students whose educational motivations may have little or nothing to do with a desire for social or personal transformation and much to do with a need for *professional* or *economic* transformation.[36] I would suggest that a second reason why we in the field of composition studies have perhaps neglected to adequately investigate the literate experiences and needs of professional adult students of the kind I have discussed in this dissertation may be that this population of students fail to fit comfortably into our preference for stories (or scholarship) in which literacy functions as a tool of personal and/or social transformation. Having taught professional adult students myself, and now, having conducted a research project with a small group of such students, my sense is that there may be some level of disconnect between the values they bring to schooling and our own disciplinary values, between their desire to gain skills and tools that will help them move ahead in their professional lives and our desire, as Newkirk (2006)

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[36] According to the NCES report "Work First, Study Second: Adult Undergraduates Who Combine Employment and Post-secondary Enrollment," "85 percent of adult employees who study reported that gaining skills to advance in their current job or future career was an important consideration in their post-secondary education" (viii). Furthermore, 80% of adults surveyed reported enrolling in college to complete a degree or credential and "roughly one-third (36 percent) [...] had enrolled to obtain additional education required by their job" (viii). This is not to say that professional and economic considerations are the only factors motivating students to enroll in formal programs of study. According to this same report, 89 percent of those surveyed "also reported that personal enrichment was an important factor" in their enrollment decision (viii).

has put it, to help them "to name, to question, and to actively resist" the various cultural discourses that seek to construct them.[37] In sum, our long-standing commitment to issues of personal and/or social transformation, rooted, as we are, in the humanistic tradition and housed, as we often seem to be, within English Departments, may prevent us from seriously considering the very real concern over *professional* or *economic* transformation that engagement with professional adult learners makes palpable.

Of course, the desire for economic or professional development which prompts so many adult students, and, if we are to be honest, many undergraduates, to enroll in formal programs of post-secondary study is, in many ways, more in step with broader shifts in literacy-use that have occurred over the course of the past several decades. These changes have been investigated and examined by Deborah Brandt in her book *Literacy in American Lives*. Noting that literacy has, over the course of U.S. history, served a variety of masters (e.g., church, state), Brandt sets out to document shifting conceptions of literacy in the broader society in our own time. She concludes that over the course of the twentieth century, literacy became implicated in economic relations in new and unprecedented ways, becoming "a key resource, a raw material, for the American economy" (188). She elaborates on this idea of the economic imperatives for literacy development in the following passage:

[37] Goals such as naming, questioning and resisting may seem entirely appropriate when working with traditional-age undergraduate students, who, one can argue, are often still in a period of social, psychological, and emotional development. But most adult students are at an entirely different stage of development, which isn't to say that we shouldn't engage them in issues of personal or critical reflection, but it is to say that the experience of doing so may be entirely different and may be met with resistance.

> Turbulent economic and technological changes force changes in the nature of work, rearrangements in systems of communication and social relations, and fluctuation in the value of human skills. With the unique kinds of economic and technological changes of the twentieth century, those fluctuations came especially to affect the value of literacy. Demands on reading and writing rose sharply. Rapid-process production, technological innovation, modern weaponry, corporate consolidation, the growth of consumerism, the rise in knowledge industries, and the spread of computer technology all made controlling and communicating words and other symbols vital to the production of profit. To an unprecedented extent, literacy became integral to economic competition and, as a consequence, became one of the human skills most vulnerable to its effects. (187-188)

Noting these changes, Brandt then goes on to point out that this new "ideology of literacy" has often failed to register with educators:

> American public schools and universities have not adequately confronted the tensions inherent in the recent transformation in literacy, especially the insatiable appetite of capitalism for more, better, faster, cheaper literacies. [...] At one level, this registers as a problem of being out of date, of promulgating old ways and old reasons for reading and writing that grow further out of step with communications experiences in the surrounding society. At another level, it registers as a problem of institutional confusion and vulnerability as new demands are stacked on top of old ones and as ideologies of older literacy campaigns are appropriated by new interests. As some politicians and business leaders call for a market takeover of American education, we see how, perhaps for the first time in history, the institution of the school has gotten out of step with the dominant economy's ideology of literacy. (204-205)

Brandt's work challenges us to ask ourselves, to what extent we in the field of composition studies may also be "out of step" with the "dominant economy's ideology of literacy." In our desire to help students, regardless of their age, achieve personal and/or social transformation, to what extent have we perhaps ignored or brushed aside students' very real concerns about economic and/or professional transformation? As Jeffrey Smith (1997) has pointed out, whether we are prepared to admit it or not, we are implicated in a system whereby students earn credentialing in order to go out into the world to do various kinds of professional work. The increasing number of adult students who enroll in formal programs of post-secondary study are already immersed in that professional world. The question is, as a college education has increasingly come to be viewed by students, parents, and the society as a key economic and professional stepping stone, to what extent should this reality factor into our disciplinary conversations and curricular decisions?

Russell Durst, in his book *Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition*, explores this very question. Examining the disconnect between a curriculum guided by critical pedagogical conceptions of literacy and the students for whom this curriculum is intended, Durst discovers that, for the most part, students' approaches to schooling tend to be pragmatic and instrumental. Interestingly, Durst argues that this is not necessarily something about which we should be surprised or concerned:

> I would suggest that students' lack of political and academic interest and their strong pre-professional orientation are no aberration, but reflect firmly rooted tendencies in American culture and history. They spring from a pragmatic, hands-on, careerist emphasis in the country as a whole...These pragmatic tendencies have continued up to the present day and seem to be increasing in intensity as students and others focus more and more on issues of financial security and worries about economic uncertainty. (170)

Having surveyed student values around schooling and its function, Durst asserts that "composition specialists, as well as other academics, have been slow to consider how the pervasive pragmatism of college students, and of U.S. society more generally, relates to our classroom approaches" (170) and argues for a rethinking of our current pedagogies. Durst closes *Collision Course* with the suggestion that "we need to show greater respect in composition pedagogy—and find a place in our course designs—for the more instrumentalist orientation of most of our students. We create a large gulf between ourselves and our students by not respecting their goals" (176).

If this is true for traditional age undergraduates like those Durst discusses in *Collision Course*, it seems doubly true for the adult student population. As the number of adults enrolling in formal programs of post-secondary education continues to rise, we might use their presence as a unique opportunity to reflect on the tensions inherent in our existent conceptions of literacy. Work with adult students may help us to begin to resolve the tension that too frequently exists between those voices external to our disciplinary conversations who all too often advocate for literacy instruction in the service of the economy and those voices within our field who sometimes fail to take into account the very real economic and professional motives driving literacy acquisition. Whereas proponents of the pragmatic, instrumental view of education and literacy development (e.g., students, parents, conservative commentators, government agencies, the media) may overstate the importance of economic imperatives in discussions about schooling and literacy, we, in the field of composition, and perhaps within English studies and the humanities, in general, may understate the importance of the economic rationales for literacy development. If it is the case, as Deborah Brandt has argued, that "American public schools and universities have not adequately confronted the tensions inherent in recent transformation in literacy," (204), work with adult student populations may offer us a unique opportunity to think about how we can simultaneously become more attentive to the economic imperatives driving literacy use and development in the wider culture while still advocating for and teaching the kind of critical literacy that is essential to participation in a democratic society.

Pedagogical Implications

As the NCES studies cited earlier in this dissertation suggest, many professional adult students like Jennifer, Tony, and John enroll at schools like NSC for reasons of professional development, transition, and advancement—in short, for credentialing. The irony, of course, is that in order to earn the credential that will allow them to achieve their professional objectives, as we have seen, they must sometimes demonstrate proficiency in academic tasks and activities that are rather far removed from those objectives. Given the fact that adult students like Jennifer, Tony, and John come to the classroom already immersed in rich communities of professional discursive practice, shouldn't that cause their instructors and those who design curriculum for them to reconsider the kinds of academic work they ask them to produce?

My sense is that it should. But how? Because many colleges and universities that serve adult student populations, like NSC, require them to complete an introductory writing course, we might begin there. What, we might ask, would or should such a course look like at a school like NSC? What would students read? What would they write? My sense is that such a course might begin with the students themselves by starting with a consideration of the role of writing and reading in their professional lives. For those students who have enrolled at NSC with the hope of transitioning into a new career or profession, writing assignments could be devised which ask students to investigate the discursive conventions of the professional communities into which they hope to enter. Students could interview professionals already at work in their desired field to gain a better perspective on the genres of writing they will be asked to produce. They could collect documents from those professionals and examine them for their rhetorical features, thus permitting the class to engage in traditional academic activities of the kind that are often most important to writing instructors. Additionally, such students could turn to job application materials, applying what they have learned in their research on future workplaces to create or revise application documents that will be suited to the future professional audiences for whom they will be writing.

For those students who are not looking to change careers but, instead, advance in their current profession, assignments could be devised whereby students could use the first-year course as an opportunity to reflect on the role of writing in their current workplace(s). They could begin by cataloguing and analyzing the various genres of writing they currently produce on the job and the kinds of writing they might be asked to produce in future positions. Having done this, they could design a long-term writing project that would be useful to them in some way in their current professional role. For example, while interviewing Tony, I learned that he was in the process of designing an evaluative document to use at the end of ACME's week-long orientation to obtain feedback from the new hires on their impressions of the orientation. He wanted to know the basics: what was helpful? Where was there room for improvement? The creation of an evaluative document like this could make for a perfect project for a first-year writing class at a school like NSC. Tony could research various evaluative and assessment methods, design a document, user-test it, make revisions, and gradually fold it into his orientation program. Because, as we have seen, writing is already a significant part of many adult learners' day-to-day work, myriad creative projects like this one could emerge from students' various work environments. Such assignments, which would draw on and seek to make connections between students' professional knowledges and experiences and the traditional goals of the writing classroom would replace the highly academic kinds of composing that many professional adult students are often asked to produce in first-year writing classes (e.g., personal essays, persuasive pieces, "research" papers). Instead, such a course, rooted in the rhetorical aspects of professional communication, could become an occasion for students to reflect on the role of writing in their lives, and specifically, in their various workplaces.

Another way to construct a first-year course at a school catering to professional adult student populations might be to focus, in part or entirely, on students' personal histories and goals as writers. This course might begin by asking students to think about the role of literacy and schooling in their lives by composing a literacy narrative. From there, students could pursue projects of their own interest, which, ideally, would emerge from the reflection and insight gained from producing the literacy narrative. John, for example, might focus on the genre of the blog, researching various blogs and their conventions and then working to create and publish his own. Tony might examine various emergency medical publications and their genre conventions with an eye towards producing an article that could be submitted for publication by the end of the term. Jennifer could investigate the relationship between visual imagery and written text in an effort to assemble a rhetorically complex and persuasive compilation of literature to send to prospective FGCC clients. Presumably, some students, like Tony, would want to focus on rhetorical or grammatical aspects of writing which have eluded them. One can envision entire projects in which students pour over the research on various aspects of writing, for example, the formal teaching of grammar, spelling and/or vocabulary (frequent concerns for many student writers) and produce reports in which they summarize the scholarly debates around their topics. In short, a course of this kind would allow students to reflect on and pursue their own questions about literacy and literacy development.

My sense, from perusing NSC's Course Catalogue for this project, is that, beyond the mandatory first-year writing course and a variety of creative writing electives, there are few, if any, programs in place to help prepare students for the demands of disciplinary writing or to help them make connections between academic and professional communication. Like so many colleges and universities that serve traditional-age students, writing instruction at NSC seems to begin and end with the first-year course, in which, it may be assumed, students' writing "problems" will be addressed. There is, I think, a real opportunity at a school like NSC to draw on students' life and work experiences, and especially their experiences writing on the job, to create a unique curriculum that foregrounds disciplinary and professional communication and seeks to make connections between the classroom and the myriad workplace contexts in which students are immersed. Such an opportunity would begin with the acknowledgment that adult students are often *already* writers when they arrive at the school and would then move on to a consideration of how a school like NSC, given its highly professional student body and the highly professionalized programs of study most its students choose to pursue, might make more explicit the process of not just learning to become, but learning to *write as* professionals—as criminologists, business managers, computer programmers; as educators, health administrators, human resource managers.

Scholarly Implications

There are a number of scholarly implications of this study for the field of composition studies. I would begin by suggesting that we need to consider institutional settings such as NSC as potential sites of research. While we have made a great deal of progress in reshaping the role of writing instruction in the university over the past thirty to forty years, much of this work has taken place at institutions which serve traditional-age student populations. It's time to engage more seriously with programs of post-secondary study, like NSC, that serve primarily nontraditional and/or professional adult student populations. Of course, a great deal of scholarly work has already been done with adult students attending community colleges, but because so many professional adult students are going beyond two-year Associate's degrees and working towards Bachelor's degrees, the gold-standard in today's economy, we need to get a sense of their experiences with literacy instruction across all the years of their undergraduate study. Given the fact that so many professional adult students enroll in so-called "for-profit" institutions, we might also begin to investigate the role literacy instruction plays in these contexts.[38]

In this dissertation, as I examined the role of literacy, past and present, in the lives of several adult learners attending NSC, it became apparent to me, the extent to which what I was seeing was only a snapshot of a much bigger picture as regards professional adult students' writing and writing development. I began to wonder, for example, what it might be like to follow a student like Tony through an entire term at NSC, examining all of the different kinds of writing he is asked to produce and the various strategies and knowledges he draws on to produce such writing. As I reflected on longitudinal studies that have tracked the writing development of traditional-age students' through their college careers, it occurred to me that we could benefit from studies that attempt the same for adult students. We need to get a sense of the "big picture" of their writing development across multiple contexts and disciplines, throughout their college careers. Additionally, we need to learn more about those who teach professional adult students. How

[38] A group of composition researchers has already begun this process. This year, Luana Uluave and Patricia Harkin of the University of Illinois at Chicago and Kristine Hansen and J. Quin Monson of Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah were awarded a grant by CCCC to conduct a study called "Survey of Writing Instructors at For-Profit Colleges and Universities." This is the first such study that I know of and will provide an important first look into the world of writing instruction at for-profit colleges and universities.

much experience do they have working with such populations? More importantly, what kind of training have they had to prepare them for such work?[39] What are the struggles that those who teach writing to professional adult students face and how are they similar to or different from the struggles one faces working with traditional-age student populations? We might also think about teacher-training. To what extent do graduate programs provide preparation for work with adult students? Should they provide such training? These are all questions that warrant further investigation.

Returning to the students themselves, we see that when professional adult learners like Jennifer, Tony, and John enroll at a school like NSC, they very likely face demands on their literacy skills that are fundamentally different from the demands they encounter in their jobs and in their day-to-day lives. This transition from writing in the workplace to writing in academic settings, a transition I have referred to in this project as the *reverse-commute*, has been too little explored in the field of composition studies. As some in composition studies have begun to imagine "middle-spaces" where we can help traditional-age students explore the world of professional communication that awaits post-graduation (see, for example, Bay, 2006), we must also begin to imagine ways to help ease the transition back into academic genres of writing that adult students make when they enroll at schools like NSC. We must begin the process of making writing less "transparent," as David Russell (1991) has put it, to both adult students and those who teach them. All of this begins with the acknowledgement of the

[39] It didn't occur to me as strange at the time, but upon reflection, it does strike me as odd that never once during the two or so years that I taught at NSC was I asked if I had received any preparation or training in working with adult student populations.

reverse-commute in the first-place—that is, the acknowledgement that adult students are often, when they enroll at a school like NSC, already proficient producers of professional and technical communication who now find themselves in a situation where they are being asked to produce forms of written communication which they have not produced in some time or which they have struggled to produce all their lives. The *fact* of the reverse-commute must be made explicit before teachers and students can begin to find ways to talk about the particular difficulties of making it.

Institutional Implications

This dissertation project focuses primarily on the literate lives of a small group of professional adult students attending NSC, a fact which gives me pause before suggesting implications for the institution these students attend or other colleges and universities like it. In many ways, though, as I delved into NSC's website to learn more about the school's background and recent restructuring, met with a half-dozen of its students, and spoke informally with several of its administrators, NSC came to feel like an additional participant in this study. Having spent a great deal of time thinking about its mission, curriculum, faculty, and students and having taught at the school myself, I feel as though I may be in a position to offer several implications of this study for NSC and other schools which strive to serve the professional adult student population. I do so hesitantly, and with great respect for NSC and its institutional mission.

In his article, "The University and Modernity: A History of the Present," historian Gerard Delantry argues that in the closing years of the 20th century, the "historical project" of the university entered a new phase. Recalling past "revolutions" in higher education, e.g., the Germanic, American/civic, and democratic/mass movements, Delantry envisions the coming of a fourth paradigm shift, the rise of the virtual university and global revolution. He identifies several key features of this most recent "revolution" in higher education:

- the emergence of new technologies of communication (most especially distance learning);
- the rise of multi-disciplinarity as a result of the increasing fragmentation of knowledge;
- the embracing of market values by the university as states have reduced financial commitments and funding ;
- the commercialization of teaching and research;
- a sense of crisis regarding the university's cultural role. (42-43)

As the editors of the collection in which Delantry's essay appears point out, what is most useful about his piece is the way in which he helps readers to understand that the

> development [of the "virtual" or "global" university] should not be seen in terms of a straightforward succession of stages. What is clear is that elements of earlier formations continue to persist, and to be fought over, in the university. What we have, then, as we shift into the new circumstances and challenges [...] is the co-presence of both residual and innovative elements, with all the attendant tensions and contradictions that follow from this. (14)

The "co-presence" of "residual and innovative elements" of higher education, as well as the "attendant tensions and contradictions" which accompany these elements, can be seen at myriad colleges and universities across the nation, but perhaps more acutely at schools which serve professional adult learners and/or adult learners in general. As I attempted to illustrate in the second chapter of this dissertation, NSC has responded in creative and innovative ways to meet the needs of its students.[40] With its multiple campus locations, varied methods of course-delivery, and flexible scheduling, NSC has worked to accommodate busy adults who don't have the time or resources to pursue a post-secondary education via the traditional route. Furthermore, they have created a diverse range of programs of study that respond to the unique professional needs of the adult student population, offering Bachelor's of Science degrees in Applied Technology, Behavioral Science, Criminal Justice, Computing and Information Technology, Elementary Education, Early Childhood Education, Health Care, and Business Management. The language the school uses to describe its academic offerings on its website is saturated with talk of "careers" and "professional development," underscoring the extent to which NSC understands the audience it is serving and its unique needs, experiences, and expectations.

Yet a close look at NSC's Course Catalogue also reveals the extent to which some "residual" elements of earlier post-secondary paradigms are still in existence at the school. While NSC has positioned itself in such a way so as to attract career-minded professional adult students, it has simultaneously committed itself to a fairly conservative curricular program, whereby a number of "core" and General Education requirements, similar in many ways to the kinds of courses one might encounter at colleges and universities serving more traditional-age student populations, must be completed—often before students can advance to pursue coursework in their desired field of study. NSC students must fulfill five "core" General Education requirements—Critical Thinking, Written

[40] Such creativity and innovation, it should be pointed out, are also a response to a highly competitive educational marketplace in which NSC competes with many other schools for adult students' tuition dollars.

Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, Oral Communication, and Information Technology Literacy—within the first thirty hours of their study. In addition to these five courses, NSC students must complete coursework in such broad areas as Arts and Culture, History and Politics, Literature and Ideas, Science, and Social Science. Of course, students can "test out" of some of these classes or they can pass out of them if they can demonstrate that they have taken a similar class at some other accredited post-secondary institution.[41] But most, if not all, of the students I interviewed for this project were checking off the "core" and General Education requirements one at a time, a process which can take, if one is enrolling in a single course per term, as many adult students do, two or more years to complete.

The actual work assigned in some of the "core" and General Education courses, as we have seen in the writing samples I have discussed in this dissertation, can tend toward the traditional. Of course, the samples I have discussed in these pages capture only a snapshot of the sum of all the writing that takes place at NSC and should in no way be construed as representative of all of the different kinds of composing students produce at the school.[42] Still, the academic writing students shared with me and the pedagogies guiding such assignments suggest that many NSC students are, at times, asked to engage in fairly conservative academic tasks and assignments. Across all three

[41] According to Jim Miller, Director of Institutional Research at NSC, the school does not collect data on how many students "test out of" classes or which classes they test out of. Nor does it collect data on how often students substitute transfer credits for NSC courses.

[42] Because I did not ask to see my research participants' transcripts, I did not know if any of them had taken any upper-level courses in their areas of specialization. If they had, they chose not to share with me any of the writing they had produced for such classes.

participants, Jennifer, Tony, and John, it is hard not to note the disconnect between the kinds of academic writing some NSC students are asked to produce in their classes and the kinds of professional writing they produce outside of school, especially in the workplace. In some important ways, this dissertation affirms the notion that workplace and academic writing are very often, as Dias et al. put it in the title of their book, "worlds apart." The question is, in regard to a curriculum geared toward adult students, should they be?

On the one hand, the school has drafted a curriculum to meet the unique needs of its students—primarily, working adults. On the other hand, it insists that they complete substantive "core" and General Education requirements that often have little or nothing to do with the actual reasons why they have enrolled in the first place. Like so many institutions of higher education, NSC is struggling to have it both ways—to provide its students with professional training while still retaining a commitment to what might be referred to as a broad-based liberal arts education. At schools serving traditional-age student populations, the tensions that result from this approach are perhaps muted by students' age and sense that a college education is an important step in their processes of social and psychological developmental. Take away the developmental imperative, though, and you begin to gain a sense of the conflict that can result when the "innovative" and "residual" elements of higher education rub up against one another, especially at schools serving professional adult students. John Beech may have captured this tension best when I asked him what he was hoping to get out of taking the mandatory writing course "The Writing Process," one of NSC's five "core" course requirements, and he replied, "To be honest, it's just a requirement that I'm fulfilling. I don't know if I would have taken a writing course had it not been required."

I would suggest that NSC reassess its "core" curriculum and General Education program. According to Jim Miller, Director of Institutional Research at NSC, in the fall of 2006, 92% of active NSC students were enrolled in Bachelor's of Science programs, which is to say that an overwhelming majority of NSC students enroll in one of the school's eight "professional" majors.[43] This statistic confirms what, in many ways, NSC already knows: that its students enroll at the college principally for professional development. Why, then, insist that they complete coursework in areas that have little to do with the reasons why they enrolled at the college in the first place and why insist that they do so, for the most part, *before* they are allowed to get into the meat of their major areas of study? At the least, NSC might reconsider its requirement that "core" and General Education courses be completed prior to major-related coursework. If NSC wants to insist that General Education is a key component of a college education no matter what population of students one is serving, a not-unreasonable position, why not find ways to balance the "core" courses and General Education curriculum students confront during their first months and years at the school with coursework that engages the kinds of *professional* questions, issues, and concerns that prompted them to enroll in the first place,

[43] It's worth pointing out that while the school does offer a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), there are no "official" programs of study to complete such a degree, there is only the option of a "self-design." NSC's website describes the Bachelor of Arts as "a flexible program that allows you to design, with the guidance of a faculty advisor, an area of specialized study with a focus on liberal studies."

and then, perhaps, supplement this work, over time, with a condensed General Education curriculum? According to Jim Miller, just 56% of all NSC students who enroll at the school to pursue a Bachelor's degree end up graduating within six-years.[44] This number is not out of line with national studies of completion rates among adult learners and especially among students like Jennifer, Tony, and John who work full-time and pursue their studies part-time.[45] One can only speculate, but based on conversations with all of my research participants, I would suggest that part of the reason for such low completion rates may be a feeling on the part of some NSC students that in the first months and years they are enrolled at the school, the courses they are asked to take are a bit too far removed from both their day-to-day lives and the initial reasons they decided to enroll at NSC. Immersing students like Jennifer, Tony, and John in courses that engage important professional interests and questions as they walk through the door might go a long way in retaining professional adult students and honoring their original enrollment intentions.

Despite the numerous "innovative" elements at work at NSC, when it comes to *what* is taught and *how* it is taught, this dissertation highlights some of the "residual" elements still in existence at NSC. Having taught and now

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[44] This number can be contrasted with the fact that at the state's flagship university, which serves mostly traditional-age students, the six-year graduation rate is 74%.

[45] According to the NCES report "Work First, Study Second: Adult Undergraduates Who Combine Employment and Post-secondary Enrollment" (2003), six years after so-called "employees who study" began their post-secondary programs, 62 percent had not completed a degree or certificate and were no longer enrolled. Additionally, "Among employees who study with reported degree or certificate intentions, the total percentage who attained any credential was 37 percent, most often a vocational certificate (28 percent)." Finally, "Employees who study were at particular risk of leaving post-secondary education in their first year. Among students with a degree goal, 32 percent of employees who study left in their first year with no credential" (ix).

conducted research at the school, my sense is that in some important ways, NSC embodies the sense of "tension" and "contradiction" inherent in recent transformations in higher education as enumerated by those who study it. This struggle is not NSC's alone. At colleges and universities across the nation, including those that serve mostly traditional-age student populations, administrators, faculty, and students are puzzling over the shifting purposes of post-secondary education. Is enrolling at a college or university about gaining broad, generalized skills and developing a sense of greater cultural awareness? Or is it about immersing oneself in a specialized professional community in order to prepare for the world of work that awaits after graduation? Must it be one or the other? Can it be both? And how does or should a student's age and professional background shape the way one responds to such questions? No doubt, these are the kinds of questions those who work at schools like NSC as well as those who work at colleges and universities serving traditional-age student populations continue to puzzle over each day.

Personal Implications

There are numerous personal implications of this study. I have learned a great deal. I would sum up the implications of this study for my own teaching and scholarship in two ways. First, I have learned much about how writing is learned and functions or circulates outside the university. Like most graduate students and English Department faculty, prior to embarking on this project I had little first-hand experience with professional or workplace genres of writing and composing strategies. My expertise was in academic writing and, specifically, in the kinds of academic genres one produces in English courses. But academic writing is just one kind of composing and, I am coming to see, a very small piece of the sum total of all the written communication that is produced in our society.

If it is true that, as Deborah Brandt has argued, "Literacy became a key resource, a raw material, for the American economy of the twentieth century," in this dissertation project I was able to glimpse of how this might be so. In my conversations with research participants about their workplace writing and in the writing samples they shared with me during our interviews, I saw, firsthand, the ways in which contemporary American workplaces (small businesses and large, public institutions and private) have become saturated in writing. Given this incredible proliferation of written communication, it seems inevitable that those of us who teach in colleges and universities, regardless of the student populations we serve, will come under increased pressure to locate moments in the curriculum when we can take seriously professional communication and the myriad forms of non-academic writing and writing technologies that are constantly emerging. In a recent documentary in which well-known writing specialists discuss the field of composition and its evolving pedagogical mission, Andrea Lunsford captures the sense of difficulty that so many of us have come to feel around this issue:

> Something that concerns me…is the tension between the teaching of traditional writing, which means, not five-paragraph essays, but reasoned, carefully structured, logically organized pieces of discourse—balancing the need and the demand on the part of the public and our university officials to teach that sort of writing and…allowing students an opportunity to experience the most exciting discursive modalities of their own time.

> Those are competing interests…I don't think that we want to give either one up. So, that's what I think we're going to be struggling really hard with in our profession over the next few years—not only how to answer that question for ourselves, but how to articulate that answer to a larger public, because it's not going to be easy.

Because many of us who teach writing in colleges and universities only ask students to produce academic genres of writing in traditional "modalities," I think we tend to define whether or not students "can write" in those terms. But writing is always produced within a particular context, for particular audiences, and for particular purposes. Thus, a second personal implication of this study is my newfound understanding of the extent to which many professional adult learners like Jennifer, Tony, and John are *already* writers when they arrive in our classrooms—already writing in ways that achieve their objectives and meet the expectations of their audiences. As teachers, our entire raison d'être rests upon what students can't yet accomplish and don't yet know. The existence of educational institutions and curricular structures re-affirm the demand for our knowledge and services. This is not to suggest that there is nothing for students to learn from us, but it is to suggest that we approach our work with them with a sense of humility and respect and also that we understand the role that institutions can and do play in shaping our perceptions of who students are and of that which they are capable. The assumption with which I approached my work teaching professional adult students in "The Writing Process" at NSC several years ago—that if they could already write, they wouldn't be sitting in my class—has, upon further examination, turned out not to be true, or, at the least, to be a lot more complicated than I at first thought. Having careful examined the "core" and General Education curriculum at NSC and having conducted an extensive research study with a half-dozen NSC students, I now see the extent to which my perceptions of NSC students and of their literate capacities may have been shaped, not by the students themselves or by their writing, but, instead, by the institutional structures the school put in place (i.e., "The Writing Process," the "core" curriculum) to remediate what it may have assumed were their shortcomings. As teachers of writing, we must always take stock of the ways in which the institutional settings in which we find ourselves work quietly to shape our perceptions of students and their work. If we can somehow find a way to always begin with an assumption of competence and capability, we will go a long way towards affording our students the level of respect which we, ourselves, would want were we in their shoes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocols

Interview #1: Background: Family, School, Literacy, and Work Experience

Administrative:

1. Exchange Telephone Numbers
2. Fill out Hiring Form
3. Sign Consent Forms
4. Set up regular meeting time

Over the series of our meetings, I will ask you to talk about your experiences with literacy and computers by asking you a series of questions about three areas of your life: home/ community, school, and workplace. I am also interested in your experience as an adult learner who has returned to school for a variety of reasons. I'm hoping that the prompts and questions I pose will lead you to tell me stories about your life. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the prompts and questions. It is my hope that our meetings will be informal and conversation and full of stories that you want to tell. If, at any point, you feel like there is additional information I should know, but that I haven't asked about, please feel free to interject.

Family Information

1. Immediate family members and ages.
2. Can you tell me a little bit about your family—what it was like growing up in your family.
3. Income Level
   - Growing Up
   - Now

Learning More About You

1. Place and date of birth:
2. Where did you live?
   - Growing up:
   - Now:
3. Schooling History (names and locations):
   - Elementary
   - Secondary
   - College
   - Other

4. Degrees, dates of graduation, size of graduation class
5. Past/Current/Future Occupations
6. What are your plans with regard to your education?

Family and Literacy

1. Parents' and Grandparents' Education and Professions
2. Grandparents' Literacy Histories (e.g. literacy values, education, reading/writing/computing activities)
3. Parents' Literacy Histories (same)
4. Did people in your family value literacy? How?

Early Childhood Memories of Literacy

- Earliest memories of seeing other people reading/writing
- Earliest memories of self writing/reading
- Earliest memories of direct instruction
- Memories of places writing/reading occurred
- Occasions associated with writing/reading
- People associated with writing/reading
- Organizations associated with writing/reading
- Materials available for writing/reading
- Ways materials entered households
- Kinds of materials used
- Role of technologies

Interview #2: Literacy Memories and Literacy and Technology

Writing and Reading With Peers

- Memories of sharing writing and reading
- Memories of writing and reading to/with friends
- Memories of writing and reading in play
- Memories of seeing friends reading and writing
- Memories of reading friends' writing

Extracurricular Writing and Reading

- Organizations or activities that may have involved writing or reading
- Writing contests, pen pals, and so forth

Self-Initiated Writing or Reading

- Purposes for reading and writing at different stages
- Genres

- Audiences/uses
- Teaching/learning involved

Early Memories of Computers

- Can you tell me the story of when, where, how you first came in contact with computers?
- Can you tell me the story of when, where, and how you first learned to use computers?
- Do you remember what the prevailing images/representations of computers were when you were growing up (e.g. movies, television, magazines, books)?

Computers at Home

- If your family had a computer at home when you were growing up, can you tell me the story of buying the computer? Who bought it? When? Why?
- Can you tell us how much the computer cost? Can you talk about how significant/serious that investment was in terms of your family's regular budget?
- For what purposes did you use the computer when you first started? As you continued to learn?
- Can you tell how a typical session might have gone in your home computing environment?
- How often did you use the computer? What contributed to your use of it or not? Are there any stories/incidents that you can remember about this?
- Can you remember any books/texts about computers that you had at home? Any that you read? Any computer games?
- Can you identify any images that you remember about computer use?
- What did you and your siblings parents use the computer for at this time? As you continued to use it?

Computers at School

- Tell the story of how you first learned to use the computer at school: What was your motivation? Age? Who helped? How did they help? What kind of support did you have? In what classes did you learn to use the computer? How much access did you have to a computer per day/week/month?
- Describe your use of this computer: Who was there? What times of day? What were the surroundings like?
- For what purposes did you use this computer?
- For what purposes did other kids use the computer at school when you were all first learning to use technology? As you continued to learn?
- Can you tell how a typical session might have gone in this environment?

- What determined how frequently you used the computer? Are there any stories/incidents that you can remember about this?
- Can you remember any books/texts about computers that you had access to at school? Any that you read? Any computer games?
- Can you identify any images that you remember about computer use that you encountered at school? Educational images?
- What did your family think about computers? Your learning computers? Your parents? Sisters and brothers? Uncles and aunts? Cousins? Grandparents? What values did they place on this activity? On your participation? On their role? Do you have any stories you can tell us that would illustrate the values your family placed on computers or computer literacy?
- What did your friends think about computers? What values did they place on this activity? On your participation? On their role? Do you have any stories you can tell us that would illustrate the value your friends placed on computers or computer literacy? What did you teachers/the school you went to think about computers? What values did they place on this activity? On your participation? On their role? Do you have any stories you can tell us that would illustrate the value the educational system placed on computers or computer literacy?
- Did you used to read about computers? If so, where? When?
- Can you remember any pictures of computers or computer use that struck you as memorable? Where did you see these?

Computers at Work

- Tell the story of how you first learned to use the computer at work: What was your age? Who helped? How did they help? What kind of support did you have? In what classes did you learn to use the computer? How much access did you have to a computer per day/week/month?
- Describe your use of this computer: Who was there? What times of day? What were the surroundings like?
- For what purposes did you use this computer?
- For what purposes did other employees use the computer at work when you were first learning to use technology?
- What determined how frequently you used the computer? Are there any stories/incidents that you can remember about this?
- Can you remember any books/texts about computers that you had access to at work? Any that you read? Any computer games?
- Can you identify any images that you remember about computer use that you encountered at work?
- What did your family think about computers? Your learning computers? Your parents? Sisters and brothers? Uncles and aunts? Cousins? Grandparents? What values did they place on this activity? On your participation? On their role? Do you have any stories you can tell us that

would illustrate the values your family placed on computers or computer literacy?

- What did your friends think about computers? What values did they place on this activity? On your participation? On their role? Do you have any stories you can tell us that would illustrate the value your friends placed on computers or computer literacy? What did other employees in the workplace think about computers? What values did they place on this activity? On your participation? On their role? Do you have any stories you can tell us that would illustrate the value the workplace placed on computers or computer literacy?
- Did you used to read about computers? If so, where? When?
- Can you remember any pictures of computers or computer use that struck you as memorable? Where did you see these?

Interview #3: Literate Practices in Everyday Life

In order to help guide our conversations on literacy practices in your current life, I'd like to ask you to read over the table below to identify any and all literacy-related activities in which you have engaged over the past six months, across three domains: classroom/school, workplace, home/community.

For each literacy practice, please identify the domain in which you practice it by placing an "R" (if this practice is Regular) or an "SR" (if this practice is Somewhat Regular) in the appropriate box. If you don't practice a particular literacy practice on the list, or don't practice it in a particular domain, leave that box empty. If there are literate practices in which you participate that are not represented on the grid, please provide a brief explanation in the section called "Other Literacy Practices".

Literate Practice--Writing	Classroom/School	Workplace	Home/Community
email			
letter			
journal/diary			
hobbies/activities			
creative expression			
lists, notes, scribbles			
AIM/Online Chat			
webblog			
webpage Design			
desktop Publishing			

message Boards			
text Message			
post to List Serve			
freewriting/brainstorming			
notes while reading			
responding to reading			
writing formal paper			
proposal			
manual/instructions			
memo			
report			

***Other Literacy Practices (Writing)*:**

Rhetorical Analysis (writing)

1. What is the *purpose* for the creation of this document?
2. Who is the *audience* for this document? Who is its end-user(s) or who will see it?
3. What is the *medium* in which this document was composed?
4. What was your *process* in producing this document?
   - where, physically, do you usually produce this kind of document?
   - how long does it take to produce this kind of document?
   - how often do you produce this kind of document?
   - was this document composed with the help of anyone else?
   - while creating this document, was there a revision process?
5. *When* and *how* did you learn how to produce this document?

Interview #4: Literate Practices in Everyday Life

In order to help guide our conversations on literacy practices in your current life, I'd like to ask you to read over the table below to identify any and all literacy-related activities in which you have engaged over the past six months, across three domains: classroom/school, workplace, home/community.

For each literacy practice, please identify the domain in which you practice it by placing an "R" (if this practice is Regular) or an "SR" (if this practice is Somewhat Regular) in the appropriate box. If you don't practice a particular literacy practice on the list, or don't practice it in a particular domain, leave that box empty. If there are literate practices in which you participate that are not represented on the grid, please provide a brief explanation in the section called "Other Literacy Practices".

Literate Practice--Reading	**Classroom/School**	**Workplace**	**Home/Community**
weblog			
magazine (online)			
magazine (paper)			
professional journal (online)			
professional journal (paper)			
newspaper (online)			
newspaper (paper)			
book (online)			
book (paper)			
proposal			
manual/textbook			
memo			
report			

***Other Literacy Practices (reading)*:**

Rhetorical Analysis (reading)

1. Why do you read this particular kind of material?

2. How often do you read this particular kind of material?
3. How long have you been reading this particular kind of material?
4. How did you come to begin reading this particular kind of material?
5. With whom do you share the activity of reading this particular kind of material?

Current Computer Exposure

Home

- Do you (or your family) own a computer now?

If "yes"

- Can you tell me the story of buying the computer? Who bought it? When? Why?
- Can you tell me how much the computer cost? Can you talk about how significant/serious that investment was in terms of (your, your parents, your family's) regular budget?
- Describe for us where you keep the computer in your house/apartment/dorm room: What are the things you have around the computer? What items of furniture do you associate with the computer?
- For what purposes do you use this computer (e.g.) what kinds of work, what applications)?

- For what purposes do your siblings/parents/children use the computer? Who taught them? Who provides the support (email)?
- Do you access the Web? What do you use it for?
- Tell the story of how you learned to use the computer in this environment: What was your motivation? Who helped? What kind of support did you have? Do you continue to have?
- What are the rules associated with using a computer in your home/apartment/dorm? Who made up these rules? How do they affect you?
- Can you identify books/texts about computers that you have access to at your home/apartment/dorm? Any that you read?

Outside-the-Home

- Do you currently have access to a computer someplace other than at home? Where (workplace, school)? When? For how long? How do you get there? How much does it cost to use this computer? How do you get that money to pay for access?
- Describe the surroundings in which you use this computer: Who is there? What times of day? What are the surroundings like?
- For what purpose do you use this computer?

- For what purpose do other students/co-workers use the computer?
- Can you tell how a typical session might go in this environment?
- Tell the story of how you learned to use the computer in this environment: What was your motivation? Who helped? What kind of support did you have? Do you continue to have?
- What are the rules associated with using a computer in this environment? Who made up these rules? How do they affect you?
- Can you identify books/texts about computers that you have access to at your school/workplace/other? Any that you read?
- Can you describe your current level of skill with computers? Novice, competent, expert? Any stories about expertise?
- What do you think about computers now? Why?

- What do your family think about computers now? What values do they place on computer use? On your participation? On their role? Do you have any stories you can tell that would illustrate the value your family and friends now place on computers and computer literacy?
- What values does the educational system currently place on computer use? Do you have any stories you can tell us that would illustrate the value your schools now place on computers or computer literacy?
- How/when/where/why do you see yourself using computers in the future?
- Do you read about computers? If so, where? When? What do you read on computers?
- Can you identify any images of computer use that have struck you recently? Where have you seen these images?

- Do you use a particular brand of computer? If so, why? Which one? Names of programs?
- Anything more you'd like to say about your relationship with computers?

Interview #5: Plans/Goals for Literacy, Education, and Work

Plans and Goals

1. In regard to writing and literacy, what are your goals, what do you want to be able to do better or more of as a writer?
2. In regard to reading and literacy, what are your goals—what do you want to be able to do better or more of as a reader?
3. In regard to computers and literacy, what are your goals—what do you want to be able to do better or more of as a computer user?

Sense of Literacy Learning

- Interviewee's own sense of how he/she learned to read and write
- Sense in general of how people learn to read and write

Adult Education

- Can you tell the story of when you first decided you wanted to return to school? Where were you? What prompted this desire?
- From the time you first decided to return to school to the time when you actually enrolled, what happened? How did you go about making this actually happen?
- What were the obstacles preventing your return to school?
- What were the encouraging factors pushing you to return to school (events or people)?
- Did you look around for different schools/programs? How did you settle on NSC?

- Can you tell me about the first classroom experience you had as an adult student? Was it a positive experience? Negative?
- Can you describe some of the challenges you have faced as an adult student? What about some of the successes you have experienced?
- How has your decision to return to school changed you, if at all?
- How has your decision to return to school been viewed or received by your family/friends?
- What do you know now about yourself as a student that you perhaps didn't know prior to your enrollment at NSC?
- What has been different about school this time, if anything?

Appendix B: Consent Letter

Consent Letter

Dear Northeast State College (NSC) Student:

I am writing to describe a research study I will be conducting at NSC during the winter, 2006 term and to potentially enlist your participation in this project. My study is tentatively titled "Literacy 'In the Middle': A Study of Writing in Adult Lives." This study will form the basis of work for my dissertation project.

Currently, I am a fourth-year doctoral candidate in the Composition Studies program at the University of New Hampshire (UNH). My areas of interest include first-year writing, professional and technical communication, qualitative research methodology, literacy, and gender studies. Prior to enrolling at UNH, I taught high school English for one year and then worked for two years as an adjunct faculty member at a variety of New England colleges and universities, including what was then the College for Lifelong Learning (CLL) and is now NSC. I taught a number of different English courses at CLL—The Fiction of Madness, The Writing Process, The Short Story, Creative Non-Fiction—at a number of different centers—Dover, Manchester, Bow, and online, through the OIC program. During this time, I developed an interest in adult education and issues of literacy.

I would like to extend this interest by conducting a study at NSC with a small group of students. I am interested in learning more about NSC students' beliefs/histories, practices, processes, and goals/plans as regards literacy. I am writing to invite you to participate in this project, in which I will conduct up to five case studies with NSC students. Case study participants will be asked: 1) to participate in up to five 60-90 minute interviews spread out over the winter, 2006 term; and 2) to share writing from the three domains in which I have interest—home/community, classroom/ school, and workplace. To compensate NSC students for their time, I will be offering:

A. *Financial Remuneration*: A payment of $10 per participant, per 60-90 min. interview session (total of six sessions), and
B. *Tutoring*: I will offer four tutoring sessions to each research participant (or the opportunity to receive online tutoring on four separate occasions)

Given my status as a graduate student, this is, of course, a modest compensation package. My hope is to engage the benevolence of participants and also, through our informal interview conversations, to offer some insight into issues of education and literacy.

All interviews with NSC students will be audiotaped and transcribed. Participants will have an opportunity to verify the transcriptions before they are used in the findings, and a chance to read any scholarship I write from this study prior to publication. Should you find that my observations and conclusions regarding our discussions of your views on literacy are in error, you will have every opportunity to raise your concerns with me and I will correct or address them in every way possible. I do not foresee any risks from participating in this study. The anticipated benefits from participation are, as stated above, increased insight on the part of participants into issues of literacy and, for the fields of literacy and education, improved design and implementation of adult literacy curriculum at schools like NSC.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled. If you agree to participate and then change your mind, you may withdraw at any time during the study without penalty.

I will seek to maintain confidentiality of all data and records associated with your participation in this research. You should understand, however, that there are rare instances when the researcher is required to share personally identifiable information (e.g., according to policy, contract, regulation). For example, in response to a complaint about the research, officials at the University of New Hampshire, designees of the sponsor(s), and/or regulatory and oversight government agencies may access research data. You also should understand that the investigator is required by law to report certain information to government and/or law enforcement officials (e.g., child abuse, threatened violence against self or others, communicable diseases). Data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office; only the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Thomas Newkirk, and I will have access to the data. Audiotapes of interviews will be destroyed after transcription. I will conduct all research.

If you have any questions about this research project or would like more information before, during, or after the study, you may contact me at (617) 823-3343 or mjm22@cisunix.unh.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Julie Simpson at the UNH Office of Sponsored Research at 603-862-2003 to discuss them in confidence.

Now that you know a bit more about me and my plans for this study, if you are interested in continuing, please take a moment to fill out and return (via email) the demographic survey (see below). Once you've filled out this survey and I've had a chance to review it, should your demographic information meet the criteria for this study, I will contact you to ask for your commitment. If, at that time, you agree to participate, I will ask you to sign this letter and return a copy to me. (You may keep a copy of this letter for your records.) Thank you for your time and interest.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Michaud
Doctoral Candidate, Composition Studies
English Department
Hamilton Smith Hall
Durham, NH 03824

Yes, I, ________________________________, consent/agree to participate in this research project.

Signed: ____ Date: __________

Appendix C: Questionnaire

Personal Information

Name: ______________________

Age: ________________________

Gender: _____________________

Race/Ethnicity: _______________

Married/Single: _______________

Native Language: _____________

Employment Information

Current Employer/Position/Location: ________________________________

Nature of Current Employment:

Employment History:

School Information

Years at NSC: ______

Major/Concentration: _____________

Schooling Experience Prior to Enrollment at NSC:

Reasons for Enrolling at NSC:

Plans for After Graduation:

UNIVERSITY *of* NEW HAMPSHIRE

December 20, 2005

Mike Michaud
English, Hamilton Smith
11 Quail Ct.
Manchester, NH 03109

IRB #: 3578
Study: Literacy in the Middle: A Study of Writing in Adult Lives
Approval Date: 12/15/2005

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 101(b). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects.* (This document is also available at http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/IRB.html.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed pink Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
Thomas Newkirk

Research Conduct and Compliance Services, Office of Sponsored Research, Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585 * Fax: 603-862-3564