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Between Smoke and Crystal: Accomplishing In(ter)dependent Writing Programs

Louise Wetherbee Phelps
Old Dominion University

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Louise Wetherbee Phelps
Old Dominion University

LEARNING FROM HISTORIES OF THE PRESENT

Despite efforts to track the decades-long rise of independent writing programs in North America, they remain a somewhat mysterious phenomenon, about which we have little stable empirical data. One reason, long noted by organizers of the Independent Writing Departments and Programs Association (IDWPA), is the difficulty of deciding what to count. As scholars recognize, units that house writing faculty and/or writing instruction vary enormously in their titles, missions, configurations, and institutional locations. It is hard even to identify them as discrete units, and all the definitions are still in debate. What makes different elements cohere sufficiently to call them a campus (or intercampus) writing "program?" What distinguishes a writing "program" from a writing "department"? And what are the criteria for "independence"?

Even if we could agree on definitions and criteria, we would find that many units occupy murky, ill-defined positions which may not be easily classified in such terms—and may well be transitory. The IWPA itself has relied on self-identification, welcoming as members "writing departments, along with writing centers, WAC programs, free-standing composition programs, and units of other kinds."[1] Other than its 2011 membership page, the most recent attempt at a comprehensive list (restricted to departments) was assembled by Danielle Koupf through a web search in 2008, updated in 2013. I identified 11 from other sources, including a query I sent to the WPA-list in April, 2014. Putting these together, without applying any criteria as to what constitutes a "writing" program or makes it independent, I came up with a total of 60 independent writing units. A finer filter would eliminate a few as clearly outside the field.

Although this composite list does include two Canadian programs, both represented in this volume (Kearns & Turner; MacDonald, Procter & Williams), it largely overlooks the Canadian scene of writing instruction, whose very different historical relationship to English has positioned it institutionally in nontraditional units and locations (Graves, 1994; Graves & Graves, 2006).

Responses to my query identified at least three more U.S. programs in some stage of transition toward independence and/or departmental status. In fact, as witnessed in this collection, the status of independent writing programs in the aggregate is in constant flux as units transition between different states: new formations, mergers, internal reorganization, reincorporation into larger units, even suspension in limbo through indecision or ambiguity. They change so swiftly that a participant writing about the current state of a program may be forced, like one author in this volume, to revise the manuscript to reflect major changes during the course of composing it. In such a complex, fluid situation it is probably impossible (at least with present resources) to build a reliable, data-based picture contemporaneously; we will have to wait for historians to clarify in retrospect what has been happening and what it will mean in the long run. For the same reason, we need to be very careful in reading or citing an account of a particular program to note its time stamp and treat it as historical almost as soon as it appears.

Currently, most of our information comes from self-reports like those in this volume and its predecessor, *Field of Dreams* (O'Neill, Crow & Burton, 2002), written by participants whose programs have grappled with independence—whether achieved, contemplated, or aspired to. This isn't a surprising state of affairs, given the relative youth of the modern independence movement. It is said that 30 years must pass for events to be subject to proper historical inquiry, and few independent writing programs have been around that long (Cornell's is a notable exception: Hjortshoj, this volume, dates its origin to the late 1960s). Independent writing departments are much younger. That may explain why the only contribution to *Minefields* from an independent historical researcher is Laura Davies' archival and interview study of the role of professional writing instructors in the early years of the Syracuse Writing Program (a department), conducted 26 years after its founding.[2]

Self-reported case studies have the limitations of the genre, in terms of the kinds of conclusions and uses they afford for their readers. The vivid, detailed accounts of programs-in-context and their developmental trajectories in this collection are rich resources for practitioners to mine for models, cautionary tales, and usable concepts, strategies, and rhetoric. But as a group they don't lend themselves to broad, data-based claims about independent writing programs. Although they often draw on the sources and methodologies of empir-

ical researchers or historians, they are too strategic and politic to rely on as a research base. (As I know from experience, there is a delicate balance to strike between candor and prudence in public writing about one's own program: being accountable to the scholarly community while doing no harm to the program.) As depictions of programs they are also time-bound in complicated ways. Much of the "current" information reported may be ephemeral, while the time scales and spans over which they follow a program's development are quite disparate. Finally, the programs described here are so strikingly diverse as to lead many observers to say that nothing can be concluded except that "everything is local."

Instead of providing reliable, objective, generalizable data about a static and homogeneous situation (a "state of IDWPs" across the academy), I want to argue that pieces like these construct a different kind of knowledge, about a phenomenon that is highly variable and changeful. More than simply stories, they serve as "histories of the present," a term applied by George Kennan to the writings of Timothy Garton Ash. In Ash's introduction to his book of that title, he explains that it occupies a frontier area, a "Three Country Corner" where journalism, history, and literature meet (2000, p. xviii). Blogger Daniel Little writes that contemporary observers can act much like traditional historians both in terms of cognition—putting together fragments of information into an intelligible whole that he calls a "midstream apperception"—and methods:

> Observers can collect and record documents in real time. They can interview participants. They can view and interpret the communications of the powerful and the insurgents. And on the basis of these kinds of investigations, they can begin to arrive at interpretations of what is occurring, over what terrain, by what actors, in response to what forces and motives . . . [in] an evidence-based integrative narrative of what the processes of the present amount to. (2009, n.p.)

Little acknowledges that apperceptions of the present may turn out to be flawed, compared to the longer-range, wider-angle view of a professional historian, but historians of the present have the advantages of immediacy and participation. These include direct witnessing of events, access to primary documents and materials that may be lost or forgotten in time, and insight into the subjectivity (motives, attitudes, lived experiences) of themselves and other actors. Ash points out that "what you can know soon after the event has increased" with technology and media saturation, and "what you can know long after the event has diminished" (1999, p. xvi). Even not knowing the unpredictable future helps historians of the present avoid "the most powerful of all the optical illusions of

historical writing," the inevitability, in retrospect, of what came to pass (Ash, 1999, p. xvii).

If we read such cases as histories of the present, what can we learn from examining a collection of them?

I take my cue from another discipline that faces an analogous problem in studying variation and change in human activity: developmental science. This interdisciplinary field examines human development over the life span. Recent contributors to the field (Overton & Molenaar, 2015) report a paradigm change in theory and methods, based on new, radical premises about the unbounded complexity of developmental processes as a function of reciprocal, multidimensional relations between individuals and their contexts (Overton, 2015). In the old paradigm, according to Lerner, the goal of studying human development was to come up with laws of "the generic human being," and individual differences were treated as reflecting either methodological error or deficiencies in people who didn't fit the norm (2006, p. 6). The new (ecological) paradigm treats diversity as a fundamental, systematic feature of human life and human development. The person-in-context is conceptualized as a dynamic, inherently active, adaptive system, which "organizes and regulates itself through complex and multidirectional relational coactions with its biological, socio-cultural, and physical environmental subsystems" (Overton, 2015, p. 50). Through this activity the system, or person, produces its own development. Both contexts and the conduct of human beings adapting to them are almost infinitely variable, constituting what amounts to an open set of combinations (Lerner, 2006, p. 5). This complexity makes every person's life trajectory unique, so that an individual's development can't be reduced to "a simple reflection of the group pattern" (Tolan & Deutsch, 2015, p. 733). Consequently, developmental science has turned to studying variability itself, encompassing both change in individuals over time and interindividual differences (Tolan & Deutsch, 2015, pp. 733–734). At the same time, researchers seek to understand systematic principles underlying developmental change and its variations in and between persons and groups. "The task of developmental science is to capture organized patterns in this variability and to propose models to account for both the variability and the stability" of development (Mascolo & Fischer, 2015, p. 114). As developmental science frames this new research agenda and devises novel, hybrid, and complementary methods to pursue it, Lerner notes that individuals and communities are themselves experts on development, and calls for their knowledge—the "wisdom of . . . participants"—to inform its formal study (2006, p. 13).

Inspired by this analogy, I would like to take diversity in development among individual IDWPs as a primary fact instantiated in this collection, and make a modest start on analyzing patterns in their variation, paying special attention to

outliers. This collection's histories of the present invite such analysis for the very reasons they do not afford traditional generalizations. They embody extremely diverse and internally variable relationships between individual programs and specific contexts (time, place, institutional type, conditions, actors, resources), and they provide actors' experiential perspectives on these relations. Their developmental trajectories show variance in stability and lability, but overall their internal variations exhibit what Tolan and Deutsch called "a rapid cascading multi-influence developmental stream that is contextually-sensitive[,] with patterns occurring on multiple levels on multiple timescales with fluctuation and transitions" (2015, p. 714).

PRESSURING NORMS

The first pattern of variation I want to look at has to do with the attitudes and stances that independent programs and their participants adopt toward academic norms, when their development inevitably challenges many of those norms.

Many stakeholders in the academy, certainly most of us in writing studies, perceive the academy as ponderously conservative and stubbornly resistant to change. Many analysts have described higher education as a highly stable system whose traditional academic values and norms persist despite the efforts of frustrated reformers like those who, inspired by Ernest Boyer (1990, 1996), sought to change the faculty roles and rewards system to value teaching and "engaged scholarship" equally with research. The reasons for this stability (actual and perceived) lie partly in the nature of social norms, which make us, as participants, complicit in the academic order. Thomas Green (1999) describes norms as a form of conscience, a set of internal "voices" which compete to govern the judgments we make of our own conduct and that of others. He is concerned with norm acquisition as moral education, interpreted broadly: he means inculcating standards of excellence not only in "the intellectual virtues" but also in the practice of crafts and professions and the political realm of citizenship and government (1999, p. x).

Norms are acquired in social contexts, through membership in groups and participation in their activities: "acquisition occurs by engaging in conduct of whatever sort is called for by those activities and institutions and appropriate to them" (Green, 1999, p. 47). In the academy, norming occurs through such highly consistent practices as doctoral education, advising and mentoring, and the processes by which faculty work toward and are judged for tenure. These practices enforce, broadly, the system of roles and rewards that determines how academic work (by individuals and groups) is defined, assigned, resourced, ranked, rewarded with status, power, and security, and so on.

Green emphasizes that norms are not descriptive (of how people behave) but prescriptive, especially in self-governance: specifically, a norm "prescribes how they *think* they ought to behave" (1999, p. 32, emphasis added). Someone normed in the strong sense understands the community's rules as ideals and feels guilty or remorseful in departing from them. But Green describes a spectrum of attitudes that members of a group can take toward a norm, which is distinct from whether or not they obey or disobey its rules. These include *compliance*, conforming to a norm for pragmatic or prudential reasons; *observance*, accepting standards as legitimate or/or ideal, even when failing to live up to them; and *defiance*, rejecting the authority of a standard and perhaps the whole system of norms (Green, 1999, pp. 33–36).

One form of faculty conduct that has deeply challenged academic norms is the rise of what Boyer (1996) called "engaged scholarship" and others call "community engagement," which can take various forms. The question raised by these activities is whether or not they can and should count as "scholarship" in making judgments of faculty work for tenure and promotion. At Syracuse University, Chancellor Nancy Cantor coined the term "scholarship in action" for this kind of work, and her efforts to treat it as scholarship in tenure decisions created enormous controversy. The university's Senate Academic Affairs Committee conducted an inquiry to explore faculty views on this topic in relation to actual practices. The results are documented in a white paper that uses Green's framework to analyze the range of attitudes the committee elicited by asking practitioners of community engagement to explain what made their work of this type "scholarly" (Phelps, 2010).

The committee discovered that all Green's stances, and nuanced variations of them, appeared among our panelists. The most common position was "observant, respecting and largely accepting the social norms of their fields despite the ways they actually diverge from them in engaged projects," largely for practical reasons (Phelps, 2010, p. 23). Often, "panelists' observant relationship to the academic norms of their training and experience showed up here in the way they draw on the resources these had given them, used and adapted them, and translated the spirit of those norms into new practices and standards. Often the result was a set of parallel or corresponding norms—for example, alternate ways of sharing, making public, disseminating, and subjecting to critique that parallel the way publications and review operate in traditional scholarship" (Phelps, 2010, p. 24). Another observant position was to support engaged scholarship only after winning tenure. Even those who changed their focus dramatically post-tenure "expressed some uncertainty or ambivalence about the role of scholarship in action in relation to traditional academic work" (Phelps, 2010, p. 24). Their reasons ranged from pragmatism about the way the academy works to

normative belief in their field's standards. Finally, we translated Green's concept of defiance into a spectrum of positions we called "transformative." One or two scholars simply found their disciplinary norms had become irrelevant to their own work (although still using their training as a resource); some were aggressively advocating for dramatic paradigm change in their own fields; and a rare few called for transforming notions of scholarship and norms for faculty work across the board (Phelps, 2010, p. 25).

Considering that we were hearing from those most engaged and profoundly committed to this kind of scholarship, our study showed how deeply engrained academic norms are among the faculty, based on the process of norming that takes place in graduate study and early participation in disciplinary communities of practice. (We did note sharp differences among fields on how rigid or flexible its norms were.) The inquiry also showed how thoughtfully faculty members struggle to judge their own conduct when circumstances and motives lead them to depart from these norms, which still bind them both externally and internally.

This experience prompted me to read the pieces in this volume with questions in mind about the variance in how participants in independent writing programs, like participants in engaged scholarship, perceive and relate to the norms that their programs (or aspirations) implicitly or explicitly challenge. To what extent do their attitudes toward norms, as voices of conscience, persist or evolve as independence changes their contexts and practices? Do we observe transformational impact, within and beyond writing programs themselves?

To explore these questions, we need to look at the way norms operate for writing programs and faculty at two different levels of organization, separately and interactively. Within English (or humanities) departments, one set of norms has traditionally governed embedded writing programs. These are not just practices, but true norms in the sense that they are naturalized—and enforced—within institutions as "the way things should be" or, at least, the way they must be. (Even though W. Ross Winterowd, a first-generation scholar, wrote defiantly against the subordination of writing studies in English departments, he often spoke of himself and fellow compositionists as "the cream of the scum," and he could never bring himself to cut the bonds.) As contributors to this volume observe, most writing faculty until recently have been socialized in English departments. But in most respects the historical norms for writing programs diverge dramatically from those of the academy at large, most significantly in three big areas: labor, teaching, and what I'll call institutionalization: how a discipline as an intellectual network finds "an organizational base for its activity, encompassing institutional and physical locations, organizing structures, and material resources," as well as relations of authority and accountability (Phelps, 2014, p. 9). The idea of independence most directly challenges norms for insti-

tutionalization that place writing programs in a dependent, marginalized position within English. But we will see that these three areas, though distinct, are coactive, intertwined by reciprocal influence, so that change in any one precipitates a cascade of changes in the others, and more besides.

In the case of labor, relying on a mix of constituencies for staffing instruction in English-dependent writing programs violates the academic norm of a tenure-track faculty with doctoral training in the discipline. (Given the increase in contingent faculty across the academy, now more than 50%, I remind readers that a norm is not an "is" but an "ought to be." Most "regular" faculty still observe this norm and treat departures from it as an aberration that violates academic culture.) In the case of teaching, the picture, even for embedded programs, is more complicated, and evolving rapidly, but their longtime focus on a single, general education (so-called "skills") course contrasts with the typical discipline's investment in a vertical curriculum (undergraduate majors through graduate education). Even as the field develops its own degree programs, this core responsibility still structures its identity both internally and as perceived by others. At the same time, writing programs as a group have developed and practice genres of instruction that are multiply nontraditional: innovative in forms and media; addressed to unconventional audiences, many not classifiable as "students"; collaborative with unorthodox partners from undergraduates and librarians to community members; and delivered in writing centers and distributed sites other than the degree-based credited courses that most fields identify with "teaching." Much of it counts as 'service" since it is unrecognizable to the system as teaching. Finally, as many pieces in this volume argue, the norm for institutionalization of a discipline is to control its own destiny within a unit that "serves as a faculty home, organizes the day-to-day structures that make their [the faculty's] work possible, including the reward structure, and serve as a political unit to defend their interests and support common goals" (Phelps, November 2002, p. 10). As a rule, embedded writing programs lack the most basic authority over their own enterprise, which in many cases is still not even recognized as the intellectual work of a discipline.

Among writing faculty, attitudes toward these deviant practices run the gamut of Green's relations to norms, including many calls to abandon them (e.g, the field's identification with general education, its use of nontenure-track faculty) in favor of developing the traditional activities (e.g., degree programs) and meeting the standards (e.g., research, tenurable faculty) for academic disciplines. But conversely, writing programs, especially independent ones, increasingly defy academic norms that devalue such a labor force and such teaching activities, working to professionalize a mixed labor force and to expand their investments in nontraditional teaching with multiple partners. The independence movement

certainly rebels against the old norms for *institutionalizing* writing programs, but it leaves in question the degree to which that will mean complying with—or embracing fully—the whole system of traditional norms that governs disciplines across institutions.

For individuals on a writing faculty, the practices of English-dependent writing programs bound by their internal norms put them at odds with the conduct prescribed by the academy for its authorized members. This incoherence or contradiction between the two levels means that writing faculty who are normed—and judged—simultaneously at both levels experience cognitive dissonance internally, while institutionally they suffer the consequences in paradoxical decisions like the successful WPA who doesn't receive tenure. The more writing studies has developed as a discipline, especially through doctoral education that inculcates broader academic norms, and the more the field has professionalized in ways that reflect those norms (scholarship, tenured faculty, graduate programs, and now undergraduate majors), the more jarring this disjuncture becomes for those in embedded writing programs.

The increasing dissonance and frustration this situation creates for writing faculty is on display in many of the histories of the present in this collection and, I suspect, is a driving force in many moves toward independence. This conflict comes out most explicitly in what is the exception in this volume, two programs that remain, at least for now, embedded in English departments. Each provides a window on the norms for writing programs so situated by directly contrasting them with the broader academic norms that govern other disciplines, exemplified by their colleagues in literature.

In "The Five Equities," William Lalicker analyzes the approach taken at West Chester University to change the status quo *within* an English department. Lalicker's chapter explains the difference in norms for institutionalization at the two levels by bluntly contrasting the state of independence with dependence. "In the usual hierarchy of academic power, departments are the de facto decision-making units of the institution. Funding comes through department budgets; hiring, especially tenure-track hiring with its assumption of defined disciplinary expertise, is conducted through departments; student allegiance, intellectual achievement, and identity, through traditional academic majors, all come through departments" (this volume). All these powers, and the resources and accomplishments they afford, are denied to the writing program subsumed under an English department. Lalicker poses the question of how "a writing program and its faculty, locked within the traditionally anti-composition structures of old-style English [can] achieve the functions and energies of a robust independent discipline" while remaining in English. The method he recommends is to achieve five equities that, he believes, have accomplished at West Chester, "if

not the completed ideal, then at least the ongoing ascendance of a progressive writing program within departmental confines" (this volume).

The five equities he identifies as a goal for writing programs in English are in employment, departmental governance, and curriculum offerings and choices for students (the latter divided into three equities—undergraduate core, options in a major, and graduate studies). The way embedded writing programs have been institutionalized is a regime of inequity. Lalicker's detailed discussion of each explains the consequences of its denial: how the inequities work to marginalize writing faculty, constrain the activities of a writing program, and deny legitimacy to writing studies as a discipline, in contrast to how departments normatively enable disciplines to gather and use resources, choose and prioritize their work, and produce and hire new generations that sustain the field. He also points out how the disjunction in norms that produce these inequities entails corresponding views of teaching: "in the mostly-unwritten prestige hierarchy of many English departments, the devaluing binaries of power divide not only composition as subordinate from literature, but teaching as subordinate from scholarly research." Of course, in this respect, as in each principle of membership in the academy, traditional English departments reflect academy-wide norms.

In a number of ways Lalicker's discussion subtly reveals the strength of both sets of norms and the hold they have over those who have been normed dually in English and in the academy. He begins on a note of resignation (pragmatic compliance) regarding institutionalization:

> the reality is that most writing programs are not independent, but retain curricular and administrative links to a Department of English . . . Whether for reasons of administrative inertia, budgetary boundaries, intellectual competition, or just plain outdated ignorance of the disciplinary status of composition many programs should be considered permanently within English. (this volume)

The solutions he describes are observant with respect to the old norm (as ideal) of viewing Composition and Rhetoric exclusively through the lens of English studies; precisely by "enacting [its] full inclusion," the result places it in an exclusive, privileged, "bi-disciplinary" relationship to literature (for example, via a unified major) (this volume). At the other level, seeking these equities is equivalent to adopting traditional academic norms for writing studies and writing programs: vertical curricula in the discipline (majors and graduate degrees); tenure-track faculty; priority given to research. Lalicker argues pragmatically that composition would be doomed by rejecting these norms: "though I might agree with those who place the blame on the valorization of research and the relative

disrespect for teaching as a central academic priority, colleges and universities are not going to relinquish the prestige of research." But, beyond compliance of necessity, he makes a strong case for the value of scholarship (and, by extension, this whole system) on intellectual and pragmatic grounds like advancing knowledge; grounding teaching in research; and gaining credibility with all stakeholders, opening space for action and influence.

This position reflects a common view among critics who dismiss independent writing programs as rare, anomalous, and doomed to reproduce the old model of an exploited labor force of contingent faculty, a basic teaching mission without grounding in scholarship, and an insecure and disrespected place outside the mainstream of the academy. While Lalicker isn't that pessimistic, he cites Appalachian State University's story of stalled independence as evidence of what happens when a writing program tries to challenge the norms for labor without achieving the equities that legitimate a discipline according to scholarly norms (this volume).

What is the perspective of authors Georgia Rhoades, Kim Gunter, and Beth Carroll in their chapter on Appalachian State? Their history reinforces Lalicker's picture of how norms operate contrastively but also interactively at the two levels. In this case, the labor force of the program consisted mainly of non-tenure track faculty (initially over 90% part-time) as well as TAs. Over the time period reported here, it grew to include three WPAs, covering several developing branches of the program. The program of professionalizing this work force begun by Rhoades, and its consequences, were the driving force beyond their still pending proposal for independence. Like Syracuse (Davies, this volume) and Grand Valley State (Schendel & Royer, this volume), the Appalachian State program leaders decided to invest in a non-tenure track faculty and build a teaching culture "through faculty development activities, expanding career opportunities, and improving working conditions," which included participation in governance, conversion of lines to ¾ and full-time positions with benefits, and inclusion in new contexts of teaching (a writing center and WAC program). Their success got them into a lot of trouble.

These changes go beyond supporting a labor force to reconceptualize it in ways that are more threatening than Lalicker's search for equity, because they challenge not only norms for writing programs in English, like the mismatches between responsibility and authority, needs and resources (Rhoades et al., this volume), but the broader system in which that labor is not authorized as genuine faculty work. By legitimating, respecting, rewarding, and treating these instructors as a faculty, with a viable career path in the academy, the writing program provoked a severe backlash that underlines the social power of norms over faculty as "voices" of conscience, in Green's sense. This concept is shocking

and subversive not simply because it might deprive certain groups of privileged status in a department, but because it puts in question the most fundamental principles of the system. In successfully professionalizing instructors, English faculty believed that "we were attacking tenure itself and naively did not understand how the university works" (Green, 1999, p. 26). (Valerie Ross, this volume, describes such backlash as the systemic response from a bureaucracy that perceives independent writing programs as a threat to the established order.)

Many in composition themselves have internalized the ideal that the academy should be populated only by "first-class citizens"—tenure-track faculty—and therefore regard its dependence on contingent faculty as undesirable and unethical. That implies an ultimate goal of "removing NTT faculty from the scene of teaching," even if it is an indefinitely postponed ideal (Rhoades et al., this volume). The authors acknowledge the force of the argument that "to be treated as an equal . . . composition must act more like other disciplines," for example by adding degree programs. But they reject that standard for labor, not simply as unrealistic, but as less desirable and productive than including professionalized faculty in a broader effort to establish a disciplinary identity through both traditional and nontraditional means and actors. A second thread in their motives for independence has to do with the development of relations to other disciplines and units of the institution. After describing the various ways in which they forged such relationships (including contingent faculty as respected participants) through a WAC Program designed to establish a vertical writing model and collaborations across campus on assessment, service learning, and information literacy, they note that "the interdisciplinary nature of writing instruction . . . was not accepted as consonant with department goals" (this volume).

Rhoades, Gunter, and Carroll don't put these choices forward as extraordinary, and have no way yet to know their long-term consequences at Appalachian State. In fact, their views are local, relatively modest expressions of trends found across writing programs, even before independence. But these attitudes are radical—and controversial *within* writing studies—insofar as they imagine a "different ideal" for both labor and institutional relationships, rather than aiming to "emulate" traditional disciplines in these respects (in Ross' useful term, this volume). In a critique of the controversial CCCC Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing (CCCC Executive Committee, 1989), I argued that rejecting the old deficit model for labor in writing studies doesn't entail accepting conventional faculty norms for an independent unit: "The CCCC Statement envisions an elite, homogeneous community of equals—all full-time, tenure-track professors of Composition and Rhetoric" (Phelps, December 1991, p. 2). The Syracuse Writing Program "chose instead the different ideal of a mixed, heterogeneous, diversely talented community

engaged in complementary but different activities," a standard that derives excellence from "hybrid vigor" (Phelps, December 1991, p. 5). (Davies, this volume, reveals the complexities of trying to implement this ideal against the grain of institutional norms.) Expertise in such a community, and the respect and influence it garners, is not identified with position or status in a bureaucratic hierarchy. Ross associates this attitude with the entrepreneurial style of many founders of independent writing programs, who "will whenever possible ignore hierarchy and seek to distribute responsibility to those able to do a job well, rather than those with the most impressive credentials" (this volume).

Similarly, in beginning to develop partnerships, activities that characterize many independent and some dependent writing programs, Appalachian State is participating in experimenting with new norms of *inter*dependence, which challenge the enduring academic ideal of autonomy for individuals and disciplines (Brown, 1982). Emblematic of this autonomy is what Rhoades, Gunter, and Carroll describe as the English faculty's disconnectedness from cross-institutional goals and projects.

What we are seeing here, in the shifting relationships between old habits and practices as normed within English departments, and new ones associated with increasing independence, is that writing studies has taken ownership of some norms that were historically imposed and developed them into organic, productive features of the field. However, these features, implemented in writing units, still conflict with the traditional norms associated with achieving visibility and acceptance in the academy as a discipline. (See the standards for field recognition identified in the field's Visibility Project, which sought to qualify Rhetoric and Composition/Writing Studies for representation by codes in influential databases, reported in Phelps and Ackerman, 2010). In teaching, for example, this conflict is embodied succinctly in the competing motives to develop instructional partnerships with academic and nonacademic actors and units across the institution, and, conversely, to expand in areas of traditional teaching responsibilities for disciplines, like undergraduate majors and graduate programs. The field values and studies pedagogy as an integral and scholarly part of the field, but this position is weakened to the extent it comes under the influence of a paradigm that values research above all. These motives and the choices they present interact with all the contextual variables of institutions and with historical contingencies to create divergent paths for independent writing units. In other words, a second pattern of variation emerges from the conflicts over norms as independent units form and develop their identity over time. In the next section, focusing on how units are institutionalized, I will examine how this variance appears as "experiments in identity." This entails taking up a systems-oriented perspective on the ecology of writing programs, which brings with it skepticism

about our perceptions and assumptions of stability in the academy itself. (Reiff, Bawarshi, Ballif & Weisser, 2015 offer the first collection to frame writing programs comprehensively in an ecological perspective very close to mine here. I regret I didn't have it in time to make use of the correspondences.)

EXPERIMENTS IN IDENTITY

The problem of constructing identity for an independent program is threaded through many pieces in this collection. This theme becomes focal in Valerie Ross' analysis of leadership styles and Justin Everett's account of "branding" an independent program at the University of the Sciences. Some groups of faculty set out deliberately to design, propose, and advocate an independent unit; others find themselves thrown into one without intention or preparation. Some free themselves by separation, sometimes entailing reconfiguration or merger with new partners, while others are created as stand-alone units; but in both types their form often emerges as the unpredicted outcome of long, tangled, contingent, messy processes. Exactly how "free" are newly independent (or born independent) programs to define an identity that doesn't fit available models and precedents at higher education institutions? How are these possibilities shaped, on the one hand, by the desire to "emulate other disciplines [rather] than revamp an identity based on writing instruction" (Ross, this volume) and, on the other, by an "institutional logic" of writing programs whose nontraditional activities, faculty, and functions require different structures (Phelps, 1991)? How do these motives interact with contextual factors unique to each institution?

The very idea of creating an independent unit, and even more the responsibility as it becomes a reality, is simultaneously liberating and disorienting. On the one hand, participants can feel adrift without the boundaries, rules, or usable models for structuring and legitimating their activity. Everett writes about the newly separated program at the University of the Sciences: "A way forward had not been mapped for our program. As a new unit independent of any department, no model existed for determining course approvals, lines of reporting, and tenure and promotion" (this volume). But at the same time, independence at the beginning can feel intoxicatingly limitless, open to almost any possibilities participants can conceive, including designing a completely unprecedented kind of unit to do all sorts of novel things.

I felt that sense of unlimited horizons when I first arrived at Syracuse University to lead a "new" writing program. It was not that I believed we could actually do almost anything we could think of, but that I saw for myself how moving from stifling departmental confines into an empty but dynamic space frees the imagination to think outside all bounds, including those relationships,

structures, and functions authorized by the university's rules and precedents for academic units. This liberated feeling was reinforced in our case by many contingent facts, like the newness of several administrators, that made the program's institutionalization experimental and improvisational. Its charter, while setting in place "in-betweenness" as a transitional arrangement, took an extraordinarily open position with respect to the program's possible future location, structure, faculty appointments, and reporting relationships (Charter for the Writing Program, 1987). This encouraged us to propose (with variable success) innovative designs for every aspect of the program from its faculty and curriculum to its rewards structure.

I think this hypothetical or imaginative freedom to re-envision writing programs is an extremely important product of the independence movement, since we can never accomplish what we can't even imagine. In practice, of course, we all know—or learn—that the ability to realize any novel design is highly constrained, because of the multiple, complex factors that enter into negotiating and implementing it in a given site. For one thing, a newly emerged academic unit isn't the clean slate that I naively thought it was. Usually a great deal of what it had been is carried over and needs to be transformed, not created, as many point out with respect to labor, teaching responsibilities, funding sources, and so on. And, as we see in almost all the histories in this volume, extremely specific, local features of the institutional context (type, mission, demographics, financial and technological resources, key individuals, etc.) intersect at particular historical moments to both constrain and empower the actions and choices through which a writing program negotiates its identity. Design processes should incorporate deep knowledge of such constraints, but that won't work well if a design isn't flexible and adaptable, as Ross points out in her distinction between planned and emergent approaches to developing writing programs (this volume). The emergent approach, while it can begin with a design, "builds into its plan—and thus into its thinking and its communication with all stakeholders in planning—the understanding that objectives and desired outcomes are likely to change over time, in response to changing conditions and unanticipated consequences." She advises that the emergent approach is "more attuned to the entrepreneurial challenges of creating an IWP or effecting other large changes," although a combination of the two is ideal. However, more often than not, the histories in this collection describe a more chaotic emergence in which design is a combination of on-the-fly and retrospective, as with the University of the Sciences (Everett) and Cabrini University (Filling-Brown & Frechie).

Acknowledging all these complexities and coactive constraints that explain variations in identity, I want to focus on one that defines writing programs in their role as institutional expressions of a discipline. This pattern translates the

complicated, conflicted interactions over a double set of norms into a particular variance in how writing programs construct their identity, along a spectrum from decentered to centered. To explain this pattern, I need to draw on previous writings trying to conceptualize an "institutional logic of writing programs" (Phelps, 1991, 2002). In the first piece, I analyzed the role of writing programs in relation to the academy as a system, suggesting that, once exposed by independence, their unorthodox features "stress the system in salutary ways," drawing attention to problems "endemic to academic institutions (for example, rewarding teaching and service, planning workload for administrators, budgeting for nontraditional instruction, encouraging cross-disciplinary teaching and research efforts)" (Phelps, 1991, pp. 157–158). This perspective sees such "problems" not as deficits of writing programs, but as a mismatch with institutional norms that lack the structures and processes to solve them. Independence foregrounds them as needs that must be met systematically in order for the writing program to work at all, at a moment when that is presumably an institutional goal. Insofar as these needs align with generic problems that confront higher education, writing programs can become laboratories for concrete experiments with more flexible or alternate norms, and, in alliance with others, potential catalysts for larger changes in the academic value system.

Independent writing programs inherit these unorthodox features from their mixed heritage—they are not newly invented. I've pointed here to two with roots in that history: developing new functions and interdependencies with other parts of the institution (and external communities) and turning contingent faculties into assets. Upon independence these become both more possible and also more controversial in relation to broader academic values of autonomy and the tenure system. But in "Institutional Logic" I went on to argue that these and other nontraditional aspects of writing programs are not just accidents of history, or the product of their marginalization as service units, but expressive of the character of the discipline as an intellectual enterprise. As these features become more visible and more valuable in independent programs, they reveal an isomorphism between "the intellectual structure of composition and rhetoric, as a highly intertextual, multisourced discipline," and its distributed, decentered functions and activities throughout the institution (Phelps, 1991, p. 159). Not only does "the logic of writing programs [call] for such a multiconnected, horizontally integrated organization," but it "reflects, and when put into place furthers, the research mission of composition and rhetoric along with its need to access and translate for its own purposes an eclectic theoretical base in the studies of many disciplines" (Phelps, 1991, p. 159).

Eleven years later, in a talk at Michigan State University, I amended this argument, based on my experience of watching the Syracuse Writing Program

"departmentalize" with the addition of more tenure-track faculty, a Ph.D. degree, and a minor that was to develop into an undergraduate major in Writing and Rhetoric. I began by defining a writing program minimally as "an administrative structure that implements the responsibility to facilitate the practice and learning of writing at an institution," and comprehensively as what results when a "scattered array of programmatic structures, settings, partnerships, and linkages coalesces into an institutionally licensed enterprise" (Phelps, November 2002, pp. 3–4). Such an enterprise is "the characteristic mode by which intellectual work is accomplished and evaluated at a college or university," understanding intellectual work very broadly to mean "the various ways faculty members can contribute individually and jointly to the collective projects and enterprises of knowledge and learning undertaken to implement broad academic missions" (MLA Commission on Service, 1996, p. 15). At any higher education institution, such an enterprise requires an inquiry base; at a research university, and for most, though not all, other institutional types, that is assured by a core research faculty identified with the program. Ultimately, that enterprise on a given campus is authorized by the inquiry base and scholarly network of a discipline.

This aspect of writing programs aligns them with traditional norms, which call for such enterprises to be "centered" in departments identified with disciplines (even if that correspondence is often a myth). I pointed out that if we didn't have departments to house such enterprises we would have to invent them, because faculty have human and political needs for a faculty home that aren't met by the kind of decentered organization needed to implement a program's integrative and distributive character. But I also recapitulated my original characterization of writing programs as "intrinsically distributed and decentered in a way that parallels the diffusion of writing itself, and the responsibilities for its relationship to learning and inquiry, across the faculty and units of the institution," requiring organizational features "antithetical to the typical hierarchical organization of departments, colleges, and universities around disciplinary cores of expertise." (Phelps, November 2002, pp. 7–8). There is an obvious (but, I think, constitutive) tension between the organizational, intellectual, and human needs of these two facets of writing units, acting as centrifugal and centripetal forces pulling them toward opposite poles. I concluded that any writing program design

> must somehow find a way structurally to reconcile needs, features, and functions that gravitate toward one of these two poles—the complex structure and broad horizon of the whole system versus the human-size community for living and learning; the decentered, loosely coupled network and the focused core; the generalist, distributed mission and the expertise that

> grounds it and finds its source and expression in scholarship
> and advanced teaching. (Phelps, November 2002, p. 11)

I propose, then, to view the independent writing programs featured in this collection as experimenting with institutional identities that respond to these centrifugal and centripetal forces by negotiating a balance—often temporarily—at different points along a spectrum between independence and interdependence, centered and decentered structures. (Although my focus is on structure, Cristina Hanganu-Bresch, this volume, observes the same polarity in the current curricular choice between "writing about writing" [disciplinary] and "rhetoric" [cross-disciplinary], with similar risks and benefits to be weighed and balanced.)

In undertaking these "identity projects" (Ross, this volume), programs are also negotiating new and variable relations to the various norms that have hitherto governed them and still have great salience, but may themselves be less stable than they seem. These negotiated identities, very much a function of programs' institutional circumstances and situations, are seldom fixed for long, but must be constantly accomplished and reaccomplished (Weick, 2009, p. 4) as contextual factors change and choices play out in unforeseen ways.

As noted earlier, outliers are significant in patterns of variance. That's why I begin with Keith Hjortshoj's chapter on the Knight Writing Program at Cornell University, which is (his word) "eccentric" in several respects. First, the program has the longest history (almost 50 years) of any independent writing program in this collection. Its identity is remarkably secure and stable, even though it has evolved from its initial form and still has the dynamism to add new structures and functions according to its original premise: that expertise and authority over written language reside in the various academic disciplines, not in any "single discipline or theoretical construct" (Hjortshoj, this volume). Second, it lies at the extreme end of the scale in decenteredness, to the degree that Hjortshoj pointedly defines it as "interdependent" rather than "independent." And third, uniquely in this collection, he denies that the program has an intrinsic connection with, or dependence on, a discipline of writing studies.

Hjortshoj draws an attractive picture of the intellectual and pedagogical richness of a program that is the epitome of a distributed, decentered logic, embodied in a writing program so integrated with its context by its reciprocal, interdependent relations with specialized disciplines that it can hardly be distinguished from them. They form a single, dynamic system that he believes is perfectly adapted to the unique milieu of Cornell as "an unusually decentralized, complicated place," a very large, anarchic institution with many hyperspecialized, virtually autonomous parts spread out in space, each with its own "distinct organizational culture, whose very diversity comprises its unique pluralistic identity" (Hjortshoj, this

volume). Although he doesn't mention its wealth, one reason for the sustainability (and inimitability) of Cornell's writing program as a nondepartmental independent unit is that it is supported by multiple generous endowments.

Unlike me, Hjortshoj doesn't see this decentered structure as a principled expression of qualities that characterize a discipline of writing studies. Instead, he portrays disciplinarity in Rhetoric and Composition as antithetical to the principle of interdependence, insofar as it means claiming authority over disciplinary writing and writing instruction. This view underlies his skepticism about "independence" as a goal for writing programs, identified with a centered "professorial, departmental status and specialized knowledge production" in the traditional roles and rewards system (this volume).

Clearly, Cornell's experiment demonstrates the viability of an identity that is totally distributed and not authorized in the eyes of campus faculty—or even its own faculty, he says—by grounding in a discipline's intellectual vision, research, or knowledge base. For Hjortshoj, independence means "the necessity of our independence from *any* department of discipline," and any faculty identification with rhetoric or composition means nothing in a university that has never even imagined that writing could be the subject of an academic field. Instead, he explains, both the program and its faculty sustain an anomalous identity, as "an interdisciplinary being" in a research university that ironically represents the quintessence of specialized academic knowledge work (this volume).

However, this position runs into some difficulties if it is projected outside its unique context. The first reason is the simple fact that a discipline is not just a pedagogical site, but a study, and so the argument doesn't rest on who has authority over either writing as practical expertise or writing instruction. He might respond persuasively that the Cornell writing program *is* a study, a richly productive, ongoing collaborative inquiry into academic writing conducted jointly with students, the program's faculty, and disciplinary faculty, although he admits that sharing this knowledge beyond those who produce it is extremely difficult. But the discipline that has formed around a study of writing (already a social fact) does not limit its inquiries to disciplinary writing or the academy; the scope of writing as its object of study is much broader and multi-dimensional. Its institutionalization is only partly about writing instruction, whether distributed and decentered or centered around degree programs of its own. As an intellectual community, it needs to find institutional expression—an organizational base on U.S. (or Canadian) campuses—to conduct its inquiries, sustain and reproduce itself, and enter into relationships, including "interdisciplinary" ones that presume disciplines, however fluid and emergent these certainly are.

The recently published book *Naming What We Know* on threshold concepts in writing studies asserts as an overarching metaconcept that "Writing is both

an activity and a subject of study" (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015, pp. 15–16). It also includes two threshold concepts that acknowledge the integral relations among writing, disciplines, and identity that Cornell explores programmatically: "Writing is a way of enacting disciplinarity" (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015, pp. 40–41) and "Disciplinary and professional identities are constructed through writing" (p. 55–56). This suggests that the discipline has already evolved intellectually to incorporate interdisciplinary inquiry and interdependence into the identity of the discipline itself. Meanwhile, realizing that other fields systematically research as well as teach writing, not only as self-reflective experts in its practice, the study of writing is re-constituting itself at another level as an international interdiscipline, where multiple disciplines identify themselves with an intellectual network of research on writing. Different programs, as experiments with embodying disciplinary or even interdisciplinary identity, may take up different aspects of this intellectual range and foci.

Hjortshoj rightly points to the costs and hazards of more centered forms of security and identity (this volume), which I located primarily in the poor match between the evolving norms of the emergent field and its programs, notably for labor and interdisciplinary connections, and the available structures and dominant values of traditional academe. But he hasn't experienced, or noted, the corresponding risks of decentering for programs that are ill-adapted to serve the disciplinary functions that departments typically afford. These are illustrated in two programs in the volume: the University of Toronto (MacDonald, Procter & Williams) and Cabrini University (Filling-Brown & Frechie).

Michelle Filling-Brown and Seth Frechie describe a remarkable convergence between the potential that lies in giving up a center and the distinctive culture and historical circumstances of a particular institution. Cabrini University historically had a mission to address social justice and serve the poor. After earlier participating in the national reform movement to re-emphasize teaching (attributed to Ernest Boyer and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching), Cabrini turned to a new reform of its general education curriculum in response to a tsunami of interlocked changes: generational turnover in the faculty; increased assessment and accountability; growth that drove hiring of non-tenure track faculty; and the transformation of a Catholic, women's liberal arts commuting college into a coed, residential college and comprehensive institution with substantial professional and graduate education. The new curriculum put its historic values at the core, ultimately establishing an independent program in which a coordinator (originally a WPA) administers a decentered curriculum of seminars in "Engagements for the Common Good" that integrate writing instruction with the study of social justice. This was accomplished when, and because, the writing faculty "dropped our traditional safety net . . .

by abandoning both the single-course approach to first-year writing and the disciplinary home that writing program had historically enjoyed" (Filling-Brown & Frechie, this volume). The new IWP's collaborations and associated professional development disseminated faculty knowledge and attention to writing into the majors, as well as integrating curriculum and faculty development with assessment. The authors declare that this decentering of the writing program was profoundly transformational for the college culture in its merging of commitments to social justice and to writing development. However, Filling-Brown and Frechie view the decisions to give up the center as a risk; their so far "successfully unorthodox means for getting the job done" (this volume). IWP is both "the centerpiece achievement and, if we're honest, most vexing problem for Cabrini faculty teaching today" (this volume). The program still has a "disciplinary face" (in English), but it is not the traditional identity that derives from first-year writing: it is more defined by interdependencies. They briefly point to some of the specific problems of having no departmental home for the IWP, including the traditional difficulties of having no reliable sources and processes for budgeting and capturing resources for such activities.

The University of Toronto (MacDonald, Procter & Williams, this volume), as a decentered program with no disciplinary home, typifies writing instruction in Canada, which has developed in the absence of a first-year writing requirement as a set of diverse independent programs on a WAC or WID model (Graves, 1994; Graves & Graves, 2006). The program at Toronto, a large research university with a student body more than half multilingual, is organized around a Writing Instruction for Teaching Assistants (WIT) initiative in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences that is directed by a coordinator who is a writing specialist and scholar. As at Cornell, writing instruction is distributed—located and funded in the disciplines, supported at Toronto by professional development for disciplinary TAs, consultations by the coordinator with faculty in the disciplines, and an array of professionally staffed writing centers. Collaborations develop around faculty-initiated projects for improving writing in disciplinary programs, which triggers funding for a Lead Writing TA and additional funding for course TAs. A key component of the program is the appointment and development of these Lead Writing TAs, advanced graduate students in the disciplines who work in their departments to serve as consultants to the faculty and provide training for the course TAs.

The authors describe the successes of this program in its broad impact on the disciplines, through cultivating a sense of ownership over writing instruction for their own particular students and needs. It has stabilized its funding and gained credibility with the institution and its faculty. However, they also make clear the costs of this model. WIT depends heavily on a single expert as

the "hub" to provide a center for this distributed structure. But "the collaborative nature of this work can paradoxically be isolating. With no departmental home, the coordinator has no departmental home and no dedicated administrative support or immediate colleagues" (MacDonald, Procter & Williams, this volume). It takes special effort to make her nontraditional work visible so that it is eligible for rewards (including tenure and promotion in the teaching track). They also note that the program lacks the "collegiality and power base of a more traditional departmental home" (MacDonald, Procter & Williams, this volume) and depends heavily on graduate students as teachers, entailing both risks and rewards in terms of disseminating expertise in writing pedagogy.

The specific problems associated with decentering even in this successful program are common ones for independent writing programs in the Canadian context, which typically float outside traditional departmental structures and, in many cases, lack the stability that Toronto has achieved. This state of affairs is both a symptom and a consequence of the fact that, for many complex historical reasons, Canadian writing and discourse studies have been unable to coalesce a cross-institutional identity and gain recognition as a discipline in the Canadian academy (Clary-Lemon, 2009; Landry, 2010; Phelps, 2014). In the US, decentered programs can reference the discipline itself as a remote center; they can draw on the resources of a discipline, its knowledge base, its mentors, the credibility it has developed through its scholarship, its funding channels, and especially its doctoral programs. (Even Cornell has brought well-known disciplinary writing specialists to campus to inform their writing seminars for TAs.) Without that national disciplinary base, Canadian writing faculty and administrators have to create their programs in relative isolation.

I just want to touch briefly on the counterpart to these problems in programs that balance an identity near the centered end of the spectrum. Examples in this volume of independent programs that gravitate toward more centered or departmentalized structures are those of Grand Valley State University (Royer & Schendel), the University of Winnipeg in Canada (Kearns & Turner), and Syracuse University (Davies). Each of these has developed degree programs, undergraduate majors for all three, and at Syracuse a Ph.D. program as well. Each has longevity, demonstrating that programs can stabilize at any point on the identity spectrum, when they are well-adapted to their institution and lucky in other ways (e.g., institutional growth, budgetary conditions, alignment with institutional initiatives). But none of these centered programs has developed the complex web of interdependencies that allows transformational effects to propagate rhizomatically across the university, although each has found ways to express the disciplinary motive for making connections across and even outside the institution. At Grand Valley State, for example, it takes the form of what the

authors call "service work around the university" that involves the department in collaborations through committees and governance structures (Royer & Schendel, this volume). In the case of Syracuse, horizontal development was an equal part of the program's initial design, which was intended to support a flow of information to and from the disciplines that would make its general education component context-sensitive. But, without institutional support, it couldn't be implemented systematically, only in ad hoc partnerships. Instead, the program turned those energies to community engagement, aligning itself with a university priority.

A closer look at these programs also shows that their departmentalization can hide some rather significant departures from established norms, making them more flexible under the pressure of novel practices in areas of disciplinarity, labor, teaching, and interconnectivity. The University of Winnipeg's "traditional" department with a first-year program and an undergraduate major in Rhetoric and Communication, by following an American model, is an anomaly in the Canadian landscape. Grand Valley State has innovated in its instructional programs, placement, and assessment, including a major that is internally interdisciplinary; and, after attempting to adopt an entirely tenure-track faculty model for teaching, it ended up instead professionalizing its workforce with a new position of Affiliate Professor for writing teachers. Syracuse instituted a longterm professional development program to establish a teaching culture, with enduring effects on the writing program and, in retrospect, its instructors (Davies). (Since Davies' piece was written, the department has finally won full-time salaried positions for these professionalized teachers after 29 years of pressing for them, requiring a policy change affecting the whole institution.)

It takes incredible energy, leadership, persistence, and resources, including faculty size and funding, to pursue such initiatives against the grain of an institutional status quo, in the larger context of doing the organizational and professional work it takes to succeed in traditional terms as a department. This means that centered programs, indeed all independent programs, must prioritize their goals. In choosing the most synergistic directions that fit the institution and their capabilities, independent programs' experiments can enact only a selection of the potential dimensions of identity that a discipline affords, producing unique individual programs. The question, and the risk, is whether and how much a particular balance can satisfy competing, equally legitimate needs—intellectual, practical, political—for faculty life to thrive and programs to accomplish their work.

The centrifugal and centripetal forces that act on programs can pull powerfully against each other at a given institution, both in terms of what is valued and in terms of what is practically possible. However, the University of Cali-

fornia at Davis' program, as described collaboratively by Chris Thaiss and his colleagues (Chris Thaiss, Sarah Perrault, Katherine Rodger, Eric Schroeder, and Carl Whithaus, this volume) presents a counterargument to the notion that an independent, discipline-based center and interdisciplinary interdependence are fundamentally incompatible. They describe the program as having developed via several long, complex trajectories of activity along horizontal and vertical axes that give it its "distinctive disciplinary/cross-disciplinary identity" (this volume). Along the horizontal (X) axis, the program has woven a web of interdependent relations to the disciplines through a program of writing in the disciplines and professions, various WAC functions, and, recently, contributions to developing the writing of multilingual writers. Along the vertical (Y) axis, which has expanded since becoming independent, the program offers courses and nontraditional (consultative) teaching at all levels of the undergraduate curriculum and in the graduate school, an audience that also includes faculty and TAs. Tables picture the curricular expression of these (Thaiss, et al., this volume).

Much of this instruction on both axes furthers the cross-disciplinary mission. But unlike many decentered programs, Davis' network of interdisciplinary connections grew from a strong central hub of writing courses and an increasingly professionalized (nontenure-track) writing faculty, providing an organizational base it could leverage to develop a more traditional disciplinary identity through the vertical curriculum. Since independence, the vertical axis has taken on a more disciplinary color in degree programs, including a professional writing minor, a proposed major, and a "designated emphasis" in Writing, Rhetoric, and Composition Studies, housed in UWP, available to several affiliated doctoral programs. The heightened potential for research and scholarship by the faculty (including the first appointed tenure-line faculty) and graduate students calls attention to the discipline as authorizing curricular activities on both axes. At the same time, even these disciplinary degrees retain an interdisciplinary flavor from their matrix in the horizontal network. The synergy and reciprocity between activities along the two axes, enabling them to coexist productively as context for one another, is the signature feature of the balanced identity Davis is trying to construct.

BETWEEN SMOKE AND CRYSTAL

In focusing first on norms, I highlighted the inertia of higher education institutions as organizations that seem impervious to change. Valerie Ross, a former organizational consultant as well as IWP founder, emphasizes how as bureaucratic cultures they operate from the top to perpetuate the status quo through "well-defined structures, a clearly established hierarchy, and a predictable, controlled set of operations and functions" (this volume). The discipline-based

norms that faculty members themselves internalize add another layer of inertia, enforced by the faculty even when an administration tries to initiate top-down, planned change. According to William Brown, academics are loyal, not to their institutions, but to an abstraction, "the culture that expresses academic principles. . . . To the extent that collectivity is perceived, the faculty sees itself, rather than the university as a whole, as embodying the values and norms that provide the major ingredient for binding participants together" (1982, p. 40). He goes on to note that "precedence, and whatever power they believe to be inherent to the system, should be afforded the department" (1982, p. 41). Many would-be reformers resign themselves, from bitter experience, to the impossibility of disrupting such a stable equilibrium—as, for example, the enduring subjection of writing programs in English departments.

From this perspective, in seeking independence writing programs act as agents of change, disrupting established order in the spirit Ross calls "entrepreneurial," which she attributes to founding directors in their leadership style. If we look at the programs here through this lens, we see individual programs acting as dynamic human systems with very much the same character as developmental scientists ascribe to human beings, with the same kind of variance and unique developmental trajectories. They are not "independent" of their environments, but form with them a system of infinite complexity, defined by its multidimensional coactive relations. As open, adaptive systems, their identity is constantly emergent, unpredictable and capable of novelty. Their practices are experimental, flexible, opportunistic, ad hoc, "fluid and collaborative, context- and goal-driven rather than rule- and committee-bound" (Ross, this volume). To the extent they actually accomplish change, such (re)invented units can be vulnerable to resurgence of the traditional order, even in their own drift back toward bureaucracy, although this may also preserve them (Ross, this volume). Their identities are only stabilized-for-now and, like genres, are constantly reproduced and reinvented in activity.

Organizational theorists like Karl Weick (2001, 2009) have reconceptualized the organization generally in exactly these terms, shifting focus from *organization* as an achieved design, to *organizing* as an ongoing, adaptive, improvisational process of redesigning. The "organized impermanence" organizations achieve is transient and needs to be constantly remade, as does their identity. "Organizing, viewed as an emergent unpredictable order, replaces a distinctive, stable self as the actor with dynamic relationships as the actor" (Weick, 2009, p. 7).

Weick borrows from Taylor and Van Every (2000) a vivid metaphor that locates organizations, as systems that embody human life, always somewhere "between smoke and crystal" (Weick, 2009, pp. 4–6, 33). Taylor and Van Every, attributing this metaphor to Atlan (1979), explain:

> Crystal is a perfectly structured material . . . but because its structure is perfect, it never evolves; It is fixed for eternity. It is not life. But it is order. Smoke is just randomness, a chaos of interacting molecules that dissolves as fast as it is produced. It is not life either. But it is dynamic. Life appears when some order emerges in the dynamic of chaos and finds a way to perpetuate itself, so that the orderliness begins to grow, although never to the point of fixity (because that would mean the loss of the essential elasticity that is the ultimate characteristic of life). (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 31)

In Weick's application of the metaphor, "the boundaries formed by smoke and crystal become the limiting conditions between which organization unfolds. Taylor and Van Every equate crystal with repetition, regularity, redundancy, and the preservation of many distributed conversations in the form of texts that stabilize and reproduce states of the world. They equate smoke with variety, unpredictability, complexity, and conversations whose outcomes are unpredictable and transient" (Weick, 2009, p. 33). Organizing is the process of trying to move organizations from the impermanence of smoke toward a more dependable, durable order, closer to crystal. But their efforts are "slowed and counteracted by conditions such as continuing change, reorganizing, forgetting, and adaptation . . . Organization, therefore embodies continuing tension in the form of simultaneous pulls toward smoke and crystal" (Weick, 2009, p. 6).

In this metaphor, writing units can fall closer to smoke, with transient, emergent, precarious order, or closer to crystal, more stabilized and less entrepreneurial; or they may "oscillate" between the two in cycles of development. This distinction does not equate with mine between centered and decentered, distributed units, because we have seen examples of both crystallizing into long-lived structures. Instead, this variability and oscillation between smoke and crystal is an overarching pattern of diversity for independent writing programs, which incorporates the two variance patterns I analyzed: programs' relations to norms and their experiments with structures between centered and decentered poles.

So what does this mean for our impressions that the academy has tremendous inertia, with crystallized cross-institutional structures that can only be changed with enormous effort, requiring radical disruption and disequilibrium (Weick, 2009, p. 233)? Are higher education institutions, after all, so monolithic in their norms and structures? Haven't we seen just as much variance in the host colleges and universities themselves as in their writing programs? Doesn't the very existence, and growth, of independent writing programs argue that American

colleges and universities are themselves, as human practices and products, open systems and, as such, subject to the same change forces, and the same coactive, complex, evolving relations with their own internal and external environments? So why do we perceive their organization as so "permanent"?

Weick suggests one answer lies in reassessing our assumptions about inertia, which he links to relying on planned change over emergent change (see Ross' comparison, this volume). If we look at an organization as a set of stable, mutually reinforcing structures, we are likely to think it requires elaborate, planned, top-down design to disrupt its inertia. But if it is a set of processes that continually accomplish and unravel order, then "the constant tension between unraveling and reaccomplishment is an ongoing prod to emergent, continuous change" (Weick, 2009, p. 233), and our problem is to manage it.

Processes of emergent change, as he describes it, involve many small changes, "ongoing accommodations, adaptations, and alterations" that occur in the daily course of work (Weick, 2009, p. 238). Individually, these adjustments are not heroic or revolutionary, but "the wise leader sees emergent change where others see only inertia and pretexts for planned change" (p. 239). Weick cites Orlikowski's argument that "as accommodations and experiments 'are repeated, shared, amplified, and sustained, they can, over time, produce perceptible and striking organizational changes'" (Orlikowski, 1996, p. 89, cited in Weick, 2009, p. 231). This concept suggests that independent writing programs, as experiments, may in the aggregate accomplish an array of local changes that could gradually effect emergent change in higher education at the systems level. That is most likely when, like Cabrini University's writing program, they can align with local culture and find allies to help channel turbulent change forces (economic, technological, demographic, cultural) that are potentially both productive and destructive.

Here are a few conclusions I draw from examining several patterns of variance in the programs discussed here, informed by the "apperceptions" and conceptualizations of their participants. First, we shouldn't expect or want these experiments to converge on some ideal model of an independent writing program or department. Instead, experimentation with identity, ongoing and context-specific, is itself a pattern of patterns among IDWPs. So is their diversity, which is what we would expect of individuals that are themselves complex dynamic systems and parts of larger systems. We shouldn't forget that independent units are part of a larger system of writing programs across an even wider band of identities. Embedded programs initiated many of the practices and challenges to norms that make independent programs distinctive in the academy. In turn, the growing number of independent programs and departments is a powerful new social fact, offering heterogeneous models for embedded programs—even their

departments—to conduct experimentation and identity projects of their own. As they become more visible to and connected with one another, they form their own collectivity and network of reciprocal influence.

If I had to speculate on a long-term trend in the development of writing programs, it might be that they will move toward increasingly complex ecological interdependencies, simply because identity is relational. The very concept of development is that change over time increases the complexity of relations in a self-organizing dynamic system, as the individual and its contexts become increasingly differentiated and integrated (Overton, 2015, pp. 52–53). For writing programs, these relations already extend beyond the academy to external actors and communities. It may turn out that "independence" is a necessary transitional state between dependence and a very expanded sense of interdependence.

Finally, I expect that independent writing programs' experiments with identity will continue, in a feedback loop, to influence and be influenced by the discipline, helping to ensure that the disciplinary identity itself remains pluralistic, highly variable, and impermanent, closer to smoke than crystal. I myself wouldn't want it otherwise. I suspect, like Ross, that our future lies in being "forever entrepreneurial, forever compelled to adapt, a stranger in a strange land, never quite at home. For here we are, some 40 years after our first declaration of independence, unsettled even about what to call our field, the greatest identity project of all" (this volume).

NOTES

1. These words are quoted from the IWPA Affiliate webpage for the Council of Writing Program Administrators, not updated since 2011, which listed 31 then-active members (IDWPA [Affiliate]). While I was writing this afterword, representatives met at the WPA Conference in Boise and introduced a new website for the organization (IDWPA [Independent]) that incorporates its most recent name change, to Independent Writing Departments and Programs *Association* (Myatt, 2015). The group's Affiliate page at CWPA will be updated to match. On the new site, a subtle change expands potential members by making it "open to *anyone interested in learning about* independent writing departments, programs, and centers," including Communication as well as Writing and Rhetoric units [emphasis added] (IDWPA [Independent]). But the minutes refer to "continued discussion about what it means to be 'independent.'" Leaders are actively revising the directory and soliciting new members. Since the new directory is not yet available, I used the 2011 list of members as the starting point for this—predictably unreliable!—estimate of independent writing programs.

2. I should disclose that I was the Syracuse University program's founding director and Davies' dissertation chair; I made my archives available for her study. I am also familiar with some other programs in this collection as a consultant.

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