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The role of literature in the freshman English programs of private, liberal arts colleges in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin

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The role of literature in the freshman English programs
of private, liberal arts colleges
in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin

by

Carole A. Teator

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INTRODUCTION

What I have attempted to determine in this study of freshman English programs in selected private, liberal arts colleges in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa is the role that literature has in the freshman writing programs of these colleges.

Based on the pedagogical and theoretical essays I had read prior to beginning this study, I believed there was a trend in writing instruction theory that would necessitate a deemphasis on literary studies in freshman writing instruction. Contemporary composition theory is based on the belief that freshman writing is best taught through instruction in typical rhetorical modes, such as the comparison/contrast or the definition essay. Because this kind of writing instruction usually relies on essays as models for writing, there is generally very little, if any, chance for students to read literary works, such as poetry or fiction. Thus, since literary study is not vital to the teaching of writing, many scholars (such as Maxine Hairston, who is discussed in the next section) argue that composition studies should become an independent discipline that has little, if any, allegiance to the traditional English department emphasis on literary studies. They support this division by referring to the depth and validity of research in composition study. However, at the same time these scholars are championing composition studies, a number of scholars, who are discussed in the next section, have called for a union of composition and literary study that could draw on the strengths of each field. In other words, theorists are still trying to establish whether this is a time of schism or a time for reorganization.

The basis for my study, then, was to determine whether the trend toward composition study had influenced programs at small, liberal arts colleges. While it was clear that universities had begun to move to programs that use contemporary composition theory in the freshman English classroom, I wondered if this was also true for small colleges. I hypothesized that liberal arts colleges would be the institutions most likely to

use literary study to teach composition. This hypothesis was founded on my own experience as a student who was taught writing at a liberal arts college not by learning rhetorical modes, such as the descriptive or the comparison/contrast essay, but rather by reading and analyzing literary works. Furthermore, I believed that if the mission of liberal arts colleges was not just to provide students with the skills and knowledge needed to secure a job after graduation, but rather to offer them a curriculum that exposed them to the world of ideas, and if a writing class is meant to teach students how to express ideas effectively, then it would be reasonable to assume that literary study (and the world of ideas it introduces to students) would find a place in the writing programs of these schools. It was my goal in this study, then, to see if this was in fact true.

In short, what I wanted to know was the nature of literary study being taught and the number and kind of writing assignments required in the freshman English programs at these liberal arts colleges. Was literature being used in the “traditional” way to teach writing or had it been replaced by composition studies? And if literary study was being taught, what were the goals for such instruction--i.e., were teachers using literary texts to teach composition or literary interpretation?

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

I took as a model for my research a study published in 1986 by Carol P. Hartzog called *Composition and the Academy: A Study of Writing Program Administration*, in which Hartzog investigated the writing programs of institutions belonging to the Association of American Universities (AAU). Hartzog's objective was to determine if the decisions made at the institutions she researched reflected current attitudes toward composition theory. In other words, Hartzog wanted to know if current theories about the writing process and its application to instruction in the rhetorical modes--for example, narration, description, and comparison/contrast--were being put into practice in colleges and universities.

In the preface to her study, Hartzog points out that we need to pay close attention to the debates going on in universities about the best ways to teach writing because those debates are determining where writing programs should be centered, whether in English, Speech and Communication, or somewhere else. She notes that there are conflicting attitudes within the field itself concerning whether composition should stay in the English department, strike out on its own, or become a component of many disciplines. What she found in the universities can serve as case studies for the theoretical debate that has been going on in scholarly works.

One side of this debate is covered in *Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap*, edited by W.B. Horner, where Horner collected essays written by scholars in the field who call for a unification of composition and literature. One such essay in this collection was written by Nancy Comley and Robert Scholes, who propose that the perceived differences between composition and literature must be eliminated, with the best place to do this being in the freshman English course, the "point where it is most powerfully felt" (101). Their essay, entitled "Literature, Composition, and the Structure of English," analyzes the study

of English and addresses some of the problems the field faces. They identify ideas about good writing that are shared by both approaches to freshman English--i.e., composition and literary study-- and from there they argue that texts can be selected that could best teach these qualities. In this way, according to Comley and Scholes, we do not need to recognize the artificial differences between "literary" and "nonliterary" texts because "literary texts may be used for many things other than interpretive consumption . . . the literary text may be a pre-text for all sorts of responses" (101-2). By recognizing the similar goals of composition and literature, the authors of this essay call for the two fields to form a cohesive discipline so that writing teachers can get on with teaching effective writing without having to worry about whether they are in fact teaching composition or literary interpretation.

In another publication, John Clifford and John Schilb, in their essay "Composition Theory and Literary Theory," support Comley and Scholes's assertions. They maintain that there is a trend in colleges and universities today to reunite composition and literature education. According to Clifford and Schilb, the paradigms the theorists are formulating are unifying members of English departments with a common goal centering on "the action of 'composing'--whether of the students' own prose, or of their literary analyses or of their general viewpoints on life" (45). These new paradigms can bring the English department together, say Clifford and Schilb, by enabling instructors "to feel that they are carrying out a common enterprise rather than toiling in different fields and subfields of a painfully heterogeneous discipline" (58).

In a bibliographic essay that offers support to Clifford and Schilb's argument, Joseph J. Comprone explores the history of the division between composition and literature. He explains that "composition has come to synthesize the study of student texts with the study of composing processes, just as literary theory . . . has subsumed text,

writer, reader, and critic--in one, overall interpretive process" (292). Despite their seemingly disparate goals, though, Comprone sees these separate developments as sharing a key to the reunification of the two areas of study: their mutual interest in writing and reading. With the added concern both have with critical analysis, Comprone argues that English departments around the country are rediscovering the connection literature has to composition.

This connection through reading and writing is a phenomenon central to the question posed by yet another scholar. Susan Miller, in "What Does It Mean to Be Able to Write? The Question of Writing in the Discourses of Literature and Composition," argues that a definition of writing which can encompass composition as well as literary studies is "urgently needed" (220). She maintains that to work exclusively in one or the other field reduces the act of writing (and its close--if not twin--relation, the act of reading) to a mere gesture that has lapsed into a "passive and reified esthetic, graphic, formal, structural, stylistic, or semiotic system" (234). Miller concludes that if we want to retain the liberating effects of writing and reading, then the studies we conduct must find common ground in a field where the two areas of research can reunite.

Jim W. Corder, in "Studying Rhetoric and Literature," could possibly have found the common ground to which Miller refers. According to Corder, rhetoric is that discipline in which to "root around between literature and composition" because, he says, it is not possible "to talk about literature without talking about rhetoric" (333, 335). To support this statement, Corder refers to an essay written by W. R. Winterowd in which Winterowd connects the two by pointing out that they both examine "how the text achieves its effects" (see Winterowd, W.R. "The Realm of Meaning: Text-centered Criticism." *CCC* 23 [December 1972]: 399). By approaching both the study of literature and the composition act in this way, Corder postulates that one day the two fields will no longer have to be seen

as “either this or that, but can, with a little luck and a little work, be both this and that” (352).

Edward P. J. Corbett, in an essay entitled “Literature and Composition: Allies or Rivals in the Classroom?” agrees with Corder and asserts that while “literature and composition should not have to compete in the same classroom,” the two, along with linguistics, can be strong allies within the English department, with none more important than another (183). What Corbett offers, then, is a recognition of the merits of composition, literary, and rhetorical theory, but he does not agree with the other scholars mentioned above that these theories can be used in a freshman English classroom. In this sense, he comes very close to agreeing with one of the most notable scholars in composition theory, Maxine Hairston, who calls for composition study to establish itself as an independent discipline. In “Breaking Our Bonds and Reaffirming Our Connections,” Hairston asserts that composition studies must, at the very least, make a psychological and emotional break with literary studies. She dismisses arguments such as those presented in the essays mentioned above because she feels these scholars are not developing new ideas as much as they are trying to reconcile the maverick field of composition studies to what she says many feel to be the more prestigious field of literary study. This, to Hairston, is a waste of time; instead, she argues that “by leaving the house in which [composition studies] grew up, we may finally create the strong connection between literature and composition that most of us feel is good and natural [i.e., what she earlier refers to as a ‘dynamic of interdependence’]” (282). Thus, what she is calling for is far different from what other scholars propose. She does not want the reunification of composition and literature; at the most, she seems willing to concede to a divorce, though she does agree the two should remain good friends.

What Hairston and the other writers mentioned above give us, then, is a sampling of the theoretical debate that has come to affect the way freshman writing programs are currently taught. This is not meant to represent an exhaustive list of current theory, but should instead serve as a fundamental background for the research I conducted. Based on this theoretical foundation, my survey was designed to discover how small colleges were responding to this debate. Because the mission of most small colleges is to introduce students to liberal studies, I wondered whether a combination of composition and literary theory could be used to achieve that goal and, if so, whether the focus was composition, literary studies, or liberal studies. I hoped the responses to my questionnaire would help me answer that question.

RESEARCH METHODS

Like Hartzog, I attempted in my study to identify manifestations of current theory in composition study in order to discover if any patterns of composition instruction surface in small liberal arts colleges. To give me some idea of the objectives of the writing programs of private, liberal arts colleges in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa, I sent questionnaires to freshman English coordinators, asking them to respond to five basic, open-ended questions; I also requested any additional information they might provide that would help me describe their program.

The criteria for the selection of the colleges were size and location. The maximum enrollment for the colleges I wanted to contact was to be no more than 4000 students, and the average enrollment of the ones I did contact was about 1200 full-time students. Of the 49 questionnaires sent out, I received 27 (55%) back. From these 27, I was able to identify four general categories--each assigned a letter A through D--into which the writing programs fall. Category A, with 13 schools, the largest number of colleges represented, was that which included two one-semester courses of composition; the next, Category B, with seven colleges, offered one semester of composition and one semester of literature; the third, Category C, with three of the 27 colleges represented, used writing across the curriculum; and Category D, with four colleges, included programs designed to introduce students to the place of ideas in a liberal education, included four colleges.

What follows in the next section should not be considered a complete list of the private, liberal arts colleges in the tri-state area (Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa). While I have tried to retain the language of every respondent referred to, I have not attempted to record every detail from the questionnaires of every college that responded; instead, what I do give is what I believe are some representative cases for each of the four categories. The

programs I selected to be included in these profiles were chosen based on one or more of the following:

- (1) the program seemed to include the components common to most of the other programs in the category or it contained some unique characteristics that seemed worth mentioning
- (2) the answers to my questions and the materials a college sent me were extensive enough that I felt I could do its program justice.

From this information from a representative group of colleges, I believe one can speculate how smaller, liberal arts colleges are addressing the relationship between composition and literary study.

CASE STUDIES

The categories below each contain descriptions of representative writing programs. The order in which I present these categories is based in part on the number of programs belonging to each category; thus, because Categories A and B are represented by more programs, they are given first. However, I also chose this format because the second two categories include programs that are more tenuously related. While these programs fit most easily into the categories as I have described them, the programs in Categories C and D include characteristics that are uniquely their own. Because of this, I present these categories last so that the reader will have a better feel for “typical” programs, as represented in Categories A and B, before being given the less typical characteristics of the programs in the last two categories.

The reader should refer to Appendix A for a brief description of all the colleges that responded to my survey but are not described here. In addition, I have included in Appendix C the texts each respondent mentioned on the questionnaire.

Category A: Composition Studies

The colleges I describe in this category include five writing programs, all of which teach students how to write according to the conventions of specific rhetorical modes. This kind of instruction includes everything from the skill-building exercises promoted by Lakeland College, to Simpson College’s writing competency requirement that a student meets by submitting a portfolio of writing samples prior to graduation.

The first two programs described below represent instruction typical of this category. However, the last three programs I describe here are included because the descriptions I received represent information that I did not receive from other colleges in this category. This is not to say that the other programs in this category do not, for

example, conduct student-teacher conferences or do not include other components just because they have not mentioned them. What makes the last three programs significant is the fact that they made specific references to elements that were not mentioned elsewhere and therefore a description of their programs seems warranted.

• Simpson College (Indianola, Iowa) Simpson College has recently revised its writing program and has established a plan that is composed of a two-semester writing sequence designed to ensure a level of writing competency among its students. The school has developed a two-level competency requirement that all students must meet before they are allowed to graduate.

The Competency I Requirement All new freshmen, and transfers without the equivalent credits, who have taken or tested out of the first course (English 101) in the freshman writing sequence must pass the second course (English 102) with at least a C-. The courses themselves are constructed around the writing process approach to composition, with the first semester writing assignments “ranging from narratives based on personal experience to explanatory essays. The second semester concentrates on writing persuasive and analytical arguments and explores through different writing assignments the writing conventions in various disciplines (“A Proposal Concerning Writing Competency,” Simpson College 1990: 1-2).

The course objectives for Simpson’s composition program are representative of most of the colleges in this study. For English 101-102, students are guided through the various stages of the writing process and are made aware of rhetorical considerations (“persona, purpose, and audience”); students are also encouraged to develop their own writing style, as well as to form the habit of revision and an awareness of grammatical

errors. In addition, a stated objective of the Simpson program is to instruct students in the techniques of narrative and descriptive writing.

The Competency II Requirement Along with the two introductory composition courses, students at Simpson are also required in their sixth or seventh semester to submit a portfolio of writing they have done in courses subsequent to English 102. The portfolio is required to contain at least four pieces of writing, with a minimum length of 500 words each, that “best demonstrates their intellectual and personal growth” (3). This approach, according to the rationale outlined by the Simpson College proposal, underscores for the student the cumulative nature of writing skills, while at the same time it emphasizes to the rest of the college faculty the importance of reading and responding to student writing.

• Lakeland College (Sheboygan, Wisconsin) Like Simpson, Lakeland College offers students a number of ways to develop and practice their writing skills. The General Studies Writing Program at Lakeland is comprised of three separate courses--General Studies 100, 110, and 112--all of which emphasize the importance of writing that is free of grammatical errors and that does not contain any plagiarized material. Only GS 112 is required for graduation, but most students enter the program at either the 100 or 110 level.

At Lakeland, GS 100 is a College Writing Workshop that focuses on grammatical concerns and paragraph-level organization. Much of the instruction in this course involves grammar drills and exercises and only after these are mastered do the students begin to write at the paragraph level.

In GS 110, the emphasis is on expository writing. In this course, students are introduced to “basic patterns of exposition . . . [including] description, narration, illustration, definition, comparison and contrast, classification and division, process

analysis, and causal analysis” (“The General Studies Writing Program At Lakeland College: A Description of Courses”: 2). As in GS 100, the importance of grammatically correct writing is emphasized and students are drilled on grammatical conventions; however, more than grammatical correctness, in this course a developed writing style receives a greater emphasis.

The final course in this sequence, GS 112 (Persuasive Writing), reinforces what students learn in the two lower level courses and builds on those to teach the skills necessary for writing college-level research papers, including summary, paraphrase, and global organization. In addition, students are taught the components of a carefully constructed, logical argument as well as the skills necessary for critical thinking.

The syllabi of each of these courses reflect the importance placed on correct grammar as well as the attention given to the students’ awareness of what constitutes plagiarism.

• Cardinal Stritch College (Fox Point, Wisconsin) This college is in many ways similar to the other colleges in this category; however, the responses offered by Professor Paula Friedman to my questionnaire seemed to set it apart in some ways. Like the other institutions mentioned here, the writing instructors at Cardinal Stritch attempt to help their students develop critical thinking and reading strategies as well as techniques for effective writing.

There was, however, an observation made on the questionnaire that did not appear in the responses from other schools; specifically, Professor Friedman emphasized the importance the college’s liberal arts mission has on the writing program. The readings chosen, as well as the papers assigned, “are geared,” says Friedman, “towards helping the student understand the liberal arts (since we are a liberal arts college).” This was the only

marked reference given by any of the respondents in this category to the ways their schools' characteristics affect the way they teach composition.

- Upper Iowa University (Fayette, Iowa) Like many of the other colleges in this category, freshman level writing is taught at Upper Iowa University in a sequence of two courses--Composition I and II--that begin by teaching students the "simpler rhetorical modes," such as process essays and comparison/contrast essays, and progress to the skills required to write an effective research paper. The texts used in class and the number of writing assignments vary according to each instructor.

What was interesting about the freshman composition program at Upper Iowa University, though, was not so much its heavy reliance on composition techniques; in this respect it is no different than the other colleges in the category. What makes Upper Iowa noteworthy, at least in relation to this study, is that it leaves open to the individual instructors the possibility of using some literary study. Though literary study is not encouraged, according to Professor Ken Johnson, neither is it discouraged. While Upper Iowa University is not the only college in this category to include some instructors who use literature to teach composition, it is one of the few that displayed a policy that freely allowed for its use.

- Edgewood College (Madison, Wisconsin) The freshman composition program at Edgewood College, like all the others in this category, offers students writing instruction that relies on composition theory as the basis of instruction. Emphasis is placed on organization; adaptation of "substance, format, and style" for the particular subject, purpose, and audience; and critical thinking and reading strategies. In addition, though, the department also emphasizes the importance placed on one-to-one conferences between the

instructor and the student, who is required to write 7500 words of graded and revised expository prose.

Also, like Upper Iowa University, Edgewood is set apart by the freedom instructors have to use literary texts in their courses, usually as a means “to improve dexterity with the written English language system.” Two examples of literary works currently being used are Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and an anthology called *From Readings, Writing*.

Section summary: These five representative programs demonstrate a focus on composition study exclusively. Some of the programs did allow for the possibility for literary study, but for the most part this category seems to reflect the current trend toward composition studies. Almost half of the colleges in my survey, therefore, did not meet my original expectations that, as colleges with a liberal studies mission, they would tend to rely more on literature to achieve their goals.

Category B: One Semester Composition/One Semester Literature

Because the composition components (represented as one semester of their respective freshman English programs) of the following colleges are so similar to each other, as well as the programs mentioned above in Category A, the following profiles will include only descriptions of their literature components.

It should be noted, though, that most of the colleges in this category have common to their composition instruction their concentration on developing the students’ basic writing skills. The essays in the first semester are patterned after the usual rhetorical strategies--narration, description, comparison/contrast, etc.--and grammatical correctness is emphasized, as is organization and style.

The first two programs listed below are representative of the members of this category, while the second two programs seemed to have differences from the others in the category and thus warranted a descriptive section of their own.

• Viterbo College (La Crosse, Wisconsin) Literary analysis is the focus of the second semester course, with students applying the skills they learned in the first semester of the sequence to the three analytical papers they are required to submit in this class. Using the *Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense* reader, the students are taught how to read carefully and analytically and to respond to what they have read in depth and with a degree of smoothness. The first paper they are asked to write is an analysis of a short story which the students did not read for class, the second requires students to analyze an aspect of a play they did read for class, and the third asks students to respond to a poem also not read in class. In addition to these out-of-class papers, students are required to write several in-class essays.

• Northwestern College (Watertown, Wisconsin) The second semester course at Northwestern is split into four units and serves as an introduction to literary texts by exposing students to the various genres, such as short stories, novels, poetry, and drama. In the first unit, covering eight weeks, the course introduces students to fiction through selected short stories and *Huckleberry Finn*. The second two units cover poetry and plays, respectively, while the fourth unit overlays the other three and covers research methods and writing.

This course is meant to introduce students to literary criticism and to help them develop criteria with which to analyze and critique literature. Along with four examinations, the students are asked to write a paper every two weeks on the literature they

have read; they are also required to submit a research paper, which makes up 50% of their grade, at the end of the term.

- Northland College (Ashland, Wisconsin) While all freshmen who have not tested out or who do not have transfer credits are required to take Freshman Composition (English 111) at Northland College, they are offered a number of ways to fulfill the second semester English requirement. Students may choose to take either English 112, Humanity in Nature, or a 200-level literature course, such as Contemporary Literature, Short Russian Fiction, Survey of Dramatic Literature, or Third World Fiction. Whichever course students choose, though, the skills learned in 111 are reinforced and a comparable amount of writing to that which is required in English 112 is assigned.

In as much as the instructors who teach English at Northland vary, according to Professor Dave Allen, so too do the ways writing and literature are taught. However, since Humanity in Nature is a course designed to address the school's environmental mission, all the instructors of English 112 agree to use the text printed at Northland that contains a number of essays, poems, and short stories that have as their themes environmental concerns. The instructors also agree to teach at least one novel and one play, which usually are selected from a list containing such works as Wendell Berry's *The Memory of Old Jack*, Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*, George Stewart's *Earth Abides*, Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Henrik Ibsen's *The Enemy of the People* and *The Wild Duck*, and Jean Giraudoux's *The Madwoman of Chaillet*. The poetry which is read may include Gary Snyder, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, and Emily Dickinson.

All instructors of English 112 require students to write at least six essays, but the number of writing assignments in the 200-level course may vary greatly; one instructor of Contemporary Literature, for example, requires his students to write nine 750 word

themes. Whatever the number of assignments, though, the kind of writing students are asked to do is designed to build their capacity to think critically about both the works and the larger issues this literature is addressing.

• Grand View College (Des Moines, Iowa) The objectives of Freshman English II at Grand View, according to the syllabus of Dr. Solveig Nelson, are for students to “study the inter-relationship of past and present through world literature, trace the development of the hero figure and of man’s changing concept of himself, and receive continued experience in writing.” The texts which students are asked to read and respond to in their essays include Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology*, as well as *The Odyssey*, *Hamlet*, and *As I Lay Dying*. For each of these, students are required to write a 500-750 word critical essay on topics which are assigned at the beginning of each unit. These essays use the modes of rhetorical discourse that are introduced in the first semester of the freshman English sequence. For example, in response to *Mythology*, students are asked to write a narrative essay in response to such guidelines as:

- Write a first-person account of Theseus’s adventure in the labyrinth. You may assume the identity of Theseus, of Ariadne, or of one of the youths saved.
- Hercules is on trial for the murder of his wife and three sons. Prepare a final statement by the prosecution OR by the defense.
- You must visit the Underworld to attempt the release of a person confined there. Identify that person. Then describe your journey: the route, the sights and beings you see, the

behavior or conditions necessary for the successful completion of your task.

For the second work students read *The Odyssey*, and the writing assignment requires them to write a comparison/contrast paper in which they may write essays in response to such assignments as the following:

- The practice of hospitality is very important in *The Odyssey*. Compare/contrast Odysseus' reception from the Phaeacians with that which he receives from the Suitors. What sort of treatment ought a stranger expect? What are the accepted obligations of host and guest?
- One theme of *The Odyssey* is a soldier's return home. Compare/contrast the homecoming of Odysseus to that of Agamemnon.

Assignments such as these are meant, then, to reinforce the modes learned in the first semester, while at the same time they help the students explore some of the themes covered in the texts they read.

Section summary: The colleges in this category came closer to my original expectations of what a liberal arts education in writing would include. They all relied on literary study at some point in the writing program as a way to introduce students to a world of ideas that is not as easily conveyed through academic essay models. However, because most of the writing programs in Category B provided composition study and literary study in two different courses, the programs in this category still did not unite the two fields in a way that the theorists mentioned above believe possible.

Category C: Writing Across the Curriculum

The writing programs of the three colleges in this category all teach their students how to write by sharing the teaching responsibility with other departments. Because there are only three, and because each of these three have very different programs, I have described them all in this section.

- Morningside College (Sioux City, Iowa) Freshmen at Morningside are required to take a one-semester course called Composition and Rhetoric, in which they are taught writing skills such as organization, clarity and conciseness, and MLA documentation. In this class, they are taught to write according to the stages of the writing process in order to develop ability in persuasive and argumentative writing, including organizational and editing skills, as well as research techniques.

Once they have completed this course, students are required to meet the minimum writing competency standards established by their major department of study, which is given responsibility for establishing its own writing standards. In order to maintain some level of consistency, a Writing Council and a Writing Advisor supervise this program and provide workshops to inform instructors of the “possibilities of Writing Across the Curriculum and recent developments in the theory of teaching writing, and to encourage communication about writing.” In addition, a Learning Center is available to help students with their writing problems.

- Gustavus Adolphus College (St. Peter, Minnesota) The philosophy of writing instruction at Gustavus Adolphus College is that students need to understand that writing in college as well as writing in society is part of a continuum in which they will be more capable of participating if they understand the way different audiences and situations affect

their writing techniques. Therefore, in order for students to be able to communicate effectively in college and out, according to Gretchen Flesher, the writing program director at Gustavus, students “must write often, in a variety of classes, with instruction from many different professors.”

To qualify for graduation, students are required to take three courses designated “W” courses. These courses are offered in every department and each requires students to submit at least two writing assignments with a minimum length of twelve pages each. Some examples of possible topics include:

- In an Art History course, students develop a gallery exhibition and then write an essay explaining its theme.
- In Biology, students research problems at the professional level and write for other scientists; then they translate their efforts for the lay reader.
- In Classics and English, students explore how literature uses language to make meaning.

Instructors of these courses agree to evaluate these assignments on the basis of form and content and to spend class time talking specifically about writing.

• Carleton College (Northfield, Minnesota) Freshmen at Carleton may fulfill their writing requirement by taking English I or a literature course, or they may enroll in a class outside the English department that has been designated as participating in the writing-across-the-curriculum program. This kind of course may have up to six students enrolled who are taking the class for writing credits. These students are required to write and rewrite more papers than the other students in the class and, at the end of the term, must be certified by the teacher as displaying a level of writing competency.

The instructors who participate in this program are not specifically required to teach writing in their courses, but they do agree to comply with college-wide writing standards. A faculty member in the English department conducts a workshop for these instructors in which they participate in “discussing appropriate standards for student prose, marking some student papers, and sharing ideas for helping students solve the most common problems they encounter in writing academic papers.” Rhetoric assistants, who are trained to respond to early drafts of student papers and to hold conferences with the students, are also available to assist these instructors with their writing students.

Section summary: These three colleges do not place an emphasis on composition study, but instead encourage students to concentrate on the kinds of writing specific to individual fields. Because they are all small colleges, it would seem that they are able to accomplish this kind of writing instruction more effectively than a larger institution, since the colleges are small enough that a student’s writing competency can be more easily monitored. However, though these three colleges, along with those in Category D, came closer to the kind of writing instruction that I expected to find at small colleges, these programs together only represented about one-fourth of the programs in my study. What this survey makes clear is that most colleges are emphasizing the study of writing more than the exploration of traditional liberal studies.

Category D: Introduction to Ideas

This final category is made up of colleges that represent a variety of programs, all of which share a common thread: they are specifically designed to introduce students to the world of ideas. I have described below only three of the four colleges in this category because I received such extensive information from their respective representatives. I

would like to note, however, that one of the programs listed here, that of Coe College, could probably just as easily fit into Category C since students are required to take four writing-emphasis courses after they take Freshman Seminar. This could be taken to mean that Coe offers a Writing-Across-the-Curriculum program; however, I believe Coe's program should stay in Category D because of the comments of Dr. Robert Marrs, which I mention below. This introductory course is clearly designed to introduce students to the world of ideas in a more specific context than any of the programs contained in Category C.

- Coe College (Cedar Rapids, Iowa) Instead of a freshman composition class, students at Coe College are required to take five "writing emphasis" courses to fulfill the writing component of their graduation requirements. The first of the five courses they must take is called Freshman Seminar, which serves as the core for the later writing emphasis courses. According to program director Robert Marrs, it is offered as an "introduction to liberal arts with readings in literature, philosophy, natural sciences, social sciences, and experiences in theater, music, art." Instructors are free to determine how they will teach writing and these different subjects, but most include in their freshman seminar an emphasis on opinion essays that respond to written texts. Many also include informal writing assignments, such as journals and reading logs, as well as a short research paper and revision of writing assignments.

- Luther College (Decorah, Iowa) The objectives of the writing program at Luther include teaching students skills necessary to write the "traditional academic essay." Instructors guide students through the various stages of the writing process and place special emphasis on organizational, research, and documentation techniques.

Luther College divides its writing program into two semesters, both of which focus on literary study and require student writing that is based on the students' interpretation of literary and historical texts. According to Professor Martin Mohr, "historical periodization and the ideas that shaped those periods are given special attention and writing assignments may well come from the 'history of ideas' associated with the reading." The texts students are required to read include, among others, *The Odyssey*, Finley's *The Ancient Greeks*, *Antigone*, *The Inferno*, *The Prince*, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, *Utopia*, *Othello*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Giants in the Earth*, selected Chinese short stories, and Fairbank's *The Great Chinese Revolution*. These texts are supplemented by a rhetoric, *The Confident Writer*.

The writing required of students in the first semester of this sequence includes five completed essays, each of which is preceded by two preliminary drafts that the students submit for the teacher to comment on. In the second semester, students write "a sequenced research paper, with conferences and workshops associated with the process." As in the first semester, revision is emphasized and students are required to write two versions of the research paper, with the second version representing a radical revision of the first.

- Lawrence University (Appleton, Wisconsin) For over 40 years, the Freshman Studies program at Lawrence has introduced students to the "excitement and discipline of intellectual life by cultivating skills essential to educated discourse while exploring some of the seminal works of the Western heritage." Emphasis in this program is placed on helping students develop the skills and the background necessary for them to gain an understanding and appreciation for such diverse works as Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*, Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, and Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

While some of the units in this course are taught by different guest lecturers who are best qualified to lecture on specific topics, most of the Freshman Studies instructors, according to the student handbook, are individuals who are “teaching outside of their own specialties and disciplines . . . [but] most of them have attended summertime faculty seminars in the various readings and historical periods of the course” (15). Working within general college-wide writing standards, these instructors are free to grade student work according to their individual conceptions of what constitutes acceptable work.

The kinds of writing assignments required of students include three interpretive essays, one of which must be revised, and several shorter written responses to the works covered in the course. These assignments emphasize the importance of the expressive quality of the students’ writing and are designed to help the students develop their analytical skills through close reading and precise statements.

Section summary: All the programs in this category are designed to help students explore through their writing the ideas to which they are exposed, including anything from literary works to a symphony. Three of the four colleges provided extensive information about the histories and missions of their program, which suggests that their programs have been specifically designed for the special purposes of their schools. They all explain their programs by pointing out that since their schools are supposed to offer students a liberal education, their writing programs have been designed to effect that goal. The programs in this category, therefore, come the closest to my original expectations of what writing instruction at a liberal arts college would be.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As I mentioned earlier, when I sent out my questionnaires I was interested in discovering the role literature had in the freshman writing programs of these private, liberal arts colleges. In the end, however, this study raised more questions than it answered. For future investigation, it might be helpful to ask the participants to identify typical class sizes and the teacher-student ratio, since these factor into the determination of the kinds and number of writing assignments. Even more informative, though, would be to ask the participants for a brief history of their writing programs so as to better determine why the programs approach writing instruction as they do. Finally, to eliminate some of the subjectivity in the research results, an important question to ask would be whether any specific theories have affected the writing programs involved with the survey. Whereas I have placed the programs in categories that I have established based on my investigation into the current theories, specific questions such as these would identify the programs in a way more in keeping with the way their respective institutions see them.

What I did discover through this study was a range of programs, most of which had at least one semester that required the students to read no literary works at all. Of the 27 colleges responding to my survey, 13 offered a freshman writing program based solely on composition theory, with literary works, for the most part, not included (eight of the colleges in this category, however, did leave the possibility of using some literature open to the discretion of the individual instructors). The next largest category was made up of seven colleges that required students to take one semester of composition and one semester of literature. In these first semester courses, students were introduced to the rhetorical conventions of composition study which, for the most, they then used in their second semester to analyze literary works. The emphasis in both these categories was on the student's awareness of various rhetorical modes. This, therefore, would seem to support

the observations made by Paul Connolly and Teresa Vilardi in *New Methods in College Writing Programs: Theories in Practice* that “freshman English is becoming a writing course, in which the students’ writing is the principal text” (3). In other words, literary study no longer has a place in most freshman English classrooms--whether those classrooms are in a big university or a small college.

This discovery greatly surprised me--especially since I was working with the assumption that the mission of liberal arts colleges was not just to teach their students only composition skills, but, as Richard Rorty says, to give students “a sense of tradition, of community, of human solidarity” (Bruffee 778). According to Rorty, this human solidarity is achieved through liberal education by exposing students to the great humanistic works as examples of how people have tried “to solve problems, to work out the potentialities of the languages and activities available to them . . . by transcending the vocabulary in which these problems were posed” (Bruffee 778). According to this view then, exposure to these great works and the study of the ways communication is accomplished in and through them is the way to achieve a liberal education. However, based on the answers to my questionnaire, if the colleges in Category A are providing such an education, it does not seem to be a component of their freshman writing programs. In fact, many of the programs in Category A emphasized the rhetorics they used in their courses and described programs that followed the structure these textbooks imposed. If they mentioned any literary works that might be used by some of their instructors, they made it clear that these instructors were the exceptions in the department.

Another related discovery that I made was that many of the programs either separated freshman English into a two-semester sequence--with composition modes covering the first semester and literary study covering the second (Category B)--or they required students to take a separate literature course that would fulfill another core

requirement (this was especially true of the programs in Category A). This therefore seems to support Corbett's essay, mentioned in Section 2 of this thesis, that literature and composition can be mutually informing, but that they do not necessarily have to be taught in the same classroom.

What I did *not* find, however, were programs that could be described as truly combining literary and composition studies. Some schools, especially those in Category B, used rhetorical modes as a way for students to analyze the literature they read in a literary studies course. However, no school specifically outlined a writing program that actively uses current literary theory--for example, post-structuralism--to inform their composition instruction. This is not to say none do, but this does indicate that the answers to such a question would be very instructive for future study.

The results that were most striking to me, however, involved Categories C and D (Writing Across the Curriculum and Introduction to Ideas), since it was in these categories that my original assumptions about a liberal arts education were proven correct. What was so striking about these programs was that, based on the extent and depth of information these colleges provided me, the programs in these categories had much more clearly defined philosophies behind their freshman writing programs than did those of the first two categories. Both Carleton College and Lawrence University included in the packets of material they sent me a detailed history of the debates within their programs concerning the best ways to teach writing at their institutions. All this material made it clear that here at last were the colleges where humanistic, liberal studies were still the focus of education. It was in these programs that my original assumptions about the compatibility of literature and composition were proven to exist.

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My appreciation also goes out to all those who responded to my questionnaire: K. Swanson of Augsburg College, Cindy Nahrwold of Briar Cliff College, Paula Friedman of Cardinal Stritch College, Robert Tisdale of Carleton College, Solveig Nelson of Grand View College, Gretchen Flesher of Gustavus Adolphus College, Jeff Elzinga of Lakeland College, Peter A. Fritzell of Lawrence University, D. Atkins of Loras College, Martin Mohr of Luther College, Marty Knapp of Morningside College, Sister Paulina Fox of Mount Mercy College, Chris Saxild of Mount Senario College, Joel Westerholm of Northwestern College (Iowa), John Braun of Northwestern College (Wisconsin), Todd Lieber of Simpson College, Barbara Pitz of St. Ambrose University, Olivia Frey of St. Olaf College, Mary Jane Jones of University of Dubuque, Ken Johnson of Upper Iowa University, Brother George Klawitter of Viterbo College, Eugene M. Baer of Wisconsin Lutheran College, and the unidentified coordinators of Edgewood College, Graceland College, and Northwestern College (Minnesota). I especially appreciate Robert Marrs of Coe College, who was kind enough to discuss my project with me at a recent Conference on College Communication and Composition. Also, I am grateful to Dave Allen of Northland College not only for the extensive information he provided me, but also for his update about what is new at my Alma Mater.

APPENDIX A: THE SAMPLE

#	State	College	A	B	C	D	Degree Of Literature (High, Low, or None)	Amount of Writing Assigned Each Semester (in # of words or essays)	Dept. in which Writing Instruction is housed.	# of required courses in Writing Program Sequence
1	MN	Augsburg College				•	High	8	Writing Program	2
2	IA	Briar Cliff College	•				Low	7	Writing Lab	1
3	WI	Cardinal Stritch College	•				None	5	English	NA
4	MN	Carleton College			•		*	5*	Writing Program	1
5	IA	Coe College				•	High	*	Writing Program	5
6	WI	Edgewood College	•				Low	7500 words	English	NA
7	IA	Graceland College	•				None	7	English	NA
8	IA	Grand View College		•			None/High	4-5	English	2
9	MN	Gustavus Adolphus College			•		*	*	Writing Program	3
10	WI	Lakeland College	•				Low	6-8	English	3
11	WI	Lawrence University				•	High	4	English	2
12	IA	Loras College	•				None	10-12 (1st sem) 2-3 (2nd sem)	English	NA
13	IA	Luther College				•	High	2-5	English	2
14	IA	Morningside College			•		NA	*	English	2
15	IA	Mount Mercy College		•			High	7-9	English	2
16	WI	Mount Senario College	•				None	6	English	1
17	WI	Northland College		•			None/High	6-10	English	2
18	IA	Northwestern College	•				Low	5	English	1
19	MN	Northwestern College	•				Low	2-3	English	2
20	WI	Northwestern College		•			None/High	12	English	2
21	IA	Simpson College	•				Low	3-5	English	1
22	IA	St. Ambrose University	•				*	6000 words	English	NA
23	MN	St. Olaf College	•				High/Low	8	English	NA
24	IA	University of Dubuque		•			None/High	6-10	English	2
25	IA	Upper Iowa University	•				Low	*	English	2
26	WI	Viterbo College		•			None/High	3-6	English	2
27	WI	Wisc. Lutheran College		•			None/High	6-12	English	3

A= Composition Studies

B= One Semester Composition/ One Semester Literature

C= Writing Across the Curriculum

D= Introduction to Ideas

*= Depends on instructor & course

APPENDIX B: COLLEGES CONTACTED

Minnesota

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Augsburg College--Minneapolis | 8. Gustavus Adolphus College--St. Peter |
| 2. Carleton College--Northfield | 9. Hamline College--St. Paul |
| 3. College of St. Benedict--St. Joseph | 10. Macalester College--St. Paul |
| 4. College of St. Catherine--St. Paul | 11. Northwestern College--Roseville |
| 5. College of St. Scholastica--Duluth | 12. St. John's University--Collegeville |
| 6. College of St. Thomas--St. Paul | 13. St. Mary's College--Winona |
| 7. Concordia College--Moorhead | 14. St. Olaf's College--Northfield |

Wisconsin

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Alverno College--Milwaukee | 9. Mount Senario College--Ladysmith |
| 2. Beloit College--Beloit | 10. Northland College--Ashland |
| 3. Cardinal Stritch College--Milwaukee | 11. Northwestern College--Watertown |
| 4. Carroll College--Waukesha | 12. Ripon College--Ripon |
| 5. Edgewood College--Madison | 13. St. Norbert College--DePere |
| 6. Lakeland College--Appleton | 14. Silver Lake College--Manitowoc |
| 7. Lawrence University--Appleton | 15. Viterbo College--LaCrosse |
| 8. Mount Mary College--Milwaukee | 16. Wisconsin Lutheran College--Milwaukee |

Iowa

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Briar Cliff College--Sioux City | 11. Luther College--Decorah |
| 2. Buena Vista College--Storm Lake | 12. Morningside College--Sioux City |
| 3. Central College--Pella | 13. Mount Mercy College--Cedar Rapids |
| 4. Clarke College--Dubuque | 14. Northwestern College--Orange City |
| 5. Coe College--Cedar Rapids | 15. St. Ambrose University--Davenport |
| 6. Cornell College--Cedar Rapids | 16. Simpson College--Indianola |
| 7. Graceland College--Lamoni | 17. University of Dubuque--Dubuque |
| 8. Grand View College--Des Moines | 18. Upper Iowa University--Fayette |
| 9. Grinnell College--Grinnell | 19. Wartburg College--Waverly |
| 10. Loras College--Dubuque | |

APPENDIX C: TEXTS MENTIONED

Rhetorics

- Axelrod and Cooper, *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing* (2nd edition)
- Browne and Stuart, *Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking*
- Gallo, *Shaping College Writing* (4th edition)
- Gefvert, *The Confident Writer*
- Hall, *Writing Well*
- Lester, *Writing a Research Paper: A Complete Guide* (4th edition)
- Martin, *The 500 Word Theme*
- Memering and O'Hare, *The Writer's Work*
- Miller, *The Informed Argument*
- Norton *Textra Writer*
- One to One: Resources for Conference-Centered Writing*
- The Practical Writer*
- Roberts, *Writing Themes About Literature*
- Seyler, *Read, Reason, Write*
- Skwire, *Writing with a Thesis* (5th edition)
- Spatt, *Writing from Sources*
- Trimmer and McCrimmon, *Writing with a Purpose*
- Van Sant, *The Random House Workbook*
- The Writing Process*

Handbooks

- Bell and Stone, *Prose Style: A Handbook for Writers*
- Bernstein, *The Careful Writer, A Modern Guide to English Usage*
- Brief English Handbook*
- A Concise Guide for Writers*
- Crews, *The Random House Handbook*
- Ehrlich, *Bantam Concise Handbook of English*
- Hacker and Renshaw, *Writing with A Voice*
- Hodges and Whitten, *Harbrace College Handbook*
- The Little, Brown Handbook* (3rd edition)
- Nordquist, *Writing Exercises*
- Pearlman, *Guide to Rapid Revision* (4th edition)
- Reinking and Hart, *Strategies for Successful Writing*
- Rightwriter*
- Scott Foresman Handbook*
- Williams, *Style*

Readers

- | | |
|---|--|
| •Barrosse, <i>75 Readings: A Freshman Anthology</i> | •Jacobus, <i>A World of Ideas</i> |
| • <i>The Little, Brown Reader</i> | •McCuen and Winkler, <i>Readings for Writers</i> |
| • <i>The Norton Reader</i> | • <i>Patterns Across the Disciplines</i> |
| •Winkler and McCuen, <i>From Readings, Writing</i> | • <i>Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum</i> |

Literature Readers

- *Black Voices*
- Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution* (Chinese short stories)
- Kennedy, *The Bedford Reader*
- *Literature: Options for Reading and Writing*
- *The MacMillan Reader*
- Perrine, *Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense*
- Pickering and Hoepfer, *Literature*

Literary Works

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Antigone</i> • <i>As I Lay Dying</i> • <i>Being There</i> • <i>Beloved</i> • <i>Ceremony</i> • <i>Citizen Kane</i> • <i>Death of Ivan Ilych</i> • <i>Death of a Salesman</i> • <i>The Diary of Elisabeth Koren</i> • <i>A Doll House</i> • <i>An Enemy of the People</i> • <i>Giants in the Earth</i> • <i>The Great Gatsby</i> • <i>Hamlet</i> • <i>Heart of Darkness</i> • <i>Hedda Gabler</i> • <i>Huckleberry Finn</i> • <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Inferno</i> • <i>Job</i> • <i>The Life of Frederick Douglass</i> • <i>The Madwoman of Chaillot</i> • <i>The Memory of Old Jack</i> • <i>Metamorphosis</i> • <i>The Monkey Wrench Gang</i> • <i>The Odyssey</i> • <i>Oedipus Rex</i> • <i>Othello</i> • <i>The Plague</i> • <i>The Prince</i> • <i>The Return of Martin Guerre</i> • <i>A Room of One's Own</i> • <i>Utopia</i> • <i>The Wild Duck</i> • <i>Woman Warrior</i> • <i>Working</i> |
|---|---|

Miscellaneous

- *Apartheid Crisis*
- *Frontierswomen: The Iowa Experience*
- Beethoven, *Symphony #9*
- Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*
- Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
- Hamilton, *Mythology*
- Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*
- Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*
- Finley, *The Ancient Greeks*
- Studs Terkel

APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRE COVER LETTER

Carole Teator
 Department of English
 Iowa State University
 Ames, IA 50011

6 February 1990

Coordinator of Freshman Composition
 Department of English
 _____ College

Dear _____:

As part of my graduate work for the Master of Arts degree in English at Iowa State University, I am doing research on the nature of freshman composition courses in liberal arts colleges in the tri-state area (Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa). Of special interest to me is the role that literature plays in composition instruction at such colleges.

Since _____ is such a college, I would be interested to learn about the freshman composition program at your institution and would therefore greatly appreciate your taking time to answer the brief questionnaire I have enclosed.

The focus of the questionnaire is the identification of the program's objectives and components. While specific information will be generated through the questionnaire, I would greatly appreciate any additional information you might have, such as syllabi and student manuals. Such materials would help explain your program more completely.

If at all possible, I would appreciate your returning your response by March 1. I have enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your convenience. If you have questions about the questionnaire, I can be reached at _____ or _____.

If you are interested, I would be happy to send you a copy of my research results. I have left room at the end of the questionnaire for you to fill in your name and the address to which you would like the results sent.

Thank you for the time you take helping me complete my thesis. I believe the results will help us better understand freshman composition programs at liberal arts colleges as well as the nature of such colleges.

Sincerely,

Carole Teator

