

From “What Is” to “What Is Possible”: Theorizing Curricular Document Revision as In(ter)vention and Reform

Tarez Samra Graban

Kathleen J. Ryan¹

The Spring 2003 special issue of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* dedicated to the joint topics of change and the first-year writing curriculum makes clear that WPAs do—and must continue to—carefully design and reflect about practices of curricular reform. As Christine Farris points out in “Changing the First-Year Curriculum,” many WPAs approach curricular revision as a fruitful “opportunity for collaborative reflection and strengthening of claims for the value of writing” rather than as an onerous task (7). E. Shelley Reid, for instance, values curricular reform for its “enabling” process rather than for its oft-conflicting products (12). Such an approach to curricular reform can break resistance to change on local and multilocal levels (12), liberate discussions about change from predetermined means or outcomes (13), and put WPAs and other program leaders at a greater advantage by modeling a sustainable, collaborative practice for newer instructors (14, 19). Reid’s principle of changing invites opportunities for initiating significant, continuing change through a variety of means and genres, and we have seen it most evidently at work in our recreation of curricular documents.

While processes of programmatic and curricular reform can begin with the analysis and (re)construction of audience-specific documents, these documents frequently go unexamined and unrevised even when major paradigm shifts have occurred or the documents are seen as mere products of reform. With this article we suggest an alternative paradigm—that theorizing the (re)production of curricular documents provides a space for initiat-

ing and sustaining discussions on high-stakes topics such as curriculum and faculty development and pedagogical anchoring, and it also *promotes* reform by reconstructing the programs they represent. By suggesting this paradigm, we offer that programmatic documents serve as sites for resonance, resistance, and activity. We also offer that these sites enact the kind of productive knowledge we want to develop in our writing programs and to encourage as an approach to document production and as curricular reform in writing program administration more generally.

We argue, then, for a particular theoretical understanding of curricular reform and document revision. First, we theorize curricular reform as productive knowledge with a focus on the rhetorical (re)construction of documents and offer a heuristic for WPAs to undertake guide revisions. Second, we position guides - texts that typically communicate curriculum to readers - as *active* genre systems within writing program activity systems to establish further our claim for guides' dynamism, particularly their active roles as public documents and grassroots movement.² That is, while guides are often read as a program's nonnegotiable statement of purpose, they can also serve as dialogical sites that reflect and construct the programs they represent; thus they may become a means for changing that system. To locate this theoretical argument for the promise of figuring document revision as a form of knowledge production and generic reform, we discuss the evolution of two documents in the context of major curricular and programmatic changes—the new English 102 course guide at West Virginia University (WVU) and the new student guide to introductory composition at Purdue University. We believe that understanding curricular reform as productive knowledge and guides as active genre systems in writing program activity systems can help WPAs better undertake document revision as productive curricular reform in their own institutions.

THEORIZING CURRICULAR REFORM AS PRODUCTIVE KNOWLEDGE

Janet Atwill's research on productive knowledge and *techne* is especially helpful for WPAs because so much of our work is specifically involved in acts of production, whether making changes through curricular reform in general or document revision in particular.³ In *Rhetoric Reclaimed: Aristotle and the Liberal Arts Tradition*, Atwill reclaims an ancient definition of *techne* as productive knowledge to argue that it is an art of intervention and invention and that rhetoric is productive knowledge. Based on our interpretation of Atwill's work, we define "productive knowledge" as a flexible, context-dependent way for people to intervene in the world by making something new that changes their - and others - interactions in it. The three characteristics Atwill attributes to productive knowledge and *techne* help explain this

definition: “its concern with the contingent, its implication in social and economic exchange, and its resistance to determinate ends” (172). The three main features of Atwill’s interpretation of *techne* are similar: (1) it is “never a static, normative body of knowledge,” (2) it “resists identification with a normative subject,” and (3) it “marks a domain of human intervention and invention” (7). The transformative potential - this promise of reform - of productive knowledge lies in its contingency, indeterminacy, and strategic moves to *intervene and invent* to make something new. Atwill offers readers an understanding of productive knowledge that has transformative potential in a number of contexts, and it is this prospect for transformation, which Atwill values for the classroom, that we want to use to extend to curricular reform.

Productive knowledge is an art, we find, that characterizes effective curricular reform in general and (re)production of guides in particular. As Reid indicates, change merely for the sake of change is inappropriate, but an appreciation of *changing* as a curricular stance creates reflective and revisionist opportunities for teachers and administrators (17). Theorizing course-guide revision as a type of Atwillian productive knowledge enables the recognition of curricular reform’s epistemic import and the production of new and revised documents through a flexible and recursive heuristic for guide revision. This heuristic is a strategy for curricular reform through document revision that negotiates complex program needs and situations, creates dialogues between makers and users, engages tensions between production and consumption, and highlights the flexible, reflective stance that ongoing, located change requires of program participants. It encompasses five aspects:

- **Gathering and Reflecting.** Gathering information about the history and current status of the guide and the course from various sources and reflecting about it to better understand the guide’s past and present shapes its—and the program’s—future.
- **Creating a Vision.** Creating an informed, mediated vision is a strategy for guide design that negotiates program histories and realities with stakeholders’ (sometimes different) scholarly and personal desires.
- **Designing and Framing.** Moving negotiated visions into production by designing and framing course-guide revisions as necessary, scholarly reform—not just tasks—in various programmatic, departmental, and even institutional contexts brings into clearer focus unresolved issues in composition programs and opens dialogic space for negotiating stability or more change in the midst of already changing programs.

- **Executing the Design.** Executing the design of a revised guide requires individual and collaborative production directed by the five rhetorical canons and three appeals.
- **Realizing Roles.** Realizing roles in reform is crucial for all stakeholders as it frames the potential and means for collaboration and production. It is particularly important for WPAs to identify and reflect about the roles they play—or (do not) want to play—as knowledge makers and agents of reform. Among community members, realizing roles helps avoid problematic distinctions between who is professionalized and who is not, and it supports the recognition that writing program administration and composition are disciplines that can be studied and practiced by those inside and outside of these fields.

With this heuristic, document revision becomes an ongoing, located opportunity to change audiences' and composers' curricular knowledge and action through the construction and use of the guide genre.

Productive knowledge that is reclaimed intervenes in a preexisting method or practice for invention to take place, transforming “‘what is’ into ‘what is possible’” (Atwill 70). Our document-revision heuristic directs this transformation within our own programs and also creates a new way for other WPAs to change curricula and programs by changing documents. However, because guides are often treated as fixed and thus forgettable course artifacts - like those we encountered at Purdue and WVU - rather than as active sites for curricular renegotiation, their productive potential can go unrealized, and, by extension, the potential of our document-revision heuristic can be unnecessarily limited. In addition, because WPAs work in complex institutional contexts, exploring writing programs as systems is a means to better understand and thus change interactions among people, texts, and agendas - further enabling the reflective and effective use of this heuristic.

WPAs AS CHANGE AGENTS AND GUIDES AS ACTIVE GENRE SYSTEMS IN WRITING PROGRAM ACTIVITY SYSTEMS

Activity theory offers WPAs a means for understanding writing programs as active sites and examining their own programs and roles because it orients program administrators within the complex web of relations, activities, and documents that constitute writing programs in general. Activity theory - initially developed by psychologist Lev Vygotsky and his colleagues A. N. Leont'ev and Aleksandr Luriiia in the 1920s and '30s (Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*; Luria, *The Making of Mind*) - is a conceptual framework for

describing human activities that emphasizes dynamic, collaborative interaction among members of a community who negotiate tools, rules, and roles to fulfill an outcome. Building on Vygotsky, contemporary educational psychologist Yrjö Engeström describes dynamic systems as overlapping "triangles of activity" that mediate complex and changing interactions between subjects, objects, instruments, rules, communities, and division of labor through processes of production, consumption, distribution, and exchange (78). Engeström's model of an activity system helpfully identifies these critical elements and their complex interactions.⁴

Engeström's model, a synthesis of smaller triangles of activity, accommodates the various local and multilocal interactions that Reid feels are critical for understanding curriculum revision as an enabling process through a focus on transformation.

Engeström's human activity system model resonates with the rhetorical triangle, familiar to scholars and teachers of rhetoric for its recognition of the relationships among text, author, and audience located in—even encircled by—rhetorical context. Through Engeström's model, we have come to re-envision rhetorical context as one dynamic player within the activity system rather than as a stable framework encompassing the system as it is seen in the traditional communication triangle. This model further expands the communication triad to emphasize a number of interacting elements - subjects, objects, shareholders in a community, rules, divisions of labor, tools, and instruments - that contribute to a sought outcome. It also emphasizes the relations among these elements as shifting processes of production, consumption, distribution, and exchange. Engeström's portrayal of an activity system allows for recursive and ongoing interactions among all of its components, because the instrument for one interaction may be the subject of another, and so on. Activity systems' emphasis on multidirectional movement among a number of dynamic elements reinforces the contingency, indeterminacy, and exchange that characterize productive knowledge.

Identifying writing programs as activity systems elevates writing programs as sites of collaborative activity and movement—spaces that welcome the potential of changing—and locates WPAs as subjects within this network of interacting components. The writing-program activity system has the general object of supporting and improving writing instruction, with more specific outcomes and organizational configurations differing across institutions and time. For example, writing programs located in English Departments at public research universities must negotiate a community that includes large numbers of students enrolled in required writing courses, and they must also negotiate issues of uneven power structures brought about when GTAs and contingent faculty staff these courses and when

WPAs are embedded in several layers of administration. At private or four-year colleges, where the system's founders may also be its revisers, concerns with community might focus on a smaller, but no less vital, set of long-term faculty relationships differently complicated because composition may be taught by tenure and tenure-track faculty within the English department or across the college.

Based on this model - and regardless of the configurations of different programs - guides can no longer be seen merely as texts that generate departmental income, forgotten as fixed products of outdated change, or figured as solitary tasks for WPAs to undertake. Instead, their production and consumption calls on a number of contingent negotiations and actions among subjects and community members - students, teachers, administrators - to participate as makers and users of this curricular and programmatic instrument. As guide creators and users who collaborate with the members of their community, WPAs become knowledge-makers who reflect about these documents' content, clarity, and suitability in the context of the program and turn this reflection into new understanding, new practices, and new documents. An important role for WPAs is that of change agent, one who can introduce this collaborative engagement and vitality to other community members to encourage their appreciation for, understanding of, and consequent participation in the potential for productive and continuing transformation. Document revision becomes a collective means for reflecting about and shaping course curriculum and leads to negotiating programmatic rules, tools, and roles collaboratively.⁵

Engeström's model, like any model, risks overgeneralizing the specifics of individual programs, but its particular limit in terms of theorizing about WPA work is most obvious in its placement of "outcome" outside the area of interactivity. In Engeström's application, a guide might be seen as an object—the "raw material" or 'problem space' at which the activity is directed and which is molded and transformed into outcomes" ("The Activity System"). However, because our field has tended to treat guides as outcomes of activity, we have found that predicted or anticipated change in curricular documents is integral to their process of negotiation and revision. We have also found that in writing program systems, contrary to Engeström's model, textual genres like guides may occupy the role of instrument, object, or outcome singly or simultaneously. Guides can in one interaction be an instrument of articulation and in another be the subject of debate or the agent for questioning a policy or rule they contain. Therefore, these documents have the potential to promote activity, not by serving as definitive statements of policies or outcomes, but by acting as witnesses to and even catalysts for interpretation and renegotiation of the policies that originated

them. These documents evoke change by creating the need for conversation, by calling into question certain aspects of the programs they represent, and even by causing administrators to rethink or to revise certain programmatic components. When viewed this way, curricular guides are simultaneously enactive, productive, and reflective.

Given our focus on guide revision as a productive art and as a means to promote and instantiate curricular reform, we are particularly interested in envisioning the role of documents, especially guides, as subjects of writing program systems that promote an ongoing cycle of inquiry so that they become *active* genres. In *Shaping Written Knowledge*, Charles Bazerman describes genre as a “social construct that regularizes communication, interactions, and relations” (62). Carolyn Miller determines genres by motive rather than by pattern or form, positing them as social and rhetorical constructs and thereby investing them with an inventive and creative power (155). More recently, Charles Cooper defines “genres” as “types of writing that make possible certain kinds of learning and social interaction” and, therefore, as essential to certain practices of communication and understanding (25). While we draw from these genre theorists to describe the malleability that guide genres can have, we also aim to disrupt any notions of regularity they promote, because our interest in curricular documents is grounded in our desire to render them unstable.⁶

To this end, we look to David Russell’s and Anis Bawarshi’s discussions of genre. Russell’s 1999 discussion of “post-process” activity theory helps posit these documents’ potential for promoting kinetic and rigorous activity—not by serving as definitive statements but by acting as witnesses to the negotiation and interpretation of program goals, means, and outcomes they inspire. Russell uses Vygotskian activity theory to theorize complex networks of human activity as “social or discursive practices, communities of practice, or discourse communities” (81); and to recognize that these communities give rise to a class of textual genres that are defined not by certain formal features they may share but according to their processes of (re)construction and use. Viewed in this way, these genre systems enact dynamic social and composing processes that are “capable of changing, though always capable of being (temporarily) stabilized as their conditions of use are stabilized” (Russell 82). Most significantly, these genres mediate the many interactions and the processes of their collective authors and participants because they are frequently under revision (83). Similarly, Bawarshi’s recent research supports the notion that genres are ways to generate and communicate knowledge and actively shape how we know and act when we encounter genre systems. He affirms our belief that “genres are not merely passive backdrops for our actions or simply familiar tools we use to convey or categorize informa-

tion; rather, genres function more like rhetorical ecosystems, dynamic sites in which communicants rhetorically reproduce the very conditions within which they act” (Bawarshi 82).

Following Russell and Bawarshi, we identify curricular guides as sites of ongoing interaction and negotiation of programmatic rules in which critical (mis)understandings about participants’ roles and purposes can emerge and be negotiated to achieve a clearer re-vision of the program’s goals. It is in part from Russell’s concept of mediated interaction and Bawarshi’s notion of sites of interaction that we devised our own cyclical model to represent our continuing work with curricular documents (Figure 1). This representation of guides as active genre systems can be located within Engeström’s complex activity system, but, unlike Engeström’s model, it recognizes and integrates any number of fluctuating outcomes as part of the system itself. Located within writing program systems, the guides mediate students’ and instructors’ public interest with committee members’ and administrators’ ideological and epistemological interests in an ongoing cycle. Interactions between components in this system often occur as dialogue, reflection, and action aimed towards the (re)production and circulation of these documents. As a result, guides become a means for and site of dialogic engagement and programmatic invention and intervention. That is, they open a space for the (re)creation of documents and instigate (re)negotiation of interactions and beliefs in the writing program as a whole through the process of document (re)construction.

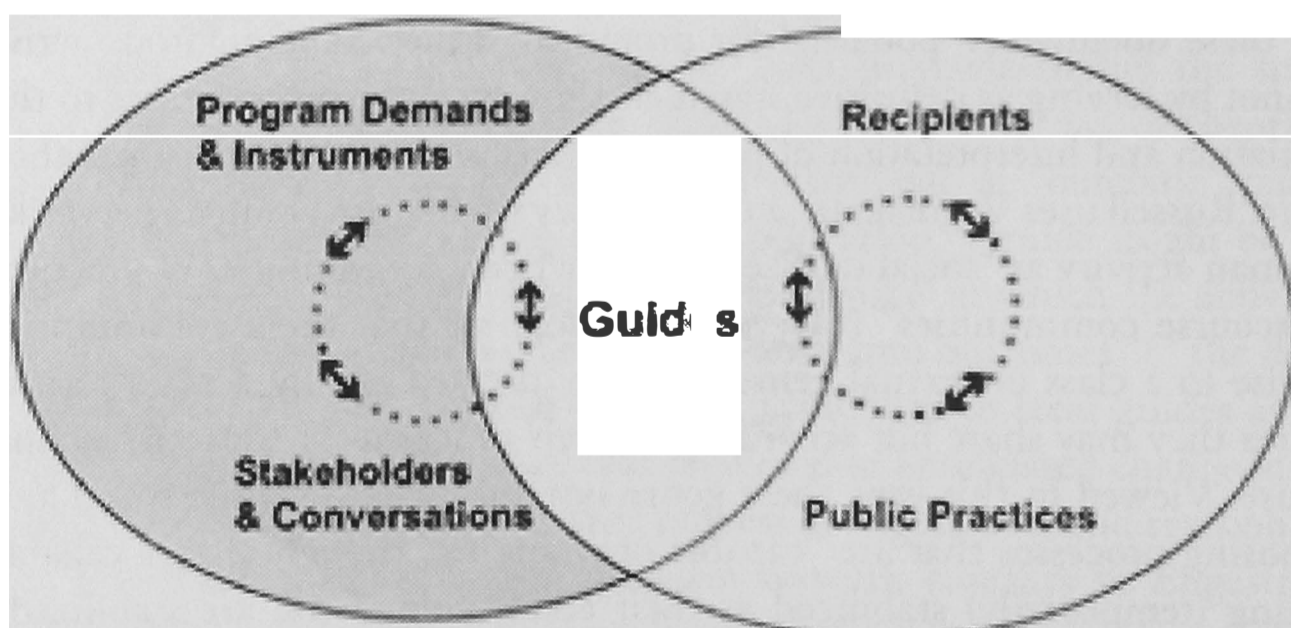


Figure 1. Interactivity of Subject Positions Caused by Guides as Active Genres. With this model, we theorize our work in curriculum revision at WVU and Purdue by placing the guides themselves (typically seen as products or “outcomes” in more traditional communications models) at the center of all other processes within the activity system—treating them as genre systems—and as the intersecting space between two spheres of activity.

TOWARD "WHAT IS POSSIBLE": DOCUMENT REVISION AT WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY AND PURDUE UNIVERSITY

Our theory of document revision as a process of in(ter)vention and reform has positioned us to welcome curricular changing as a productive art. Based on an improved understanding of our programs as writing program systems, our guides as dynamic genres, and our roles as knowledge makers and change agents, we have become better able to resee guide-revision tasks as productive opportunities for ongoing curricula and programmatic change. A discussion of the revision process of two documents at WVU and Purdue University demonstrates how we use this theorizing to undertake document reform at our quite different institutions. Ryan, WVU's Undergraduate Writing Coordinator recently hired and charged to revise their undergraduate writing program, and Grabau, a member of the Introductory Writing Committee charged with leading a subcommittee on student guide revision at Purdue, renegotiated the content, use, and function of student and course guides. The document revision heuristic helped us revise our respective guides and, by extension, engage in broader programmatic reform and reflexive understanding. We offer brief discussions of our uses of this heuristic within our respective programs to promote it as a *flexible* means for writing program administrators to practice the art of guide revision as part of their own reform efforts.

Course Guide Revision at West Virginia University. At WVU, the Center for Writing Excellence (CWE) is an organizational structure within the English Department that unites undergraduate writing, creative writing, distance education, and professional writing and editing. A faculty administrator coordinates each writing emphasis and the Director of the Center for Writing Excellence administers the whole program. As the Undergraduate Writing Coordinator, Ryan is responsible for curricula development, faculty development, and GTA education related to the two required composition courses, first-year composition and sophomore composition. When Ryan was hired in 2001, she was charged by the hiring committee to revise the undergraduate program to strengthen coherence between the two courses, improve teacher morale and faculty development opportunities, and develop a program that would reflect of contemporary composition theories and practices. An expectation included in these aims was that course guides be updated regularly, not only because the department recognizes published-guides as the primary representation of course content, but also because their sale to students provides substantial funding for department travel. In her second year at the university, Ryan began to undertake these charges with a particular focus on the second required course, English 102, in part because of the clear message she had received from administrators, teachers, and

students that it was a “terrible course terribly organized, taught and administered.” Ryan knew she needed to better understand what made English 102 so “terrible” to make meaningful changes to the guide, course, and program, and she used the document revision heuristic to explore the course and embark on its re-vision.

The process of gathering and reflecting about the history and status of the course and guide as critical elements in the CWE writing program system enabled Ryan to understand the “what was” of the program and her role in changing it. She knew basic administrative information related to English 102; however, considering the interactions among the teachers, students, support staff, and administrators as an activity system highlighted programmatic challenges, particularly some uneven power relations that limited vital processes of consumption, production, and collaboration.⁷

As the course is staffed primarily by adjuncts, their membership in the community has a significant effect on the program as a whole. By asking questions, holding meetings, listening to stories told in the hallways and mailroom, examining old documents, and conducting surveys, Ryan learned that these disempowered and overburdened teachers feel subjected to unwritten programmatic rules, that is, feel unempowered to make the program. Generally, these least-paid, most-burdened teachers resist taking active roles in the program beyond teaching their own courses. Despite (and perhaps because of) problems they observe and experience within the program, they neither wanted nor knew how to take part in changing the curriculum or revising the guide. Seen in terms of the activity system model, these teachers emerge as selective consumers of the program and the guide; the classroom is their place of power and they resist changes - including changes to documents - that might destabilize it, and they accept those that might reinforce it. They wanted the guide (a collection of articles primarily about finding materials in the library and documenting those materials properly) updated by the WVU writing program administrator, and they wanted her undergraduate writing committee to correct proofreading errors were eradicated; they wanted more samples of documentation and revisions to reflect changes in the university library system. The ways they viewed and used the guide reflected an assumption that a course on research and argument is primarily a course about discrete library research and proper documentation, and they wanted the guide to model these skills.

Because curricular and policy materials related to the course were not readily available in document form - guidelines were often implicit or written on obscure pieces of paper in files no one used - there were no documents to suggest that English 102 should be or could be anything different. In addition, teachers received little pedagogical support or administrative

guidelines beyond rules "handed down" about the number of pages to be written and assignments to be given; they were free to teach the course however they wanted. Students' complaints about differing expectations across courses, tedious library assignments, documentation exercises that they did not believe helped them to write arguments, and unclear and inconsistent grading criteria and practices revealed problems related to these freedoms. Through this research, Ryan identified "the trouble" with English 102, in multiples: a lack of teacher preparation and support, inexplicit course policies and outcomes, and little interest among teachers participating in the program beyond their roles as classroom teachers. This disconnectedness was undeniably connected to an understandable discontent felt by teachers because of hiring practices and job conditions.

Identifying problems with the English 102 course and recognizing the guide as an active genre system helped Ryan imagine the guide revision as a site for and means of intervening in particular curricular and programmatic problems. An important dimension of this revision included the ways Ryan needed to realize her role in this system to develop effective strategies as a change agent. As a feminist, she wanted to be a partner, or, according to Charles Handy in *The Age of Paradox*, one who "(1) orchestrate[s] the broad strategic vision, (2) develop[s] the shared administrative and organizational infrastructure, and (3) create[s] the cultural glue which can create synergies" (qtd. in Cambridge and McClelland 157). Ryan sought to use the role of partner as a means to revise the course guide by acknowledging her expertise to create a vision for guide reinvention and by relying on her abilities as a leader to encourage collaboration and community among teachers as engaged participants in guide revisions and in the program. Being a partner and creating partnership opportunities seemed the best approach to acting as a change agent in this system, particularly because this role redistributes power and processes of production and invites teachers to be makers of knowledge and change. Through the process of changing the guide, Ryan initiated broader reforms to revise the culture of the program.⁸

With this deeper understanding of the writing program system, its challenges, and her own role in it, Ryan worked to create an informed, mediated vision for guide design that negotiated exigencies, scholarly desires, and system realities. Her participation in the 2002 WPA Workshop, study of writing program administration texts and documents, and background in composition theory and pedagogy helped her imagine change from a disciplinary perspective. Conversations with the English 102 Mentor Coordinator, a woman with twenty-five years of English 102 teaching experience as a lecturer and a member of the undergraduate writing committee, led to their collaborative brainstorming about pragmatic change in the local

environment and gave this interested teacher a means for sharing her ideas and expertise. Through this inventive work, Ryan arrived at the following goal, or mediated vision, for guide revision: (1) to use the guide to shape the course's purpose toward a Burkean parlor approach to argument intended to encourage students to enter into academic conversations, and to move away from the historical focus on teaching the course as a series of discrete documentation tasks and library scavenger hunts; (2) to (re)create and make course policies and outcomes explicit and available in the guide; and (3) to affect these changes to the guide in collaboration with other stakeholders.

Arriving at this vision allowed West Virginia University coauthor Ryan to design and frame the English 102 course-guide revisions as a productive art and to encourage teachers' participation as makers and users of the new guide. Ryan supported teachers' increased understanding of and contributions to curricular reform and guide revisions through committee meetings and workshops. It was critical for the undergraduate writing committee to discuss guides as sites and means of change to help committee members - as the primary group responsible for the revising the guide - engage in guide revision differently from their past revisions of it. In addition, in a workshop developed by the undergraduate writing committee for English 102 teachers, Ryan asked participants to put newly developed course outcomes in dialogue with new developed course-guide materials—course description, assignment overviews, and recommended pedagogical practices—to help participants learn and talk about the course revisions in general and recognize the guides' various uses for teachers and students. Thus meetings and workshops became forums for teachers to talk and learn about course guide revisions, to collaborate on the revisions, and to meet as a community.

For Ryan, executing the design of the revised course guide emphasized rhetorical invention and arrangement; it was manifested in four ways: (1) using the notion of entering academic conversations to frame the guide and represent the course specifically by creating a lead article to articulate this concept for student and teacher readers; (2) physically redesigning the guide to include (for the first time) material to frame the course and provide common policies; (3) making a section entitled "Learning by Doing," written by department members to include one-page articles with related workshops on research and argumentation and to bring together theory and classroom practice; and (4) moving the library section to the end of the guide to emphasizing the new "Learning by Doing" section. Ryan brought her vision of the course and guide revision to the committee of lecturers, faculty, and graduate students who collaborated on the redesign of whole guide and the creation and composition of the new section. The redesigned guide includes new textual content to meet problems students had raised

and that Ryan and committee members had observed: a description of the course’s purpose and pedagogical approach, an outcomes statement, general assignment overviews, grade descriptors, and a common course attendance policy. Renaming the guide *Entering Academic Conversations: Research and Argumentation in English 102 at West Virginia University* reinforced these changes (see Appendix 1).

WVU’s guide has been anecdotally successful: new teachers like the guide, all of the teachers like the clear policies and outcomes statement, and students lodge fewer complaints about course inconsistencies and unclear grading criteria. In addition, while some teachers still resist change and involvement as makers and producers of guides and curriculum, the committee members’ engagement in reform is a promising sign of collaborative activity. Ryan hopes that the collaborative process of this guide revision and its circulation and use in the program supports ongoing change in the curriculum and in the interactions among members of the of the undergraduate writing program, including a recognition of guide revision as a collective opportunity for reflection, dialogue, and negotiation among teachers and administrators about programmatic and curricular issues.

Student Guide Revision at Purdue University. In Fall 2003, the introductory composition program at Purdue began a significant transition from a two-semester sequence of composition required for many students to a one-semester course required for all students. The new, single-semester course is an intensive “hybrid” course combining traditional and computer classroom instruction with regularly scheduled conferences. It emphasizes information literacy along with the production of new media. Some reasons generating this change included disparities in course content, pedagogical approaches, and students’ FYC experience under the previous program.⁹ Another reason was an expressed need to focus attention on articulating a set of shared goals and outcomes, so the new course, English 106, motivated the reinvention of a shared curriculum with different syllabus approaches, led to the creation of a dedicated conference center and multimedia instruction classrooms, and increased the instructors’ contact hours per student. Consequently, the new curriculum has challenged many students’, instructors’, and administrators’ conceptions of class space and time, teaching and teaching preparation, and rhetoric and writing. Furthermore, it has required new approaches to articulating the program’s goals and means both intra- and inter-departmentally—including prompting both instructors and their students to begin to theorize about and understand the need for such a course—to assess its outcomes better. As a result, program participants began a campaign to reconstruct every document connected with FYC at Purdue that attempted to establish or communicate policy.

Introductory Composition at Purdue (ICaP) is an organized structure within the university's English department comprising the various committees and groups that support first-year composition.¹⁰ Partly as a result of its multilayered mentoring program and diverse teaching staff, ICaP's members are often also involved with other writing emphases—a circumstance that both enriches and complicates FYC's role and involvement at Purdue. Stakeholders in Purdue's student-guide genre system include as many as ten members of the Introductory Writing Committee, representing program directors, tenured and tenure-track faculty, contingent faculty, and graduate students from introductory writing, professional and business writing, writing across the curriculum, second-language writing, and the writing center; about 145 instructors (also tenure-track faculty, part-time adjuncts, full-time lecturers, and graduate students); and other members of the program fulfilling the roles of mentors, assistant directors, and support staff. Recipients and users of the student guide include the approximately 5,200 students enrolling in FYC each year and their instructors. Appointed by the department head or voted in by the graduate student English association, the Introductory Writing Committee membership fluctuates from year to year. Graban has been a voting member of the Introductory Writing Committee since Fall 2002, when preparations for the change to English 106 first got underway.

As part of this effort, Graban was asked to lead a subcommittee on revising the student guide, a task that seemed unimposing at first; however, gathering and reflecting about information about current uses of the old guide helped Graban to realize the guide's potential for pointing out sources of ideological disparity. The old guide, called *Introductory Composition Courses*, was the sole program document written explicitly for students, informing them of their rights and expectations regarding their FYC requirement and serving as a public iteration of the program's overarching goals and policies. In theory, this guide was distributed and read with the instructor's syllabus and policy statement during the first week of classes; in practice, fewer than half of the instructors believed that it effectively engaged their students' interest in the course; nevertheless, instructors referred to it when justifying particular grades or assignments. Largely underused, the student guide had undergone no more than minor lexical or grammatical changes in more than twelve years; it no longer adequately attended to the changing curriculum.

In the process of gathering and reflecting about the document's history, Graban found herself returning to ICaP's other key program instruments—namely the flagship “Goals, Means, and Outcomes” statements—initiating frequent and continuing interactions with these documents; consequently, some goals and outcomes were further revised. This process allowed Graban

to begin to negotiate among the different expectations and beliefs that ICaP stakeholders brought to the project by offering guide revision as a helpful component in reflecting about the new curriculum.

Because it is ICaP’s practice to vote on all new initiatives, Graban’s work invited rounds of discussion among various members of the department. Thus, early in the revision process, Graban had to realize her role as a negotiating member of a curricular committee and be willing to direct conversations about the student guide into other means of communicating such as one-on-one meetings or e-mail communications when consensus could not be reached. Early revisions of Purdue’s student guide revealed ICaP members’ difficulties in relinquishing their individual premises and the ideals they felt defined the reasons they taught and their students learned. A gap between intangible goals and measurable outcomes related to articulating course aims in terms of social epistemology, civic ideals, and individual growth emerged in one revision. Based on study of the old guide, use of the “Goals, Means, and Outcomes Statement,” and conversation with committee members, Graban arrived at the following informed, mediated vision for Purdue’s student guide: enlarging the parameters for what constitutes acts of “writing” and “composing,” speaking more rigorously to students about how they could recognize their own measures of success in the program, and addressing the various roles FYC plays in socializing students into Purdue University, the academy, and civic society.

Graban designed and framed the student-guide revision as part of programmatic reform by employing Ellen Barton’s notion of “rich features” in discourse analysis to explore ideological inconsistencies in the student guide and in discussions of the program. Barton’s rich features are those lexical and semantic elements that show evidence of social interaction in a text—they have both linguistic integrity and contextual value (23); therefore, rich features can be small or large, syntactical or organizational, they can occur at the word or on the genre level, and they can apply not only to the written text but also to the text’s interlocutors and their purposes for writing (24). Examining these elements helped Graban and her subcommittee to recognize lingering current-traditional notions (Berlin 58), explore cooperative contention among stakeholders, and note a critical lack of vocabulary for fully integrating technology into the new course. In the language of the old guides Graban found no references to “technology,” “Internet,” “online,” “media,” “digital,” “electronic,” “production,” or “creation”; although nine references to “composition” occurred, they only named or identified the course as “introductory composition.” Furthermore, ICaP’s notions of writing had already broadened to include composition in all forms of media, yet it was difficult to articulate those notions without resorting to a list of

preferred applications or letting named technologies drive the course. Other contentions ranged from theoretical disagreements on the treatment of grammar and the use of grading norms to strategic discussions about changing the program rhetoric without being unduly disrupting to broader university discourses.

Graban received the most feedback in response to presentations of evolutionary drafts of the student guide at committee tables and training sessions; stakeholders also “talked” through their votes. Outside of the committee room, she raised awareness of and elicited conversations about the student guide over the instructor listserv, the ICaP website, and during a training workshop for returning instructors. The summer prior to the transition, Graban also developed a workshop for students developed a workshop for students learning to write public documents in a pilot section of English 106. This opportunity allowed her to demonstrate to students the rhetorical and theoretical significance of working collaboratively on unstable articulations of policy, ideology, and public identity.

Executing the design of a revised guide based on these studies of the guide and conversations about it led to individual and collaborative production that were substantively informed by the five rhetorical canons and appeals. Graban, whose efforts focused on arrangement, style, and delivery, observed several problematic psycho-dynamic positionings within the organization of the guide that she sought to change: the tone was optimistically broad yet offered little or no room for student questions; the narrative speaker was the introductory writing program, while the narrative subject fluctuated inconsistently between program and student; the instructor was positioned as an interested (albeit undermined) third party. In rewriting the student guide, Graban emphasized the roles of instructor as an autonomous agent in carrying out the goals of the program and student as an autonomous agent in negotiating the shared goals of the program in three ways: (1) framing ICaP’s policies using student queries by reorganizing the guide as a series of questions that students tended to ask; (2) putting various sections of the guide in a deliberate relationship and hence in conversation with other sections; and (3) creating reciprocal agency by using subordinating conjunctions, logical and conversational transitions, and flow markers to iterate ICaP’s policies as responses in a particular context and to create a tone that was reminiscent of discursal turn-taking, with students taking the first turn. In the new guide, the instructor shares the same “we” position as mentors, program leaders, and anyone else who shared the ICaP vision. The student occupies “you” and “I” positions of simultaneously speaking and being spoken to. The result is a document that shares and alternates, rather than blends, the writerly and readerly roles (see Appendix 2).

The new framework also allowed the subcommittee to be more creative in the ways they described and positioned ICaP's courses as (1) intrinsic to students' broader intellectual development, and (2) responsive to greater and more vital literacy practices. They achieved these aims by recompiling the "course policies" section to include apologia for vital course goals, renaming it "instructor policies," and bringing it in much earlier in the document. They created a "resources" section that aligned introductory composition with the library, the multimedia development center, the writing center, and even the program for adaptive services, demonstrating that English 106 and 108 are not the only spaces where students can develop as writers. Feedback on the final circulating version has been positive so far; program members' vested interest in continuing to revise the document underscores the mood for revision, and ICaP has committed to evaluating its use and usability this year, agreeing that the student guide is best viewed as a flexible document. Graban hopes that this commitment will not only carry over into other program documents, but also help encourage a systematic and rigorous reflection of program goals each year.

THEORIZING DOCUMENT REVISION: CHANGING DOCUMENTS, CHANGING PROGRAMS

Sharing and reflecting about our different uses of this heuristic underlines its flexibility and reinforces for us the importance of theorizing curricular reform as a productive art capable of being used to change our guides, our curricula, our programs, and our perspectives by initiating cycles of inquiry. Recognizing the different writing programs as activity systems in which these guides function has necessarily caused us to question programmatic rhetoric and identity, embedded power structures, discourse operations, and processes of production and consumption tied specifically to the guides' circulation. This model also helped us better recognize venues of teacher training, orientation workshops, composition classroom, and committee table as valuable spaces in which certain aspects of programs and curricula are negotiated or reconsidered. We have also learned the importance of teaching other teachers, students, and administrators how we identify and conduct document revision as reform and as the role of collaboration among stakeholders, who include WPAs. We do so in the hopes that people understand better how course and student guides serve their generic function as "the articulation and effect of what we do and the reason and means for why we do it" (Bawarshi 45) - and thus how the guides construct and represent curricula and programs; thus, too, how guide revision is a productive means for curricular and programmatic reflection and transformation.

Through writing together, we observed the ways we adapted the heuristic to attend to our different writing program systems and needs, and we saw that the heuristic points to the potential this theorizing has for other WPAs' document revision practices in their institutions. For instance, we observed that many of the changes to the WVU course guide focused on adding documents and disrupting long-standing power dynamics and limited interactions; at Purdue, student guide-revision emphasized identifying and appropriating discourse and reflecting about the new curriculum as it emerged. We also saw that these changes reflect our larger institutional and program histories. The guide revisions at Purdue reflect reform in a writing program with an established national reputation for scholarship and teaching in composition studies that was in the process of undertaking an innovative change to the first-year composition curriculum. Graban engaged the heuristic as a means of dialogic interrogation of a specific student text as part of significant curricular change. Alternatively, West Virginia University recently affirmed its commitment to the teaching of writing with the establishment of the Center for Writing Excellence in 2000 and new tenure-track lines in composition studies in 2001, including Ryan's position, and is developing and professionalizing preexisting and new writing programs. As such, Ryan's use of the heuristic to institute broad changes to set a guide, undergraduate course, and program on a new path is appropriate to the larger changing scene. We intend for our descriptions of the heuristic at work within these two programs to help other WPAs imagine ways to negotiate their roles as knowledge-makers and change agents, and to adapt this approach to guide revisions into their own writing program systems. Ryan, who is an active WPA, plans to extend this approach to document revision to other venues to continue reforming and developing curriculum, community and faculty development, and to implement a deeper understanding of the teaching of writing. Graban, who is not currently an active WPA, regularly carries many of the rhetorical implications of this work into her participation in other committees and scholarly projects. We have learned, as theorists and practitioners, to embrace the potential for change that this approach to document revision encourages.

For Reid, reflective curricular reform keeps us in a state of productive flux and encourages us to anticipate change more regularly and comprehensively (12). We agree, although we find theorizing document revision and guides as a more specific genre directs this potential for transformation. Theorizing document revision as productive knowledge and guides as active genres in writing program activity systems can help WPAs to improve their understanding and to carry out guide revisions as acts of located knowledge-making in dynamic sites to (re)produce guides through a dynamic heuristic and

to improve communication of the importance of rhetorical reform to help teachers, administrators, and students use guides effectively, to understand document revision, and to participate in curricular change. Ultimately, this perspective allows WPAs to embrace the stance that attends the heuristic—a recursivity that is both tool and medium for invention—and challenges the notion that WPAs simply build and maintain programs.

APPENDIX 1

Table of Contents for 2003-2004 *Entering Academic Conversations: Research and Argumentation in English 102 at West Virginia University*

Part One: James Paul Brawner Expository Writing Contest Winners
 Female Performers as a Marketable Means of Domesticating Post-War Women
Bobbie L. J. Godbey (first prize, 2002)
 Race: A Problem in Death Penalty Cases
Jennifer Narus (second prize, 2002)

Part Two: Learning about English 102

Welcome to English 102

Outcomes Statement for English 102 at West Virginia University

English 102 Course Goals

English 102 Policies and Procedures

General Grade Descriptors for English 102

Assignment Overviews

Procedural Basics

English 102 Support

Part Three: Learning by Doing

Entering Academic Conversations, *Julie Vedder*

Reading and Interpreting Arguments, *Robert Fanning*

Evaluating Internet Sources, *Greg Thumm*

Workshop on Taking Notes, *Elizabeth C. Junkett*

Paraphrasing and Summarizing, *Carolyn Nelson*

How to Incorporate Sources Into Your Paper, *Tim Sweet*

Using Evidence, *Beth Madison*

You Want us to WHAT?? But This is A Writing Course. . . or

Preparing the Oral Presentation, *JoAnn Dadisman*

Part Four: The Libraries

Library Resources and Services, *Jing Qiu*

Using the Evansdale Library, *Barbara LaGodna*

Using the Health Sciences Library, *Virginia Bender*

Government Documents in the WVU Libraries, *Christine Chang*

West Virginia and Regional History Collection, *Harold Malcolm Forbes*

The Appalachian Collection, *Jo B. Brown*

The Map Collection, *Christine Chang*

The Rare Books Room, *Harold Malcolm Forbes*

Part Five: Using Library Resources

MountainLynx: The WVU Library Online Catalog, *Jing Qiu*

Periodical Articles, *Penny Pugh*

How to Find Book Reviews, *Hilary Fredette*

Locating Biographical Information, *Marian G. Armour-Gemmen*

Welcome to WVU Libraries' Web Services for English 102 Students, *Beth Jane Toren*

What to Do When We Don't Have It: Using Interlibrary Loan, *Hilary Fredette*

APPENDIX 2

Excerpt and Organizational Structure from the Revised *Student Guide to Introductory Composition at Purdue*

This excerpt from the introduction illustrates that the new student guide positions students as asking both mediated and authentic questions (the former represented by departmental paraphrasing and the latter represented by an imposed watermark in the ICaP program font). Each section of the guide was designed this way, offering recipients and stakeholders a visual representation of the tensions ICaP sometimes felt between students' questions and its own rhetoric.

What is INTRODUCTORY COMPOSITION?

Students at Purdue have diverse academic interests and professional goals. And although not every student at Purdue is an English major or strives to become a career writer, the ability to communicate creatively and effectively is important to all of us for several reasons: 1) it provides us an outlet for sharing our ideas and an opportunity for making those ideas better, 2) it empowers us to understand different conventions, genres, groups, societies, and cultures, and 3) it allows us to have a voice in multiple academic, civic, and personal situations. In short, writing is a way of learning that spans all fields and disciplines, it is broadly defined to include many reasons for and methods of composing.

Similar discursive strategies are at work in the reorganization of this guide’s original structure:

Organization of Old Student Guide

- Introduction
- Introductory Composition Courses
 - English 101
 - English 102
 - English 103
- Class Policies and Grading
- General Grade Guidelines
- Honesty and Use of Sources
- What You Can Expect in FYC
- If You Have Problems

Organization of New Student Guide

- What is Introductory Composition?
- Are all Introductory Composition classes the same?
 - English 106 (including English 106I)
 - English 108
- Do all Introductory Composition instructors teach the same way?
 - Instructor Policies
 - Academic Honesty
 - Evaluation and Grading
- What if I want more help with or resources for my composition class?
 - Writing Center
 - Digital Learning Collaboratory
 - Adaptive Programs
- What if problems arise?

NOTES

¹ Because this is a feminist collaborative effort, the coauthors are listed in ascending alphabetical order and not in a pre-determined order of importance.

² By “guide” we mean to describe those texts that help readers - makers and users - understand and negotiate a course. Guides might include explicit features like policies and procedures, resources, and specific information - activities or articles - in support of course outcomes. We use “student guide” to refer to the *Student Guide to Introductory Composition at Purdue University*, which is addressed specifically to the students and implicitly to the instructors, and “course guide” to

refer to the WVU guide to English 102, which is addressed to students but also serves as teachers' primary introduction to the course.

³ In the "Guest Editors' Column" of the 2002 Special Issue of *Technical Communication Quarterly*, Tracy Bridgeford and Michael Moore focus on Atwill's interpretation of *techné* as "an underlying context" for their discussion of the teaching of technical writing and technical communication (125). We extend that discussion into the writing of program documents.

⁴ Engeström's model of the structure of human activity and its stages can be viewed on Web site of the University of Helsinki's Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research (<http://www.edu.helsinki.fi/activity/pages/chat-anddwr/activitysystem/>).

⁵ Although this discussion focuses on our use of curricular guides, we regularly interact with and value the other tools that accomplish this objective, including e-mails, statements of policy, workshop materials, meetings, Web sites, and listservs. As well, we acknowledge that more implicit tools—totems and taboos of different communities—also shape the use and interpretation of explicit rules and relationships.

⁶ Efforts to rewrite program documents quickly become opportunities for curricular, programmatic, and institutional reflection, which we further liken to Carolyn Miller's notion of recurrent rhetorical situations (157), and Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin's "duality" of rhetorical structure in "Rethinking Genre from a Sociocognitive Perspective" (493). In the former, Miller argues for genres as ethnomethodological classifications—ones that "seek to explicate the knowledge that practice creates" (156). In the latter, Berkenkotter and Huckin attend to disciplinary structures as simultaneous medium and outcome.

⁷ That is, approximately thirty-five tenured and tenure-track faculty, part-time adjuncts, full-time lecturers; graduate teaching assistants teach 2,500 students in classes of twenty-two students each year. Each student is required to buy the course guide.

⁸ In addition to revising the course guide, Ryan—in collaboration with administrators and the undergraduate writing committee—developed a peer mentoring program, an instructor's Web site and an improved contractual arrangement for adjuncts.

⁹ Under the former system, FYC at Purdue offered three courses: the two-semester English 101–102 sequence, culminating in academic writing and research, and English 103, a one-semester course for accelerated students. Depending on placement and major, some students enrolled in as many as six hours of composition, some only three, and some students none, according to whether they tested-out or whether their major required a second semester of composition. Therefore, not all Purdue students were guaranteed to experience guided instruction in academic

writing, research, or visual rhetoric. English 106 (the four-credit one-semester replacement for the six-credit English 101–102 sequence) and English 108 (formerly English 103) have eliminated the test-out option, ensuring that more students will take FYC, although exemptions from English 108 are still possible.

¹⁰ At Purdue, this support extends beyond the daily classroom into opportunities for professional and pedagogical development, in part as a way of encouraging classroom-based research that can contribute to current knowledge about what makes effective composition practices

WORKS CITED

- "The Activity System." Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research. 2003. U Helsinki. 17 May 2004 <<http://www.edu.helsinki.fi/activity/pages/chatanddwr/activitysystem/>>.
- Atwill, Janet M. *Rhetoric Reclaimed: Aristotle and the Liberal Arts Tradition*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998.
- Barton, Ellen. "Inductive Discourse Analysis: Discovering Rich Features." *Discourse Studies in Composition*. Ed. Ellen Barton and Gail Stygall. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 2002. 19–42.
- Bawarshi, Anis S. *Genre and the Invention of the Writer: Reconsidering the Place of Invention in Composition*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2003.
- Bazerman, Charles. *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*. Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1988.
- Berlin, James. *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1984.
- Cambridge, Barbara L., and Ben McClelland. "From Icon to Partner: Repositioning the Writing Program Administrator." *Resituating Writing: Constructing and Administering Writing Programs*. Ed. Joseph Janangelo and Kristine Hansen. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1995. 151–59.
- Cooper, Charles. "What We Know about Genres, and How It Can Help Us Assign and Evaluate Writing." *Evaluating Writing: The Role of Teachers' Knowledge about Text, Learning, and Culture*. Ed. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1999. 23–52.
- Engeström, Yrjö. *Learning by Expanding: An Activity-Theoretical Approach to Developmental Research*. Helsinki, Finland: Orienta-Konsultit, 1987.
- Farris, Christine. "Introduction: Changing the First-Year Writing Curriculum." *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 26.3 (Spring 2003): 7–9.
- ICaP. *Student Guide to Introductory Composition at Purdue*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University, 2004. 10 July 2004 <http://www.sla.purdue.edu/academic/engl/ICaP/student_guide.html>.

- Luria, A. R. (Aleksandr Romanovich). *The Making of Mind: A Personal Account of Soviet Psychology*. Ed. Michael Cole and Sheila Cole. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979.
- Miller, Carolyn R. "Genre as Social Action." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70.2 (1984): 151–67.
- Reid, E. Shelley. "A Changing for the Better: Curriculum Revision as Reflective Practice in Teaching and Administration." *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 26.3 (Spring 2003): 10–27.
- Russell, David. "Activity Theory and Process Approaches: Writing (Power) in School and Society." *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing-Process Paradigm*. Ed. Thomas Kent. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1999. 80–95.
- Ryan, Kathleen J., ed. *Entering Academic Conversations: Research and Argumentation in English 102 at West Virginia University*. Littleton, MA: Tapestry Press, 2003.
- Vygotsky, Lev S. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Eds. Michael Cole, et al. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978.



Copyright of *WPA: Writing Program Administration - Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators* is the property of Council of Writing Program Administrators and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.