Guidelines for the Academic Preparation of English Faculty at Two-Year Colleges

Two-Year College English Association



The highly competent professor of English in today's two-year college—like highly competent faculty at all levels of education—is a skilled educator, a knowledgeable scholar, and an active learner and contributor within the profession. What distinguishes the two-year college teacher-scholar is his or her dedication to open educational access, commitment to democratic participation and equity within higher education, and ability to help make these ideals a reality for highly diverse learners from eighteen to eighty and from backgrounds that cross conventional divides of race, ethnicity, class, and academic preparation.

Prepared by an Ad Hoc Committee of the Two-Year College English Association of the National Council of Teachers of English

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Executive Summary

The Two-Year College English Association of the National Council of Teachers of English developed the following document to give guidelines for the academic preparation of two-year college English faculty to administrators who hire teachers at two-year institutions, to university faculty who offer graduate courses or are engaged in training future two-year college teachers, and to graduates who want some direction in deciding appropriate courses in their preparation to become two-year college English faculty.

Two major questions frame the document; what are the characteristics of effective twoyear college English teachers, and how can these characteristics be fostered through academic preparation and professional development?

Characteristics of Effective Two-Year College English Faculty

- Are reflective practitioners and flexible teacher-scholars
- Center their classrooms on the student
- Understand diversity and teaching to diverse ethnic, economic, and ability populations
- Challenge their students
- · Ground their teaching in theory and research
- Collaborate with colleagues in developing curriculum
- Actively serve their colleges and their communities
- Participate in professional community through conferences, presentations, publications, and ongoing scholarship

Academic Preparation and Professional Development

Baccalaureate degree with major in English and these core courses:

- Western and non-Western literature, including literary theory
- Grammar and linguistics
- Writing (including expository writing, creative writing, technical writing, writing in the disciplines)

Additional courses recommended in:

- Teaching writing (including courses in basic writers, bilingual/bicultural writers)
- Teaching reading
- The adult learner
- Curriculum

Master's degree in English or English education should include:

- In-depth courses in the core group above
- Other coursework in:
 - Theories of learning, including basic writers and literacy for adult learners
 - Composition theory and pedagogy
 - Rhetoric and rhetorical theory
 - Reading and literacy
 - Multilingual/multicultural, ESL education
 - Computer-mediated learning and digital environments
 - Research methods
- Suggested elective coursework in:
 - Diversity
 - Writing across the curriculum
 - Writing centers
 - Classroom assessment

Further Graduate Studies and Continuing Faculty Development

Further faculty development, which may involve doctoral work, should include:

- Higher education politics
- Issues of language policy
- Teaching non-traditional students, students with disabilities, and ethnically diverse students
- Course development and assessment; faculty/self-evaluation

Adjunct Faculty

Since much of the teaching of composition is taught by adjunct faculty, they should have the same qualifications expected for full-time hires, specifically, a master's degree in English with coursework in composition theory or the teaching of writing, or experience with the National Writing Project, writing centers, or similar organizations.

For those who may be teaching without this background (whether full-time or adjunct), the English Department in the two-year college is urged to offer courses or workshops in these areas as well as in methods of evaluation, adult learners, and assessment.

Guidelines for the Academic Preparation of English Faculty at Two-Year Colleges

Statement of Purpose

Effective community college teachers are reflective and flexible teacher-scholars whose primary role is to enable students of widely differing backgrounds, needs, and interests to learn most effectively. This document offers suggestions for both the training and the philosophy that two-year college teacher-scholars of the twenty-first century need to bring to the English classroom in order to fulfill this role.

The audience for these guidelines includes professionals at all levels:

- graduate students who are preparing to teach in two-year colleges;
- university faculty who are engaged in training teachers or in offering graduate English courses;
- those who seek adjunct teaching roles at two-year colleges;
- faculty, staff, and administrators who are involved in hiring English teachers for twoyear college classes.

The need for guidelines established by professionals within two-year colleges is urgent, as three conditions suggest the need for many more community college faculty within the next ten years. First, as Generation Y students reach college age and as increasing numbers of four-year colleges and universities reach enrollment saturation points, two-year colleges are poised to increase positions to serve the additional students. Second, current English faculty who were hired during the rapid growth of two-year colleges in the middle to latter part of the twentieth century are now retiring in record numbers. Third, many of these positions will be filled by adjunct faculty as well as by recent graduate students embarking on careers.

A recent study from the U.S. Department of Education reports that almost two-thirds (64.9%) of faculty in two-year colleges are now adjuncts. In English departments, the profile may include MA or PhD graduates in composition or literature, high school English retirees, professional writers, or professionals from related fields. While research to date has examined adjunct faculty working conditions, matters of academic preparation and currency of these professionals have not been fully addressed. Clearly, these concerns must become paramount if two-year colleges are to continue to offer a bright educational gateway for all students.

In addition to adjunct positions in English, full-time tenure-track faculty positions in two-year colleges now present special concerns. Recent graduates of master's and doctoral programs are often applicants for these positions, yet many have not been appropriately prepared by traditional English graduate degree programs to confront and address effectively the needs of two-year college students.

Taking into account the rapidly changing nature of the profession, this document offers suggestions and a rationale to guide the training of those who can best serve the needs of tomorrow's two-year college learners. This report offers a historical overview of changes in the discipline and in the student populations of two-year colleges; presents some guiding principles for teaching and scholarship in the two-year college; and makes specific recommendations for both the formal preparation and the ongoing professional development of two-year college teacher-scholars.

Changes in Theory and Praxis in English

It is a serious mistake to assume that the discipline of English is essentially static, and that anyone with a graduate degree in the field, however dated, is well qualified to teach in a two-year college. Some degree-granting institutions have helped perpetuate that notion by assuming that a traditional curriculum supplemented by T.A. or similar teacher training is adequate preparation for two-year college teaching. A brief review of several of the many changes in the profession over the past three decades refutes these assumptions.

A shift from writing-as-product to writing-as-process is one such change. In the 1970s, psychologists moved from a stimulus-response view of cognition to a processing one. At about the same time, both writing and reading theory changed to "process" theory, in which the writing process itself became the focus of composition, and the reading process offered ways of thinking about how students learn to read and use what they learn. These changes prompted significant revisions in classroom practices of writing assessment, among others.

In the 1980s, social-constructivist theory exerted one of many new influences on composition.

Learners began to examine the power of language (word presence, absence, choice, positioning,

repetition, and the like) to "construct" (and, by extension, to reshape or "deconstruct") thoughts, images, identity. Concomitantly, such practices as peer editing, along with group research, writing, and discussion, became current.

Many other theories of composition and rhetoric—influenced by a host of disciplines from classical logic to ethics, social psychology, political history, ecology, and technology, to name only a few—have continually shaped and reshaped English curriculum and pedagogy over the past three decades. These theories, too numerous to summarize in a short document, have prompted informed English educators to deconstruct widely held assumptions about language/s, literature/s, literac[y/ies], and learners, and have compelled them to redefine such concepts as "literary canon" and "standard grammar," to revise notions of authority, and to review and refine good teaching practices.

It is worth noting that the National Council of Teachers of English has published significant books and position statements over the years to reflect and respond to changes in current theory as these have affected the profession at large. One such early work, the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Students' Right to Their Own Language (1974), offered a view of language that the field has continued to debate: (1) a student should be encouraged to use the language that fits the context; (2) a student's home language should not be denied but should be used in an appropriate context while standard (today, standardized) written English continues as the language for academic writing. In addition, NCTE position statements advocated that graduate English departments provide "education in basic pedagogical skills through formal programs, internships, and other comparable experiences" (NCTE Resolution on Pedagogical Preparation of College Teachers, 1973), as well as teacher education programs that prepare teachers "to work with students from diverse language and dialect backgrounds" (Students' Right to Their Own Language, 1974). Nearly thirty years later, NCTE statements on teaching second and other language learners, the preparation and professional development of teachers of writing, and a revised view of the teaching of grammar reflect further changes in the profession.

As all these theories developed in the profession, not all practicing teachers were aware of or in support of the changes. Nonetheless, scholars and researchers continued to publish, and graduate students were frequently trained in theories that were not practiced in the actual classrooms where they might wish to teach. This disjunction between what was becoming theory in the profession and what was actually being used in the classroom was exacerbated by the lack of a set of standards for expectations across the country.

This document seeks to offer some suggestions to help ameliorate this situation while at the same time suggesting ways that training for new teachers might reflect current and changing theories in teaching.

The recommendations are intended to reflect the classrooms and theories now in place, and the fact that theory and practice will continue to evolve. As research reveals new ways of teaching and learning, this document will be continually updated and revised. Therefore, these guidelines should be viewed as a living document that will change as the profession changes. The profession needs to have a consistent voice about what is expected in training and philosophy in newly hired, full- and part-time faculty. While different states require different academic credentials, which this document does not expect to regularize across the country, this document hopes to establish broad parameters that will be consistent for all two-year colleges.

Changes in Student Populations

In the middle of the twentieth century, a movement began to combine two-year preparatory or junior colleges with technical colleges to create the public community college. Most of these institutions, locally controlled and supported, also addressed community needs, such as non-credit educational opportunities. In their different roles, two-year colleges, both public and private, have attracted and served different student populations, which have become even more diverse over time.

Especially in two-year colleges, students represent a range of age groups; social and economic backgrounds; racial, ethnic, and international groups; and levels of academic and physical ability—all requiring flexibility in curricula and in teaching. The U.S. Department of Education 1997

survey of two-year colleges reveals that nontraditional students (22 years +) make up 59.9% of all enrolled while those under 18 years represent 3.8%. Women rank as the slim majority at 57.4%.

Ethnically diverse groups account for 31.8% enrollment, with 11% Black (non-Hispanic), 8.7% Hispanic, 6.1% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian or Alaskan. Not counted in these numbers are nonresident aliens, who comprise about 3% of the enrollment. Further, since 1993, the numbers of international students at community colleges have increased by over 46% (Woodard A77–78).

Besides these groups, students with documented disabilities are more likely to be older (average age 30) and enrolled in public two-year institutions (32% versus 25% in four-year institutions), according to the 1995–96 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (qtd. in *Postsecondary* 1). Within that cohort group, up to 9% of first-time, first-year college students have documented disabilities (Hebel A19), including physical, learning, and psychological disabilities, which often require special teaching strategies and accommodation. And this figure does not account for the many undiagnosed students who sometimes self-disclose traumas, abuse, or mental illness to their writing instructors in their journals.

It is incumbent upon professors to become knowledgeable about the many needs and issues facing the diverse pool of students who, in increasing numbers, are different from the predominantly white, middle-class eighteen-yearolds earlier dominating higher education. For example, many students from lower economic backgrounds, especially older students, have more responsibilities when pursuing higher education, with home, childcare, and transportation, and they often suffer from a lack of self-confidence and adequate emotional and academic support. These factors certainly can interfere with their success in college classes. In addition, those who are firstgeneration college students, including many ELL students, can place themselves in academic jeopardy because they may be unaware of college and social expectations. In fact, students across backgrounds who enter the "open door" are often underprepared academically. To prevent the "open door" from becoming a "revolving door," two-year college

teacher-scholars have to know their students at least as well as they know their field of study and be prepared to adapt instruction accordingly. Research has shown, for example, that students generally defined as "nontraditional" often respond more to self-directed learning projects with optional assignments and individual attention. Adult learners and women have been found to succeed in an instructional climate that is more collaborative, modular, and problem-centered (Cross).

Teachers of such diverse groups of students need to be able to employ multiple teaching strategies and materials that are genuinely inclusive, free of bias and stereotypes. They also need to be knowledgeable about international cultures and prepared for global classrooms of the future. In short, two-year college teacher-scholars of the twenty-first century must do more than understand diversity—they must value it.

Guiding Principles

In light of the changing student populations of twoyear colleges, two questions emerge: What are the characteristics of an effective community college English teacher-scholar? How can these characteristics be fostered and extended through academic preparation and continuing education?

Interviews with community college faculty nationwide who have been recognized by their peers as highly effective teacher-scholars have confirmed that effective community college English teachers exhibit the following characteristics:

- They are reflective teachers. They think about their own ways of learning so that they approach each class with a belief that others, too, can learn if teachers just offer them ways to do that.
 Before, during, and after their classes, these teachers examine what has been successful and what has not helped students to learn, and then they modify what they do in the next class.
- They center their classrooms on the student, not the teacher. In their classrooms, they involve the students in the learning process through a variety of approaches from group work to debates to group projects to individual presentations.
- They are flexible, not only in their teaching approaches, but also in the different roles they are asked to play—from teaching a developmental

- course to designing an honors curriculum. They can adapt their teaching styles to serve different types of learners in a variety of learning situations.
- Because they respect their students as learners, they treat students with consideration. They bring to their classrooms an understanding of diversity in all its manifestations—from racial and ethnic diversity to differences in gender and age to diversity in economic background to differences in learning style.
- They ground their lessons in research and theory, and they are able to teach theoretical concepts through practical applications. They challenge their students to think beyond the obvious, and they build assignments that will do that. They understand the necessity of providing students with clear guidelines and of following through with what they have promised in those guidelines. They collaborate with their colleagues on and off their campuses in developing curriculum as well as in sharing assignments and approaches to teaching.
- They continue to grow and learn themselves so that they can model for their students ways of reading and writing successfully. To provide new ways of learning, they familiarize themselves with technology, using it not only for their own research but also as a resource for teaching.
- In every way they are professionals—from employing professional expertise in their curricular choices and pedagogy to participating in professional organizations and conferences to reading and contributing to professional journals in the field. They participate in an ongoing dialogue with other teacher-scholars and reflect in their classroom teaching their awareness of new theories and practices.

In order to prepare such teachers for future roles in two-year colleges, we believe that graduate programs in English should not be limited to studying literature, although literature is essential to a well-balanced program. We therefore offer some suggestions of ways that graduate programs can enhance skills their students gain while in their programs and when they become faculty members in two-year colleges.

Formal Preparation

The undergraduate degree should be a major in English. But, because two-year college English faculty may teach a broad range of courses and a diverse student population, the undergraduate major should provide students with a foundation constructed from an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating areas of composition and rhetoric, linguistics and grammar, research methodologies, theories of writing and literature, and literatures of the Western and non-Western world. The undergraduate major should provide a broad base in these areas as well as in allied areas such as oral communication, history, and humanities. In addition, a student who hopes to teach in the community college would be wise to take courses in teaching reading and writing as well as in teaching the adult learner and understanding and responding to curricular issues.

Building upon this broad undergraduate degree, a future two-year college English teacher should seek graduate degree programs that include in-depth courses in the areas recommended above for undergraduate study, with particular emphasis at the graduate level on the teaching of writing. The candidate should become thoroughly familiar with theories undergirding writing and literature, with research methodologies, with classroom management practices (including how to build a syllabus and organize assignments), and with theories of learning, especially those that inform adult literacy. With the increasing student diversity projected for community colleges, emphasis on bilingual and bicultural education will be essential. Furthermore, coursework in educational psychology, history of the community college, and modern methods and materials for teaching in the two-year college will prove valuable. Additionally, skills need to be developed in using technology-mediated instruction, in developing strategies for teaching nonnative as well as diverse native speakers of English, and in assessing both writing and classroom instruction. Especially helpful are programs that offer students opportunities to gain both practical and theoretical knowledge in writing centers, service-learning, and distance learning, as well as programs that foster an understanding of programmatic and classroom research so that their

graduates will be able to assess and evaluate curriculum and contribute in significant ways to the scholarship of teaching. Future two-year college teachers should keep in mind the goal of becoming a teacher-scholar and should take courses in research, including ethnographic research and statistical analysis.

Because the two-year college teacher-scholar must adeptly address a broad range of curriculum that may include combinations of basic writing, professional and technical writing, creative writing, analytical reading and writing, introductions to and surveys of literature, specialized literatures (such as African American, Shakespeare, etc.), speech, humanities, ESL, and foreign languages, the academic preparation of the teacher-scholar should include extensive interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary study. Furthermore, because this knowledge must be reinforced by pedagogies that address the needs of highly diverse adult learners, provision must be made for the future teacherscholar to acquire some specialized skills. In most instances, the complex role of the two-year college professional can best be developed in a graduate program carefully designed to integrate theory and praxis and to provide graduates with both breadth and depth in the field. One of the best ways for students to learn about teaching in a community college environment is for them to complete teaching internships. Some master's and doctoral programs around the country have partnered with two-year colleges to provide internship opportunities for a semester, with two-year English faculty members serving as mentors.

Because *traditional* graduate programs heretofore privileged in the academy have not well served the needs of most two-year college teacher-scholars, prospective two-year college teachers of English are encouraged to lobby for change in institutions where "reformed" graduate programs are unavailable. Master's and doctoral degree-granting institutions are encouraged to seek collaborations with two-year colleges in designing such programs. And two-year colleges preparing to announce openings in English are advised to make clear in their advertisements not only a degree requirement or preference but also the *type* of educational experience and professional development that is important. In formulating such

statements, two-year colleges may wish to consider evidence of excellent teaching, balanced curriculum, and appropriate scholarship, which degree status alone may not measure. Schools should be aware that worthy candidates well-suited for two-year college teaching and scholarship may also be found among those who hold additional degrees in a related discipline (reading, foreign languages, humanities, etc.) and/or significant career experience in a field closely linked to the teaching of writing (journalism, technical writing, law, etc.). Pivotal, of course, to a college's success in attracting the best applicants is the time, space, and economic support the college is willing and able to provide for ongoing professional development.

A Framework for Ongoing Professional Development

Perhaps nowhere in postsecondary education is lifelong learning more critical than it is for teacher-scholars in the two-year college. In a setting in which academic preparation and workforce development go hand in hand, the two-year college English teacher must stay current and have a major voice in all vital discussions of undergraduate education and workplace literacies. Thus, ongoing academic and professional development must be an expectation of those who enter the field at this time. The following are guidelines for graduate programs committed to serving the needs of two-year college teachers of English and for two-year colleges committed to hiring teacher-scholars well trained to serve the needs of students:

- A two-year college teacher-scholar of English should show understanding and appreciation of a broad range of professional issues, such as politics in higher education, issues of language policy, the relationship between two-year and four-year colleges, and such institutional issues as student advising and credit-transfer systems.
- A two-year college teacher-scholar of English should be an active member of English professional organizations, conducting research to enhance his or her teaching, participating actively in academic conferences and publishing opportunities, and engaging in professional and community service to further the growth of the academy.

- As teaching is the main focus of two-year colleges, a teacher-scholar of English should be competent in the following:
 - Course development
 - Course evaluation
 - Teacher evaluation
 - Self-evaluation
 - Syllabus writing
 - Active learning strategies
 - Teaching with technology
 - Team-teaching and cross-disciplinary pedagogy
 - Assessment
 - Distance learning
- A two-year college teacher-scholar of English should develop an awareness of differences in learners and learning styles. Because two-year college students are often defined in the literature of the academy as "non-traditional," including "students with disabilities," two-year college English teacher-scholars should be able to develop, apply, evaluate, and modify teaching techniques to promote active learning for all.
- A two-year college teacher-scholar of English should develop an awareness of workforce expectations, especially soft skills (responsibility, team work, adaptability, information processing, and, of course, communication). With the emphasis at most two-year colleges on preparing students for employment, it is vital to learn about local businesses and industries and establish relationships with local business leaders. Since research suggests that employees with effective written and oral communication skills are desired by potential employers and earn more promotions than their less-skilled colleagues, English faculty have a pivotal role to play to support students' success.
- A two-year college teacher-scholar of English should have a teaching philosophy that can be clearly articulated and verified through a teaching portfolio or other exhibition of his or her practices.

Adjunct Qualifications

Qualifications for adjuncts should be the same as those expected for full-time faculty members. The minimum qualification for adjunct faculty teaching English should be an MA in English with evidence of background in composition theory and experience in the teaching of writing (such as experience with the National Writing Project). Formal mentoring of new adjunct faculty should be mandatory.

For adjunct faculty without recent coursework in composition theory, English departments should provide opportunities for teacher development within the institution or should offer partial tuition reimbursement. These opportunities include noncredit workshops during the year as well as formal coursework in composition theory, grammar, methods of assessment, reading, ESL, and distance learning.

English faculty should be engaged in ongoing professional development and will support the concept that such development might include additional formal education and inservice certification.

The above recommendations are not exhaustive: however, the highly competent professor of English in today's two-year college—like highly competent faculty at all levels of education—is a skilled educator, a knowledgeable scholar, and an active learner and contributor within the profession. What distinguishes the two-year college teacher-scholar is his or her dedication to open educational access, commitment to democratic participation and equity within higher education, and ability to help make these ideals a reality for highly diverse learners from eighteen to eighty and from backgrounds that cross conventional divides of race, ethnicity, class, and academic preparation. To maintain that position, this teacher-scholar should be ready to navigate all waters.

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