At a Mirror, Darkly: The Imagined Undergraduate Writers of Ten Novice Composition Instructors

While reading a series of undergraduate essay drafts, ten newly appointed graduate teaching assistants consistently projected their own anxieties about academic writing onto the authors of the papers, with two exceptions: the students were imagined neither to have the teachers’ compositional agency nor to feel their ambivalence about the academic writing conventions in question. Suggestions for repurposing the intellectual work of the TA-training practicum follow.

The composition teacher consciously and unconsciously initiates students into the culture’s discourse on language, which is always at one with action, emotion, and regulatory establishments. This teacher is always engaged in initiations to the textual fabric of society and thus will always be in a particular and difficult relation to the powers that overtly regulate that society.

—Susan Miller, Textual Carnivals

This study compares the reflections of ten new graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) on their conflicted relationship to academic writing with their responses to a series of papers from first-year composition students. To make useful sense of these teachers’ reflections and reactions to drafts of undergradu-

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420

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ate academic writing, and before detailing the data collection and findings, I need to briefly trace research in three areas: the singular demands of the conventions of academic writing and their associated genre systems; the role of writing and specifically of genre uptake in identity formation; and the curricular, institutional, and pedagogical complications of the so-called practicum course for new GTAs. The suggestion that these research threads are tightly tangled is here less important than the context they provide for the findings of this study and for our understanding of novice teachers’ initial acclimation to postgraduate study and teaching.

Dana Lundell and Richard Beach have illuminated the contradictions and “double binds” graduate students experience near the end of their education (i.e., in writing the dissertation); this study is focused near the beginning of many English studies students’ graduate careers: the GTA-training practicum. For it was during the fifteen weeks of their practicum that the GTAs I studied expressed considerable anxiety about—and frequent hostility toward—academic writing conventions and then projected disconcertingly reductive versions of these anxieties and writing practices onto students. As Min-Zhan Lu notes, those without opportunities to make “constructive use” of the “dissonance emerging from their actual discursive resources” are susceptible to the “profound cynicism and alienation toward both learning and writing” that have been recently documented among graduate students in English studies (“Essay” 37). Given what these ten GTAs suggest in their interviews (findings corroborated in recent work by Micciche), we have been largely oblivious to a considerable source of conflict and tension among novice teachers and have failed to create opportunities for them to acknowledge and address it. Such tensions simply resurface elsewhere.

As “the tool for disseminating knowledge regarding how to teach rhetoric and composition” and (absent widely available undergraduate majors in writing studies), the central site for recruiting new professionals to our field, the practicum can—and should—make more constructive use of the dissonance experienced by its student-teachers (Rice 269; emphasis added). Given that teaching assistants and so many of their peers are effectively the sole representatives of academic writing expertise to a sizable fraction of the first-year U.S. undergraduate population, the practicum should better equip its novice teachers to negotiate reflectively (and thereby to model in their own classrooms) a more productive relationship with dominant academic writing practices.

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**Academic Writing, the Practicum, and GTA Identity Formation**

Carol Berkenkotter, Thomas Huckin, and John Ackerman’s “Conventions, Conversations, and the Writer: Case Study of a Student in a Rhetoric Ph.D. Program” remains the dispositive study of postgraduate writing, closely tracking “Nate” during his uneasy acclimation to the social science writing conventions dominant at Carnegie Mellon in the early 1980s. Though the study has received much attention over the years, its claim that Nate’s “heavy use of first-person pronouns, hyperbole, and other features associated with expressive writing at the beginning of the year may be seen as acts of identity” warrants another look (39; emphasis added). For in a memorandum explaining his ambivalence about an assignment,1 Nate anticipates this claim: “I lost, if you will, my voice—or never had it from the start. . . . The same grave errors [sic] error plagues my writing as when my students write to please only the teacher. They write to become someone they really know nothing about” (23; emphasis added). Nate knows that the writing conventions he’s being pressured to adopt may do things for him; he also has mixed feelings about what those conventions will do to him (see esp. 18). For David Russell, this study announced a “central theme” for research in the decades ahead: “that newcomers to a genre/activity bring their cultural history to their writing,” and that “disciplinary enculturation may be less a gradual absorption or assimilation and more a messy struggle” (229).

If the field initially presumed that these struggles were characteristic only of “basic writers” and ESL undergraduates, it now recognizes that the adoption and use of academic writing conventions are often fraught experiences throughout the entire breadth and depth of postsecondary and postgraduate populations, and even among English studies postgraduates. As John Swales suggests, the descriptors “Broadly English Proficient” and “Narrowly English Proficient” would be an improvement over initialisms such as ESL (English as a Second Language) or NNSE (Non-Native Speaker of English) that fetishize native-speaker status. NEP, he observes, would as accurately describe “junior
researchers whose first language happens to be English” and among whom anxieties about academic writing are “as prevalent . . . as they are among international students” (Research 57; emphasis added).

It has also become clear that Nate’s hypothesis that his own and his students’ academic writing were “plagued” by anxieties about voice and identity was correct (see Burgess and Ivanić; Lea and Street; Lillis). In a recent review of research in applied linguistics, Patricia Duff characterizes academic discourse as not only a “social, cognitive, and rhetorical process” but also a “form of en-culturation, social practice, positioning, representation, and stance-taking,” concluding that it is “identity work” and “therefore a site of internal and interpersonal struggle . . . especially for newcomers” (170).

Such newcomers—in the persons of GTAs—taught nearly a quarter of the 44,173 sections of composition represented by the 643 writing programs Anne Gere surveyed in AY2008 (4). Assuming, as both Swales and Duff suggest, that Nate’s complicated relationship with academic writing is generalizable to most new postgraduates, the practicum (often the only source of professional training for all those GTAs) has an anxious and conflicted demographic with which to do an already-difficult job—difficulties compounded by the practicum’s ongoing struggle for “validation and legitimation” in departments indisposed to recognize pedagogy as intellectual work (Dobrin 2). While broadly true that “inexperienced teachers instruct much better than we have a right to expect or deserve” (Michel 186), the “challenge in training one of the most vulnerable and powerless populations in the university . . . to teach another vulnerable and powerless population” (McKinney and Chiseri-Strater 59) makes for a “highly contested arena” (Roen, Goggin, and Clary-Lemon 358) beset with “central problems” (Stygall 40). On the whole, GTA resistance to the practicum may be a given, but we have not located that resistance in the deep ambivalence these self- and institutionally designated teachers feel toward the academic writing conventions they have been charged to teach.

Perhaps the most important current researcher of the practicum confesses that the course is “both impossible and crucial to teach, in part because of who and where the students are when they enter our classes, in part because of where we need them or want them to go as teachers and as scholars” (Reid,
“Anxieties” 242; emphasis added). And here, I argue, is where these threads are mostly tightly snarled. The difficulties the practicum presents for its teacher, its student-teachers, its advocates and even those who contest the sophistication of its content or its worthiness for graduate curricula are not separable from our slowness to recognize the ubiquity of difficulties with academic writing acquisition and their entanglement with issues of identity. Even in E. Shelley Reid’s astute diagnosis, the question of student identity after matriculation is deferred—that is, why doesn’t the second half of the question parallel the first: “who do we want them to become as teachers and scholars?”

This revision may sound presumptuous, and certainly no one aspires to be like the smug indoctrinators who ran Nancy Welch’s teaching practicum to suit their “identity-changing, ideologically situated assumptions” (388). But this study suggests that we may need to move past skittishness on the question of teacher identity. After all, considerable research already demonstrates the influence of GTAs’ cultural histories on the space of the practicum (e.g., P. S. Sullivan; McLeod; Ebest; Dufflemeyer; Stancliff and Goggin; Stenberg and Lee; Belanger and Gruber). Yet little research assumes that the practicum should be engaged in the production of identities, even though, as Sidney Dobrin explains:

> part of the power of practica comes from the fact that the identity of those who take the practicum is an oddly contested space: on the one hand, they are cast as students learning a skill/trade/pedagogy or taking an introduction to a discipline, and on the other hand, they are teachers passing on a likeness of those same skills/trades/pedagogies and disciplinary knowledges to students of their own. (28; see also Yancey, “Professionalization” 72)

GTAs can only experience the practicum as a conundrum: the quality of the writing samples in their applications helped secure their teaching positions, often irrespective of any teaching experience, or any professional work experience whatever (Murray 302). Yet graduate students often endure crises of identity in their coursework (Pemberton; Reynolds; Taylor and Holberg; Yoder), often brought on by the seminar paper required in most of their courses. As Micciche confirms, the seminar paper is what Swales would call an “occluded genre,” that is, an institutionally vital genre in which there is little to no direct instruction (“Occluded” 18), and faculty claims that graduate students don’t or shouldn’t need instruction in academic writing are well documented (Bloom 104–6; Ray 146–51; P. A. Sullivan 293–6; Pennington 152–3).

For their new departments to remand them to a course that focuses on “pedagogy” assumes that these novice teachers need instruction in instruction,
rather than in the subject matter that “accidents of institutional history” insist that they already know (Phelps, “Becoming” 313). GTAs thus find their writing confidence and competence undermined in one set of classrooms and faculty offices while being positioned (and positioning themselves) as writing experts in another set of classrooms and in their own offices. As the institutional formations of the departments that rely on novice GTAs to teach first-year composition are unlikely to change soon, the pressing current question is thus whether this complicated relationship to academic writing affects GTAs’ uptake of student papers. If not, the issue is probably best addressed in critical-writing workshops like the one Micciche proposes (483–93). As this study discovered, however, the conundrum the GTAs experienced resurfaced in striking ways as they imagined the undergraduate writers of the papers I asked them to assess and projected versions of their own academic writing histories onto the students.

Hypothesis, Participants, and Methods
Masters’ candidates at State U. can subsidize their study of creative writing, technical writing, composition and pedagogy, poetics, or gender and literature with a teaching assistantship. I reasoned that these different courses of study would attract students with different genre profiles (experiences, affiliations, interests, and dispositions in particular reading and writing practices). These profiles could be reconstructed through close interviews with the GTAs about their reading and writing practices to better see the “cultural history” each student “bring[s] to their writing” (Russell 229). If each also responded to an identical set of ENG 101 papers, certain literacy profiles might be seen to correspond with tendencies to characterize student work in certain ways.

I tested this possibility during a brief window of insider-outsider status in the first semester of a new faculty appointment at State U. (that is, before I had much of a chance to acquire a personal or research-interest reputation). After securing permission from the WPA and the IRB (institutional review board) for three interviews, I offered $30 compensation to the fourteen students enrolled in the practicum that fall. The data discussed below are from ten of the twelve students who volunteered. All ten informants (identified throughout by pseudonyms of their choosing) were white native speakers of English.
### Table 1. Informant Casebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GTA</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Blake</th>
<th>Catherine</th>
<th>Emily</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Ginger</th>
<th>Maria</th>
<th>Delilah</th>
<th>Rex</th>
<th>Vivian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program of study</td>
<td>Creative writing (n=5)</td>
<td>Literature (n=2)</td>
<td>Composition (n=3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at time of study</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years since BA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching experience</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Solo</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Solo</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Solo</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring experience</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took English 101</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year in program</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of self pre-practicum</td>
<td>&quot;fraud&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;in over my head&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;imposter&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;imposter&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;fledgling&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;fraud&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;student, rather than a teacher&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;imposter&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;novice&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;novice&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of self post-practicum</td>
<td>&quot;real teacher&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;qualified&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;teacher&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;more knowledgeable imposter&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;apprentice&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;writer&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;student and teacher&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;graduate student/teacher&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;more prepared teacher&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All 10 were interviewed at the sixth, eleventh, and sixteenth weeks of the term (except Vivian’s final interview, which took place after the winter recess). With only that exception, each set of interviews took place within a seventy-two-hour interval to help ensure that the teachers were in mostly the same place with respect to the practicum and 101 assignment sequences. The interviews were “semi-structured” (Prior 187); that is, all interviewees were asked the
same questions in the same order (see interview protocols at Appendix B), but always with one or more “probe” questions to encourage informants to elaborate on their initial responses. Interview 1 collected information on the GTAs’ academic literacy histories, practices, and current sense of the demands of postgraduate writing, and interview 2 collected information on GTAs’ identification with, investment in, and affiliations with particular genres. Interview 3 was a “stimulated elicitation” interview focusing on the GTAs’ term projects for the practicum (Prior 189).

After each interview, GTAs read a copy of an anonymous ENG 101 paper written for the same assignment sequence they were currently teaching (the WPA provided papers from her section). After I confirmed that the paper was not from one of my own 101 students, they were invited to take as much time as they wished to write comments on the student paper; the interview was then resumed with the question “How might you characterize the work this writer is doing in this essay?” The teachers’ written comments were not retained or coded, since this was not a “real” commenting scenario; rather, the activity of writing responses facilitated the transition to a new phase of the interview. Transcripts of the thirty responses were uploaded to NVivo 9 qualitative research software along with the ten consolidated interview transcripts. Prior to coding, the department’s program assistant replaced every instance of an informant’s name with one of forty random numbers. When coding was complete, but prior to running any coding queries, pseudonyms were restored to the 88,558-word interview corpus.

Papers from the GTAs’ own classes would have more closely approximated a genuine pedagogical scenario, but cross-informant comparisons would have been difficult with thirty different papers. It was also important to remove the temptation for the GTAs to represent themselves as “good teachers” by selecting only the best student papers to bring. In other words, and especially with the end-of-term portfolio assessment looming, papers that were written neither by my students nor theirs helped ensure a more disinterested response—one in which the GTAs had no vested stake in presenting themselves or the student in any particular way.

Finally, even though these teachers proved to be gazing at a mirror darkly, I do not suggest that ideal, or simply better experienced, teachers see students as it were face to face. We likely overestimate how well we actually know our students; moreover, the situation in which these teachers were responding is not all that uncommon: assessment of “diagnostic” essays and external-rater
review for exit portfolio assessment are widespread and involve the work of students we do not know at all. Finally, if part of working with novice teachers means “provid[ing] an environment in which tacit theories . . . are drawn out, articulated, explicated, questioned, put into dialogue with complementary theories, challenged, and even put into conflict with competing theories” (P. S. Sullivan W47), complicating the images on which those tacit theories are based must be part of that work (see Phelps, “Images”).

Findings: Discourses “Monstrous and Unfathomable”

The hypothesis that GTAs’ uptake of undergraduate writing would correspond meaningfully with their genre profile was not proven. The usual shortcomings of novice composition instructors’ responses to student papers (e.g., dwelling on a text’s shortcomings rather than its strengths; assuming that academic writing conventions are ahistorical or nonnegotiable, etc.) were certainly present but did not correspond with any particular genre repertoire. Appendix A provides a table of node-coverage for genre affiliations and some observations about patterns, both to help address concerns about GTAs affiliating with programs of study other than composition as teachers of academic writing (see Huntley 297; Michel 192; Fischer 201–5), as well as to record a benchmark by which other studies of novice teachers’ genre repertoires may be compared.

The important finding lay elsewhere, although again, Nate anticipates it. When he describes himself as “butting heads finally with ACADEMIC WRIT-ING—and it is monstrous and unfathomable,” his co-researchers suggest that he is becoming aware that “that he had not cracked the code” (Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman 21; original emphasis). They might also have linked this remark to his identity of a “teacher-writer-researcher who has a history of discounting if not ridiculing universities” (21). As Table 2 indicates, Nate’s counterparts at State U. twenty years later were also ambivalent about the academic writing conventions they were reproducing in their coursework and being asked to teach in 101.

Nate’s counterparts at State U. twenty years later were also ambivalent about the academic writing conventions they were reproducing in their coursework and being asked to teach in 101.
few of the questions in the first two interviews specifically invited these topics. The table presents percentage of total transcript coverage of coding rather than word counts, since some informants were more talkative than others.

Each GTA reported some combination of difficulties with, ambivalence about the conventions of, a feeling of lack of preparation for, inferiority relative to peers, or explicit cynicism about academic writing, irrespective of confidence or even pleasure in academic writing expressed elsewhere (or of literacy profile or program affiliation; see Appendix A). When cross-referenced to the information collected for Table 1 above, we can also see the following:

1. The experience of taking a first-year composition course did not alleviate tension about academic writing (or teaching it). In fact, the five GTAs who took a course like ENG 101 seem to feel less prepared for academic writing. Their reported teaching confidence was lower than for those who did not take 101, with higher ambivalence about teaching (perhaps because of witnessing a teacher doing it or resisting or resenting the assignments as students themselves).

Table 2. Representations of Academic Writing Experiences (in Percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program of study</th>
<th>Anna 4929</th>
<th>Blake 4483</th>
<th>Catherine 4473</th>
<th>Emily 4147</th>
<th>Leon 4300</th>
<th>Ginger 2947</th>
<th>Maria 3653</th>
<th>Delilah 5288</th>
<th>Rex 2526</th>
<th>Vivian 4969</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence/Pleasure in</td>
<td>4.9 — 11.7 1.9 1</td>
<td>4.5 8.2 6 6.8 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidence as a teacher of</td>
<td>6.3 4.6 — — — — — — —</td>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness of composing process</td>
<td>2.2 2.7 — — — — 3.4 3.2 8.9 2.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unprepared for</td>
<td>— 7.6 5.4 4.5 4.1 5.9 2.4 8 — 2.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other grad students are better at</td>
<td>2 3.9 — 1.5 7 1.4 5.1 — — 1.6</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with</td>
<td>3.4 3.2 5.3 4.5 8 19.7 11 4 21 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence about</td>
<td>3.2 8.9 5.6 7.7 11.8 3.8 3.2 — 5 9.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynicism about</td>
<td>— — 24.1 8.6 5 3 2.2 3.3 10.7 7.3</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence as a teacher of</td>
<td>3.5 — 1.2 12.6 4.6 14.6 — 1 — 1.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
2. Prior teaching experience was distributed as evenly as possible: three with solo experience, three in a support role, and four with no experience. It appears to negatively correspond with confidence or pleasure in academic writing. (Note that those who had served in a “support” role in teaching were much more sanguine about teaching than those who had had sole responsibility for a classroom.)

3. While four GTAs’ prior tutoring experience corresponds with a heightened self-awareness as writers, stronger feelings of readiness for academic writing, and greater confidence as teachers, it seems to have diminished their readiness to claim pleasure in academic writing and—paradoxically—exacerbated their sense of its difficulty (perhaps because of exposure to fellow students’ perceptions of themselves as poor writers or their criticisms of teachers and their writing assignments).

**Describing Writing, Projecting Writers**

In order to formulate an answer to my question about the essays, the GTAs had to solve the linguistic problem of needing “to identify a creative source” of the paper (Haswell and Tedesco Haswell 422). One workaround, as Haswell and Tedesco Haswell note, is to attribute agency to the paper itself: “the rest of the paper isn’t developed” (Delilah); “you expect from reading the introduction that the paper’s going to talk about [the subject] and the paper doesn’t really talk about that too much” (Anna); “the seed of it is there; it’s just not followed through” (Rex) and so on. While this finesse the problem of critiquing a student the GTAs don’t know, assigning agency to the paper precludes the possibility of conceptualizing the student as agent, since the focus is always on an unrealized future revision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Coding Intersections: Idealized Texts and Imagined Writers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of words coded at both nodes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coding for:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagined writer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Put another way, the GTAs simply could not grammatically construct the student writer as agent in the same sentence that invoked an ideal text—the lines of coding never overlap. No construction of a future text, in other words, could also be coded as a construction of a writer making choices about that text, only as a demonstration of what that writer had failed to do. For example, Ginger suggested at one point that “I can see three potential points that they’re trying to make, but none of them are fully articulated or brought together in a way that would be significant.”

The GTAs’ other solution to the problem of articulating a response to my question about the undergraduates’ papers was to characterize the writer who composed it. Replicating a well-documented phenomenon in holistic assessment research (see Barritt, Stock, and Clark 320–21; Hamp-Lyons; F. Sullivan; see esp. Faigley), these GTAs spent nearly 20 percent of their total transcribed word count describing the undergraduates they imagined producing the papers. More importantly, as Table 3 also indicates, it was difficult for them to construct an undergraduate as deliberately, agentively, enacting some motive for producing the paper. It was not impossible; at the handful of lines in the transcripts where coding for “imagined writer” and “writer as agent” intersect, for example, we find Rex imagining a writer who thinks “here’s every point in an argument that fits in with our discussion that I could put in here.” But writers imagined as passively unable, incompetent, aimless, or—crucially—in need of the GTAs’ direction were far more numerous. Such critiques conventionally began with a qualified acknowledgment of something the student had accomplished (Smith 261–63; Batt 218–19). Table 4 provides an example from each GTA.

Elizabeth Rankin observes that teachers are drawn to (or repelled by) particular students in whom they see some version of themselves (2–3, 28–33), and Kathleen Blake Yancey has shown that as novice writing-center tutors engage in “inventing practice, in the course of which the tutors invent themselves,” the “set of stages or perspectives” they experience first involves “identifying with their students” (“Seeing” 192, 200). And it was clear that GTAs who believed, for example, that they struggled with organization or focus in their own academic writing attributed the same problem to the imagined students—albeit in a curiously flattened way. Flattened, that is, in that while the GTAs usually imagined that the undergraduates had experienced similar difficulties, no
undergraduate was imagined to have an idiosyncratic genre profile, to have made personal compromises in his or her use of academic writing conventions, to have questioned his or her preparation for postsecondary education relative to his or her peers, or to have experienced ambivalence or cynicism about academic writing conventions. True, even senior genre researchers tend to oversimplify “by assuming blocks of text to be mono-functional and ignoring writers’ complex purposes and private intentions” (Hyland 116). But even if it’s not surprising that novice teachers would characterize students’ academic writing primarily in terms of what they failed to do, it is surprising that a group of teachers who talked at length about their own ambivalence about academic writing practices only minutes before invariably effaced such struggles from the students they constructed.

This finding illustrates again the power of genre uptake to normalize relations between readers/writers and texts by near-instantaneous reinscription of subject relations. Uptakes, writes Anne Freadman, have “long, ramified, intertextual, and intergeneric memories” (40), and readers and writers take up social relations along with the genres they produce and consume (Kill; Giltrow).

Table 4. Abilities and Shortcomings of Ten Representative Imagined Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Abilities</th>
<th>Shortcomings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>“This writer has some decent points and they have some good ideas”</td>
<td>they struggle a lot with organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake</td>
<td>has a way with words</td>
<td>needs more focus and a framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>can really come up with a lot of interesting things</td>
<td>doesn’t really know how to focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>“This writer has some really interesting ideas”</td>
<td>he seems to be making very easy choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>is getting there</td>
<td>[doesn’t] have a very solid idea about where they want to go right now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>has a pretty good grasp of the material</td>
<td>now they just need to do something with it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>seems like he has the skills</td>
<td>just needs to focus the paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>really do[es] answer the question</td>
<td>it just seems they’re answering it with a lot of cookie-cutter answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rex</td>
<td>is setting up a comparison</td>
<td>they don’t follow through.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivian</td>
<td>has a clear control of language</td>
<td>not an argument.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Abilities and Shortcomings of Ten Representative Imagined Students

Anna: “This writer has some decent points and they have some good ideas but they struggle a lot with organization.”
Blake: has a way with words needs more focus and a framework.
Catherine: can really come up with a lot of interesting things doesn’t really know how to focus.
Emily: “This writer has some really interesting ideas” he seems to be making very easy choices.
Leon: is getting there [doesn’t] have a very solid idea about where they want to go right now.
Ginger: has a pretty good grasp of the material now they just need to do something with it.
Maria: seems like he has the skills just needs to focus the paper.
Delilah: really do[es] answer the question it just seems they’re answering it with a lot of cookie-cutter answers.
Rex: is setting up a comparison they don’t follow through.
Vivian: has a clear control of language not an argument.”
As Robert Schwegler reminds us, “to take on a role is to be constituted as a subject by it” (217); Kimberly Emmons has shown how those roles are already available in genres (e.g., the self-administered questionnaires about symptoms of depression placed by pharmaceutical companies in women's magazines help prepare readers for the embodied subjectivity of depressed-but-treatable-person). “The problem of uptake,” Emmons writes, “is the problem of what is taken on when an individual takes up particular genres” (138).

The uptake of a student paper appears to have triggered so powerful a “memory” of the role of teacher that it effectively erased the immediacy of what these GTAs just said about themselves. If research on holistic scoring suggests that “successful” reviewers (i.e., those with high rates of inter-rater reliability) tend to have comparatively broad ranges of writing (and assessment) experiences that seem to enable them to internalize other ways of evaluating prose (Pula and Huot; Wolfe), this study suggests an analogue. Like novice scorers’ susceptibility to construct-irrelevant variables, novice teachers’ shallow history of student-teacher interactions may not furnish them with viable alternatives to the immediately available precedent of their own experience.

The similarities became obvious after running coding queries to extract the thirty “imagined students” from the thirty responses to the three 101 papers and to extract each GTA’s descriptions of his or her reading and writing practices. While Figure 1 is obviously “the product of difficult decisions about where to draw lines and how to correlate different beliefs and feelings” (Phelps, “Images” 63), I suggest that the GTAs’ projections of their imagined students

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**Figure 1. Categories of imagined students.**
can be usefully categorized in three ways. Both subcategories are inclusive of the underlying trait(s) (as their porous borders are intended to suggest). While space permits discussion of only tiny excerpts from each transcript, the category-descriptions below include insights from each GTA.\textsuperscript{11}

**Projection**

*Projected* elements of each GTA’s literacy practices or anxieties were ubiquitous. For example, Blake attributes his new struggles with academic writing to a misspent undergraduate career “hellbent on being [laughs] being like a maverick or whatever” and not “doing the work so much.” Blake worries that his colleagues’ assigned readings “are all highlighted and there’s way more notes than what I put,” and he confesses:

I feel like sometimes in class I get a little bit lost . . . I have to go home and figure out what everyone’s been talking about . . . I see a lot of things; I see a lot of threads and connections, but I kinda wish someways that I had more framework to help me understand a little bit more and to see things a different way.

Although he explains that he doesn’t “have a structure for academic writing,” evaluating his students’ writing “makes it easier to have a framework to evaluate my own academic writing.” Overall, he finds that “the immersion here [at State U.] is really good . . . always being around people who are reading, and you know, writing I think is really helpful cause it helps me focus.”

What’s good for Blake is what’s good for students. Even if “it’s always the smart ones that ignore the comments,” Blake’s writers have “potential,” but their paper “just needs a little bit more focus” or “could stand to make an outline and have some focus . . . it feels like it they’re just throwing everything against the wall to see what sticks.” They just need “more focus and . . . a framework.”

Like Blake, Ginger worries that “everyone else is somehow more prepared than I am.” While relatively confident as a reader, academic writing has been “terrifying.”

I may know these things or realize these things, but learning to understand that what I’ve read has value, or meaning, that it may in fact be important, and how to allow those things to come across in [a] way that [pause] I don’t know, sounds smart.

“In my mind,” Ginger explains, “I know what a good paper sounds like.” But she felt that her practicum project was marred wherever “the diction sort of drops off”—places where she felt she was no longer “speaking *academese* you know
... whatever enormous word,” but where she could neither quite “show where [pause] my own thinking or trying to think through what I read is coming out.” Ginger’s imagined undergraduates are likewise strong at thinking—just not “academese.” There’s “hope for” the author of paper 1 “because they’re drawing parallels; they are trying to pull out examples, which is good; they have strong language; they seem to be confident.” Paper 2 “is not terrible; the author is making some attempt to . . . try at an argument” and “there’s potential for all these things to be connected.” And if Ginger could only “talk to [the author of paper 3] and ask them what they thought their thesis was and what they were trying to convey,” then perhaps they could “try to figure out how best to do that.”

Also like Blake, Delilah finds herself in her coursework “spending so much time trying to figure out what’s on the surface level . . . that I have trouble getting then to the in-depth of ‘ok, why are they saying it and why are they saying it this way.’” Delilah regrets not a rebellious youth but rather her prior training by professors who “were more interested in what my analysis of a particular story was than in our going outside and into literary criticism.” Delilah believes this has cost her: “if you’re not familiar with the current you know research . . . then you’re not going to get to the level of the reading that you need to be . . . to get to the level of a seminar paper.” She compensates with her skills at “proofreading and revision and making something sound [laughs] like it’s intelligent”; she can even “say a bunch of nothing and make it sound eloquent,” and her projected students sound familiar. They “don’t have enough of an understanding of the readings for the class to be able to adequately fulfill the assignment as they thought” and try instead “to make their ideas sound [pause] well thought out and like they’ve considered a lot of things.” “You can tell,” she observes, “that the student isn’t quite understanding exactly” the nominal subject of the essay, “and I think that lack of understanding is leading to trying to make sense of it through other things they’ve read.”

Not all projections were grounded in writing anxiety. As Table 2 illustrates, Rex is the most preoccupied by his difficulties with academic writing. Yet it’s not his difficulties he projects so much as his practices. Rex resists “planning phases” because he claims not to know “what my point or argument or conclusion is until I’ve made it.” Planning his academic writing makes it “unsatisfactory or stale” (although he will “go through the motions” to accommodate more process-oriented instructors). If the first and second papers that Rex read appear clearly to be first drafts because “all the ideas are thrown down on paper” and “kind of a freewrite almost where you just start writing and it’s
just pouring out,” then the writer of the third paper “isn’t comfortable with,
or unsure how to proceed” and needs “a sounding board, to kind of get those
ideas out and find a direction they want to take.”

At the furthest remove from Rex, Anna was the most secure and least
conflicted academic writer. A self-described “very careful reader” with a well-
developed writing process for academic writing projects (“I spend a lot of time
annotating a text . . . sometimes I take notes on a separate sheet of paper to
really think my way through”), Anna’s projected students lack her practices:
they “think through the writing process as they type” or “just kind of write
from . . whatever they’re thinking, you know, as they’re sitting in front of the
computer typing.” The third writer “struggles with direction” and “by the end
of the paragraph, they’ve gone in a completely different direction than where
they originally intended to go” and must “get distracted a lot.”

Exception
In constructing student writers from the cloth of their own academic-literacy
practices, five GTAs found ways to differentiate themselves from projected
students whose academic literacy prac-
tices (naturally) resembled their own. As
Marguerite Helmers demonstrates, com-
position teachers have always organized
their pedagogies to remedy perceived
“lacks” in their students; as she also dem-
strates, these perceptions have said
more about particular zeitgeists than they did of students (i.e., depending on the
era, students have lacked polish, lacked the “right” reading list, lacked “voice,”
lacked authenticity, lacked liberation from capitalist hegemony, lacked cultural
sensitivity, and so on). The teachers described here excepted themselves from
their projected students by identifying a lack of “purpose” in those students’
theses—a “real” motive for the composition.

Because Emily’s BA was in a different field, she felt as though she’d “missed
an entire year somewhere,” repeatedly describing problems “outlining and
thinking of a bigger picture.” Emily can “grope in [her] academic vocabulary
and throw it together into a legitimate-sounding summary,” and some of her
practicum project was “rearranging other people’s words into something that
sounds [pause] as if I gave the article more attention than I actually did.” She
could even distinguish between a section of her project in which she was “just
sort of putting together a generic paragraph that that sounded legitimate because I had the right vocabulary and topic sentence and supporting ideas,” and a section that “sounds legitimate because it is legitimate; it’s just not, it’s just not you know, it’s the interest I was faking, not the legitimacy.”

Like Emily herself, all her imagined writers struggle to organize their ideas. Yet she denies them her strategy of appearing to give “the article more attention that I actually did”; they simply lack initiative: one writer is “an intelligent student with some good ideas who just really doesn’t want to work at it”; another “obviously has an opinion . . . but he seems to be making very easy choices”; if “he really were invested in the argument, he would be very specific” but “just wanted to write the paper.”

As an undergraduate, Leon explained that “I was not a very studious student; I wasn’t very dedicated to this whole college thing by any means.” A State U. graduate himself, Leon’s chance exemption from 101 gave him good reason to be cynical, for the topic of the impromptu diagnostic

was a subject that I that I knew a little bit about and I could I guess . . . BS about [laughs] pretty well, you know? So I just got really lucky I guess that first day. I already had an ability to, to sound semi-, you know, academic in my writing? Just cause I’d always attempted to write that way because it sounded good?

Even today, when Leon is “writing a formal paper I find myself kind of going over the thesaurus in my head. I think there’s always a better word to use, a word that sounds, I don’t know, more academic I guess, more impressive.” Leon’s creative writing comes “from an emotional level,” on which he feels a “need to write about this topic,” and he extends this prerequisite of sincerity to his academic writing. For example, he designed his introduction to his final project “to reassure my audience, I think, that there was some kind of motive you know, other than trying to get a grade . . . trying to prove to my audience that I’m [pause] sincere?” Leon excepts himself from similarly situated students by assuming that they “didn’t do the reading or didn’t find it engaging enough to want to use that reading” or aren’t “clear on what he or she is, is arguing yet” and is “trying to sound better with a longer, longer sentence” or is disingenuously “being dramatic to sell the point without having to commit to any facts.”

Catherine felt she coasted through undergrad, thanks to a rigorous college-prep high school that also seems to have made her something of a dissembler in academic writing. While most GTAs expressed some ambivalence about academic writing (and eight of the ten expressed some degree of open cynicism
about its conventions), she had nearly two thousand words to say about her confidence in academic writing and her strategies for psyching out her teachers. There is only space for one of the more striking strategies, a rationale for taking a shortcut on a part of the final practicum project in which she’d lost interest:

teachers like to be able to point out something that they knew that you didn’t know. And [pause] I know this is like completely shady that [laughs] I do this when I’m feeling lazy or that I don’t wanna, you know, invest so much time in an assignment, that I might play dumb, a little bit just to get out of having to really do the work.

When asked if this meant that she had purposely left this part of her project simplistic, she explained:

if you’re almost there, then you can get away with it. I still got an A on this . . . it’s not wrong enough to be really wrong, it’s just wrong enough so that the teacher goes “Oh, well, I’m helping you here; I can help you.” And so, you still get the points, but you don’t have to do all of the work.

Even a self-knowledge as developed as Catherine’s (and she was often quite critical of herself for such stratagems) does not extend to the writers she imagines. Instead, they are the kind of writer who “probably . . . latches onto a lot of ideas quickly and can come up with a lot of interesting things but doesn’t really know how to focus”; or is “very concerned about what they’re supposed to be saying” but “unsure of how to treat the material they’re using”; or who (though she says she doesn’t “suppose to get inside their head”) “understands the smaller fragments of information but they haven’t come up with some sort of unifying thing that brings it all together.” Catherine doesn’t, in other words, imagine that these undergraduates might be providing her with the room she needs to say, “Oh, I can help you here.”

**Effacement**

As projected, all thirty undergraduates have starkly diminished agency in their composing practices, and most lack personal motives apart from grades. But most curiously, any traces of the ambivalence, the cynicism, or even the complexity of feeling about academic writing to which their teachers freely attest are utterly effaced from the projected undergraduates.
that her language was “plain” and “wasn’t up to par as it should be in academic writing discourse.” Even though she recalls feeling “fine in terms of being able to analyze texts . . . but for some reason my language I felt [pause] was something I was really uncomfortable about.” In fact, it “made me almost feel that I didn’t have anything to say.” Now in her second year, “reading more academic texts” and “closely examining my own peers’ work,” she feels “more comfortable working with academic language and incorporating it into my own work.” Yet Maria remains deeply conflicted over the relationship between that language and her work:

> analysis matters so much more than being able to write a paper and actually get that [pause] you know, have the correct form of the paper and have things organized well than the actual language you use? Although that language kind of suggests that you are part of an academic discourse and that you should be listened to . . . But I feel like it’s one of the last things someone should actually worry about.

Maria is comparatively enthusiastic about her projected undergraduates (they have “interesting thoughts,” “interesting ideas,” and “amazing ideas”). Yet despite her commitment to privileging ideas over their conventional representations, she assumes that the former are the latter: “This student has many interesting ideas, but my big issue, I think the first thing I would bring up with this student is a lot of his points aren’t really proving his thesis.” But what, other than its conventional location at the end of the first paragraph, makes her so sure which interesting idea is the thesis? Despite Maria’s mixed feelings about “the correct form,” the student’s needs for it are unequivocal:

> It’s really not enough that he gives one sentence [to explain a quotation], and I have a lot of students that do that, and it’s one thing that I do not . . . really like and I emphasize that analyses of quotes should be longer than the quote itself typically or the same length.

This was also true of“rules” that were not so easily described. Initially appreciative of one writer’s idea of “switch[ing] to using a lot of first person and trying to relate to the reader,” Maria began to feel that “it just didn’t fit . . . it could be effective, but he needs to change how he’s really [pause] I wasn’t quite sure to be honest [pause] a paper like this I probably would have to set aside and come back to.” Maria’s uptake of the student text effaces her own ambivalence about academic writing conventions as well as the possibility that the student might share these feelings.

This is worrisome. As described above, new GTAs have few ways to make
useful sense of the dissonance arising from their peculiar experience of, as Nate says, “writing to become someone they really know nothing about” while being required to require their students to do the same (Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman 23). The assumption that students have uncomplicated needs for manifest instruction is perhaps the way they table the contradiction and set aside the possibility that their students are also “acutely aware that it is not always in and to their interest to use English in the repetitive and predictable ways they feel they are expected to by those in positions to make and break their opportunities in school or at paid work” (Lu, “Essay” 37).

Vivian was obviously in good company in not feeling “totally prepared for the level of discourse.” In class, “I end up not talking a lot even though I’m thinking.” But also “in the back of my head I’m always thinking ‘well did I misunderstand the book’ . . . you know, sort of looking like a fool.” Like Delilah, Vivian was beginning to reassess her undergraduate experience:

by the end of my college career my professors thought I was a great writer and I thought that was surprising. Even today I wonder whether or not [laughs] my writing is actually good or whether I just know to make it sound really good.

Even though “at no point in my college education did somebody teach me the form of academic argument,” Vivian feels that she can’t now “ask these things without [laughs] being like ‘I don’t know what I’m doing.’” Meanwhile, a professor’s sharp critique of her attempt to get away from “stuffy language” and write in a “more conversational tone” left her unable to “get away from writing in such really, really heavy academic jargon.”

Still unable to resolve her worry whether her ideas “just sound like they belong,” Vivian singled out a paragraph in her practicum project to indicate her

distaste for language that’s too academic. It, it’s just there’s no other way to say some things and I guess this paragraph might be an example of that, so whether or not that’s indicative of how I would like to be perceived, I had to say something and so I said it in the only language that was really available to me I guess.

On reflection, she added: “obviously, I’ve made it clear that I just don’t like to write this way but reading it back, it sounds good [laughs] you know? In a weird way, I’m proud of it. But I’m also [pause] skeptical . . . that I actually needed to use that kind of language to say something.”

As Janet Giltrow observes in “Legends of the Center: System, Self, and Linguistic Consciousness,” the conventional standard is “advanced not by dictionaries and grammars but by the provisions of modernity: institutions, roles,
disciplines, techniques, policies, publicity” (364). Despite Vivian’s conflicted relationship with a kind of writing that is at once distasteful, impossible to authenticate, the only available option, and a disguise she can’t risk dropping—and yet is also a source of mixed pleasure and pride—she advances the standard in the only role that presents itself after uptake of a student paper. If her imagined undergraduates are like her in “trying to sort of adopt this academic tone . . . that they think will make them sound good,” that role requires Vivian to immediately efface any further similarities. They “just need a little bit more practice with the format of an academic argument”; their writing “comes off more as an editorial piece than as an academic argument”; or “maybe he or she is not that familiar with the format of the academic essay that we teach in 101.”

Implications for the Practicum and Afterward

Vivian and her colleagues, positioned by State U. as experts on center standards about which they have neither much explicit knowledge nor unambiguous affiliation, universalized (and thus normalized) their own relationship with that standard for their students. This move also consolidated their authority as teachers by refusing those students the very particular struggles, conflicts, and tensions that illustrate that academic writing is less a “standard” and more a messy agglomeration of sociohistorical and material conventions.

The assumption that this messiness should be foregrounded with GTAs, rather than ignored or denied, guides Judith Goleman’s interest in “the look and sound of novice literacy instructors negotiating positions for themselves among competing models of subjectivity” (87; for a similar argument for basic writing pedagogy, see Lu, “Conflict”). In response to Goleman’s call for guidance for practicum instructors who are trying to help these teachers “reflect on their own evolving relationship to a new model of knowledge” (88), I suggest that certain deroutinizing practices (see Giddens 220) might have the effect of changing teachers’ commonsense, tacit, conventional theories and the performed identities through which such theories are enacted. For practices appropriate to a course uniquely situated at the nexus of programmatic, faculty, graduate student, and undergraduate texts, we might start with E. Shelley Reid’s latest work, which questions whether those who invoke the commonplace that “writing teachers should be writers” have considered whether it matters “what new teachers write?”

Believing it does, Reid argues for writing assignments that are “overtly, deliberately difficult, exploratory, and critically reflective,” explaining that such experiences allow GTAs to “experience productive, guided difficulty in writing.”
up to and including “metacognitive writing about these difficult, exploratory assignments” so as to address “the difficulty and the exploratory nature of the writing, and linking writing to teaching practices” (“Teaching” W198). The practicum should do such work. But it might go still further by deroutinizing GTAs’ uptakes of the genres that constitute the subjectivities they are revising. For if genres like the seminar paper and the marginal comment—texts by and through which new graduate students and new teachers inscribe themselves in these two roles—are not themselves disturbed, then the practicum may, like the revisions to the student guide described by Christina Ross, offer only “a discursive layer of redescription that refers to but does not alter very much the terms of a latent discourse that organizes practical action” (304).

A practicum that only assigns academic writing to GTAs may miss opportunities for them to better understand their own ambivalence about the academic writing conventions they embody in 101. We might strategize ways to bring the work that students are doing (and the selves that are produced by such work) in the practicum, in 101, and in their other academic workspaces into productive tension.

Is it not possible, after all, that Nate’s perspicuity was facilitated by the experience of reflecting with Berkenkotter and Huckin on his acclimation to and struggles with academic writing practices—as they were happening to him (see Prendergast 48)? We might instead imagine a practicum that moves what Russell calls “the tools people use to construct their individual and collective subjectivities and objects/motives, particularly the operationalized (routinized) rhetorical tools-in-use we have called genres” (546) to a central role. Genres like response papers, seminar papers, rosters, syllabi, notes on office doors, assignments, in-class exercises, and comments on student papers (as well as talk at the seminar table and in offices) help produce the identities of novice graduate students/novice composition teachers by operationalizing the routines and subject positions through which these students and teachers become learners and teachers.

The practicum might then provide opportunities for GTAs to deroutinize the practices such genres make commonsensical, transparent, or otherwise beneath notice. For example, GTAs might be asked to:

- Strategize ways to write seminar papers “as a TA” or to write comments on student texts “as a grad student,” negotiating which uptakes seem to

We might strategize ways to bring the work that students are doing (and the selves that are produced by such work) in the practicum, in 101, and in their other academic workspaces into productive tension.
transfer between systems (and why) and which need to be resisted (and how).

• Examine the interdependent systems of documents that scaffold the seemingly autonomous figure of “the teacher” so as to learn how teachers are constrained and enabled by training, curricular requirements, historical traditions, assumptions about students, teaching, and language, and so on.

• Close-read their responses to the kinds of writing assignments Reid suggests to develop a genealogy of the syntactical, rhetorical, and intertextual moves through which they try to maintain their identity as “English major/good writer,” even in the face of assignments “deliberately designed to challenge them as writers: posing for them serious difficulties, both cognitive and affective, in discovering and communicating what they mean” (“Teaching” W201).

• Consider how texts produced by classmates or the practicum instructor seem inflected by transfer from some other system (the creative writing workshop, the literature or professional writing seminar, prior “English” teachers, commonplaces about literacy crises, critical thinking, metaphors of clarity, focus, coherence, etc.).

• Experiment with other changes in material or linguistic conditions in order to hinder routinized uptakes (e.g., the reformatting of student papers without margins, a class commitment to prefacing evaluative language with “I think,” a class moratorium on the use of the word writing as an unmodified intransitive, etc.).

• Engage in institutional critique (Porter et al.). For example, GTAs might investigate the local institutional affordances/obstacles for changing job titles like “student teacher, graduate assistant, graduate teaching assistant, and so on,” labels that “carry historical and institutional baggage” for faculty, administrators, students, stakeholders, and themselves (Dobrin 28; see also Schell 164–67). They might also investigate the genre system used to predict their ability to teach composition, award their support, and enroll them in the practicum.

To suggest that teachers of writing should be asked to think through the cognitive (and ethical and emotional) demands of the writing conventions with which they already have a certain measure of technical facility is not to dimin-
ish what they have already accomplished. Instead, to push past skittishness as forcefully and as provocatively as possible—it is a way of asking what sorts of learners and teachers they will become, and whether these are the sorts of learners and teachers their graduate programs, their writing programs, their students—and they themselves—will most need them to be.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the great Pat Burns for sustaining the space for this research project and for innumerable essential conversations along the way. Thanks to Heidi Estrem, Kathi Yancey, and an anonymous CCC reviewer for their very helpful feedback. I’m obliged to the University of Maine for a Summer Faculty Research Grant and indebted beyond measure to the exquisite Elizabeth Neiman for support, sharp peer review, and essential guidance here, as in all things.

Appendix A: GTAs’ Genre Profiles and Initial Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node-Coverage (collections of references to a particular subject matter), Percentage of Total Individual Transcript Word Count; Interviews 1 and 2</th>
<th>Anna (4929)</th>
<th>Blake (4483)</th>
<th>Catherine (4473)</th>
<th>Emily (4147)</th>
<th>Leon (4300)</th>
<th>Ginger (2947)</th>
<th>Maria (3653)</th>
<th>Delilah (5288)</th>
<th>Rex (2526)</th>
<th>Vivian (4969)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genre fiction, nonfiction, blogs, etc.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical texts (prompts, comments, etc.)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research in composition</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Research in literature</td>
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<td>1.9</td>
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<td>3.9</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical/transactional genres</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| As writer of: | | | | | | | | | | |
| Genre fiction, nonfiction, blogs, etc. | 3 | 2.3 | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1.7 |
| Literary genres | 6 | 6.4 | 6.7 | 3.1 | 11 | - | - | - | 3.1 | - |
| Pedagogical texts (prompts, comments, etc.) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2.3 |
| Research in composition | - | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1.7 | - |
| Research in literature | 3.3 | 1.8 | 4.7 | 1 | - | 2.2 | 1.5 | - | 4.9 | 2.3 |
| Technical/transactional genres | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
The creative writers have a hypertrophied sense of themselves as writers (in the case of Catherine, Emily, and Blake, at the exclusion of nearly any other kind of writing). The literature students seem reluctant to characterize themselves as readers and writers of anything but literature or research about literature. That composition studies at State U., as nationwide, relies on postmatriculation “converts” accounts for the traces of Rex’s former affiliation with creative writing and Vivian’s with literature.

The GTAs’ strong tendency to describe themselves as readers of literature and writers of research on literature reflects their investment in their new status as postgraduate “English” students (and the program’s fifteen-credit literature core). Yet of the seven noncomposition GTAs, only Anna sees herself in any substantive way as a reader of composition theory. Only one composition GTA characterizes himself as a writer of research in composition, and that only trivially more than the one creative writer and the one literature student who thought to mention it.

Oddly, given their enrollment in the practicum, that they were teaching a section of ENG 101 and were enrolled in at least one other seminar for at least ten weeks at this point, their reported self-awareness as either readers or writers of pedagogical texts like assignments or even comments was extremely low.

GTAs said little about “extracurricular” reading and writing (other than Catherine’s enthusiasm for crime fiction and Delilah’s description of the occasional “chick-lit novel in my purse”). None mentioned diaries, histories, journals, newspapers, private sector documents like memos or progress reports, or other non-argumentative nonfiction.

Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Protocols

Interview 1 – Week 6
1. Could you talk a little bit about the reading and writing practices you brought to the grad program at State U.?
2. Now I’d like you to talk about the reading and writing practices that brought you to State U.
3. I’d like to ask you about the congruencies and disjunctures that you’ve experienced between the reading and writing practices you brought to State U. (or brought you to State U.) and those you’ve experienced while here.

Interview 2 – Week 11
1. With what forms, types, or kinds of texts would you say you most identify?
2. In what forms, types, or kinds of texts would you say you are most invested?
3. With what forms, types, or kinds of texts would you say you are most affiliated, and by whom or what? (That is, we can affiliate, and we can also be affiliated.)

Interview 3 – Week 16
1. In the broadest possible terms, how would you characterize this project?
2. And how would you characterize your work in this project?
3. Please show me a passage in this project that you feel is indicative of reading and writing practices that are distinctly yours.

4. Please show me a passage in this project that you feel is distinctly not yours.

5. If it’s not yours, then whose is it?

6. Please show me a passage in this project in which you feel you were making an accommodation (i.e., a compromise or a concession).

7. Please show me a passage (as short as a phrase, as long as a paragraph or two) in this project that represents for you the most complicated nexus of affiliations. Here’s how you might be able to tell: was there a place in the text that you fussed with for a long time, never could get quite right, perhaps you still feel isn’t right, that you felt tugged in multiple directions while working on?

Notes

1. This memorandum is also one of a handful of places in the article that suggests en passant that Nate is a teacher as well as a graduate student at the time of the study (see also the excerpt from his self-report, 18; the excerpt from his Mishler critique, 21; and the researchers’ discussion of his bibliographical essay, 32).

2. If we assume a conservative course cap of twenty-two students for those sections, that’s nearly a quarter-million undergraduates—again, counting only the institutions Gere surveyed.

3. As Dobrin documents, this struggle has gone on since the early twentieth century, during which one-credit (and sometimes noncredit), expediency-oriented, nuts-and-bolts workshops were gradually—if unevenly—replaced with theory-based seminars (see also Latterell 10, 18–20; Wilhoit 18). Yet this move has not undone these courses’ typically subordinate position in graduate studies. Like the historical positioning of 101 as “women’s work” (see Miller; Crowley; Tuell) or more specifically “housework” (Grego and Thompson 65–68), scholarship on the practicum often sounds a similar chord of fatigue: endless work devalued and nameless because it is never completely finished nor even precisely delimited.

4. Yet the word identity appears in none of the fifteen syllabi Composition Studies published in its 1995 “Forum on Doctoral Pedagogy” either. At that time, analogies between the practicum and first-year composition were also popular, perhaps because students in neither classroom enroll voluntarily (e.g., both “negotiate their way through a paradoxical combination of imitation and misreading, insecurity and bravado” [Farris 100-111; see also Recchio; Hesse]).

5. This appears to be well-understood in research on primary and secondary educators; for a succinct review of the relevant literature, see Phipps and Borg 381.
6. One student did not file the consent form on time and could not participate; the other was so taciturn that her transcripts were essentially unusable.

7. This information was collected via email after interviewing was completed in order to avoid inflecting subjects’ responses.

8. The three papers were by native speakers; each was roughly three and a half pages—neither particularly short nor long for first drafts in the assignment sequence the practicum was using. The WPA selected the papers from her section of 101: the first for its author’s uneven execution of an innovative argument; the second as a good example of the difficulties most students were having in transitioning to arguments involving different kinds of sources; the third as an interesting text by a student who was interested in the subject matter and enjoyed writing elegantly, but at the expense of overall cohesion.

9. As Elaine Chin points out, details of interview strategies, procedures, and conditions are essential to a full understanding of the results of qualitative research (250); she also argues that we must acknowledge the messiness both of interviewing and interpreting the results, a messiness effaced by the more clinical term coding (252; see Broad 226–30 for an example of an exceptionally thorough account of the formation of coding nodes). Conventional wisdom suggests at least two initial unsuccessful coding schemes (Smagorinsky xi); the data discussed here only emerged on the fifth attempt to create nodes. Four initial hypothetico-deductive approaches (Willis 201) to the thirty interviews failed to produce usable information on the GTAs’ tendency to construct genre conventions as static or dynamic (attempt 1); their tropes of “depth,” “range,” and “level” for talking about academic writing (attempt 2); their theories about pedagogy (attempt 3); or their characterizations of undergraduates, the practicum, fellow graduate students, and self-characterizations as students and teachers (attempt 4). While it cannot be said that these issues have no relationship with their genre profiles or conceptualizations of student writing, no correspondences could be established in this data.

10. GTAs affiliated with creative writing did not, in other words, operate with the assumption that “writing is the product of the author’s creativity”; literature students did not rely on a genre discourse of “text-types”; composition and pedagogy students weren’t any more likely to make use of a “social practices” discourse, and so on. (These are three “discourses of writing and learning to write” [Ivanič 224–40].)

11. I had to omit richly coded nodes on, for example, socioeconomic class and critical writing (see Peckham), on the epistemic qualities of some of their experiences with the final practicum project, and their motives for graduate study. Such exclusions are necessary in reporting qualitative research, obviously, but are particularly painful here, since—for obvious reasons—I have no wish to flatten these remarkable people in representing them here.
Works Cited


Michel, Anthony J. “From Theory to Theorizing: Rethinking the Graduate Introduction to Composition Course.” Dobrin 183–199. Print.

449


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