

When the study of English literature began to be incorporated into the undergraduate curriculum, it was almost universally understood to entail writing instruction. Charged in 1913 by Cambridge University “to promote, so far as may be in his power, the study in the University of the subject of English Literature,” for example, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch proposed that “here in Cambridge we *practise writing*: that we practise it not only for our own improvement, but to make, or at least try to make, appropriate, perspicuous, accurate, persuasive writing a recognisable hall-mark of anything turned out by our English School.” Similarly, Strunk and White’s 1918 classic, *Elements of Style*, begins by affirming this relationship between literature and writing: “This book is intended for use in English courses in which the practice of composition is combined with the study of literature.”

The articles in this issue indicate a significant, ongoing shift in thinking about the place of writing in the undergraduate curriculum. The proposition that writing is, as Jonathan Monroe observes in the lead article, “central to the work of higher education,” not to mention the world of work, is achieving increasingly broad acceptance. The kinds of innovations described here comprise much more than a response to the widespread perception that too many college graduates lack basic composition skills. As Monroe writes, “rather than a remedial or ancillary concern, writing is integral to the learning students will engage and pursue from the first semester of their first year through their senior years and beyond.” Basic composition skills ought thus to be the foundation, not the outcome, of college-level writing programs. No longer regarded as a skill to be acquired in a single course but as a mode of learning, writing is a key competency to be addressed and practiced recurrently across the educational experience and at successively more challenging levels. Accordingly, writing can no longer be the responsibility of English faculty alone. Responsibility for writing must be truly pervasive.

AAC&U’s recent report, *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College*, hails the emergence of a “New Academy” based on an engaged and practical liberal education and fostered by intentional practice at all institutional levels. As this issue of *Peer Review* attests, writing can be an effective fulcrum for many of the intentional practices that characterize the New Academy: integrating general education and the major, introducing

students to more interdisciplinary approaches, assessing student learning, requiring culminating experiences.

Realizing this vision of the New Academy requires more than alignment within college, however; it also requires alignment across educational sectors. Seventy-five percent of high school graduates now go on to postsecondary education. Yet fewer than 25 percent of twelfth-graders scored at or above the “proficient” achievement level on the 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress Writing Assessment (and only 36 percent scored at or above “proficient” on the Reading Assessment). These data strongly suggest that, in the absence of school-college articulation, even the best designed curriculum and the most integrated college experience may still fail to provide students with an education of lasting value.

The recommendation, made in the *Greater Expectations* report, that students have the experience of doing a significant project in the senior year of high school offers a potential starting point for constructing purposeful pathways for students from high school to college and through college to the world of work. Virtually every student takes a writing-intensive course of some kind in the first year of college—and these are generally small classes. So, if campuses would require a writing-intensive project in the senior year of high school as a condition of preparation (one chapter or early draft to be submitted with the application; the final project to be sent with the final high school transcript on acceptance to college), then writing instructors could start with that project as baseline evidence of students’ best work to-date. This would create a bridge to college; reinforce the notion of connected and cumulative learning; and be far better as writing for placement and further intellectual development than what we do now.

While the curricular architecture is changing, and multiple pathways are possible within and between educational sectors, the goals remain the same—namely, to paraphrase Quiller-Couch, to make the practice of good writing the constant auxiliary of liberal education and, in turn, to make appropriate, perspicuous, accurate, persuasive writing a recognizable hallmark of anything turned out by the New Academy.—DAVID TRITELLI

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