Giberson, Greg A., and Thomas A. Moriarity, eds. *What We Are Becoming: Developments in Undergraduate Writing Majors*. Utah State UP, 2010.

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Having spent the last twelve years in two different universities and in three different writing departments independent of English/Literature, I approached *What We Are Becoming* with excitement and lots of practical experience in developing, maintaining, and revising undergraduate majors in writing. As I read, I thought several times about how beneficial this collection would have been when I first encountered the idea of a writing major as an assistant professor, fresh from my doctoral program, in a recently-formed independent Writing and Linguistics Department that had no major or minor and very few advanced writing courses. Although I was eager, I wasn't prepared for the work ahead. Like many people in Rhetoric and Composition, all of my degrees were in English, and all had been housed in rather traditional English departments. I had never taken an undergraduate writing or rhetoric course beyond required composition. Although my graduate work had prepared me as a scholar and composition teacher, it didn't provide opportunities to think about developing a whole curriculum–not simply a course or two–focused on writing and rhetoric. And I certainly wasn't prepared with the bureaucratic knowledge and political skills needed to guide a major program through an institution's governance structure.

Luckily, the situation has changed. *What We Are Becoming* joins a growing body of literature, including the *Composition Studies* 2007 Special Issue on the Writing Major, as well as books (e.g., Shamoon, et al.; O'Neill, Crow and Burton) and articles (e.g., Balzhiser and McLeod; Phelps and Ackerman), on the writing major and the position of rhetoric, composition and writing studies in the university. Although *What We Are Becoming* focuses on the writing major, its contents also address other related

issues, such as the relationship between Rhetoric and Composition and English Studies, the formation of independent writing and rhetoric departments and programs, and the connection between the universal first-year composition requirement and the vertical curriculum.

The book is divided into two sections: the first is entitled Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Issues for Writing Majors and includes eight chapters; the second is Curricula, Location, and Directions of Writing Majors and has seven chapters. There is also a brief Foreword by Janice Lauer and an Afterword by Susan McLeod. While the section titles seem to make a clear distinction, as a reader I found that the division didn't always make sense to me because just about every chapter seemed to include issues related to disciplinarity, curricula and location. For example, Section I of chapter five, "'Between the idea and the reality . . . falls the Shadow': The Promise and Peril of a Small College Writing Major," as well as chapter six, "The Writing Major as a Shared Commitment," discusses the development of the writing major at Mount Union College. Both chapters address issues related to the location of the major in a small liberal arts English department while the second of the two goes into great detail about the curricula of both the English and Writing majors. Likewise, in Section II, the chapter by Dominic Delli Carpini and Michael Zerbe on the writing major and advanced composition course goes into detail about the curriculum of the course. But in doing so, the authors address the rhetorical canon and other broader disciplinary issues. While I sympathize with the editors' need to give shape to the collection and make a more coherent text, I didn't find the divisions necessary or helpful. Readers, I imagine, will not necessarily sit down and read the text from start to finish as I did: some readers will be drawn to this text because of specific situations in their local contexts, such as initiating or revising a writing major, for example, or because of particular institutional situations, such as needing to justify a new major. Readers such as these will be best served by finding the chapters that are most appropriate for them by reading the editors'

Introduction. (There is no index, which was disappointing to me as I tend to use them frequently in spite of their limitations when I am hunting for a particular issue or reference. Likewise, there is no cumulative bibliography but rather each chapter has its own, which is convenient when reading but disappointing when trying to get a sense of the range of resources cited.) So, although divided into sections, the majority of the book's fifteen chapters report on the formation and curriculum of various writing majors, some housed in English departments and some in other departments, such as Rowan University's Department of Writing Arts. The contents also include two chapters that do not present, or grow out of, one particular program or course, but rather address the idea of an undergraduate writing major more generally.

Moriarty and Giberson's chapter, "Civic Rhetoric and the Undergraduate Major in Rhetoric and Writing," is one of the two that are not grounded in a particular program, curriculum, or course. Rather, the authors address the idea of the major, cautioning us to "be careful" so that we "build undergraduate degree programs that will last . . . [and] that will grow and evolve as the years go by and not fade away as the times and academic fashions change" (204). To do this, they argue for programs to focus on civic rhetoric, instead of academic and professional writing and rhetoric, which are the dominant arguments used to support undergraduate majors in writing. I found this chapter to be one of the most interesting for me given my current professional situation. I was drawn back to it as I considered some of the issues facing my department as we are in the process of reshaping our curriculum.

The final chapter of the book also looks beyond a single department or major and attempts to create a heuristic for evaluating and categorizing writing majors and courses. In this chapter, Lee Campbell and Debra Jacobs identify different features of programs–more liberal arts versus more technical and more general versus more specific. They map courses along this two-way continuum to demonstrate how programs and courses

can be described. For example, an advanced course in creative nonfiction is on the extreme liberal side of the continuum but in the middle of the general to specific continuum, while a professional writing class on usability studies would fall on the technical side and very close to the specific end of the continuum. In constructing the heuristic, Campbell and Jacobs examined existing undergraduate writing majors to decide on the types of courses and the range of offerings, which was also useful for me to see. While one might disagree on the range of courses covered or the placement of a particular course on their map, their chapter can be useful in helping look at a particular program. In fact, I couldn't help but attempt to map our current curriculum to see where we would fit (more liberal with a range of courses from general to specific) and to see what other possibilities exist for courses or emphases.

Excepting these two chapters, the rest of the book tends to focus on a specific course or program. Most of these chapters are also authored by individuals invested one way or another in the particular program under discussion (most, in fact, are still connected to the institution or program). In other words, in general, the chapters present an insider's point of view, which is useful for understanding some of the nuances of the program's curriculum not available in public documents, some of the debates and rationales that influenced a program's development, and some of the limitations or constraints that prevent the major from expanding. However, the insider point of view can also influence how a story is told about some of the shortcomings of a particular course or program. For example, in reading "Restorying Disciplinary Relationships: The Development of an Undergraduate Writing Concentration," I couldn't help but wonder how this narrative would be told if it were written by the authors' non-composition and rhetoric colleagues, or if it had been collaboratively written with such colleagues. I do not doubt the accuracy of their presentation, but it seems to me that they are only able to present the development of the concentration from their own disciplinary perspective.

Although grounded in particular contexts and perspectives, the individual chapters do make more general arguments about the discipline or curriculum. For example, in the first chapter, "A Major in Flexibility," the authors argue in favor of "a post-disciplinary writing major in rhetoric and composition" at research intensive universities" (13). However, after making this argument, authors Rebecca de Wind Mattingly and Patricia Harkin shift to a "witness narrative" about one of the author's experiences teaching a special section of a the first-year course that was a hybrid speech and writing course. This section of the chapter very clearly situates their perspective in the particular institution, although the larger argument seems to be attempting to transcend location. I actually found this chapter to be one of the least useful, perhaps because of my own institutional context, although I also thought it highlights some of the problems in the discipline such as staffing of composition courses with contingent labor and our identification with the universal first-year requirement. In "Not Just Another Pretty Classroom Genre: The Uses of Creative Nonfiction in the Writing Major," Celeste Martin argues that creative nonfiction "serves our writing majors, and should be considered a legitimate form of professional writing" (227). In serving students, Martin claims that creative nonfiction supports learning about the craft of writing, that it provides students who choose to write in personal genres a way to write that is audience-oriented, that it teaches conventions of the "literary genre," and that it provides a way for double majors (and I would add minors) to communicate to non-specialists about their work. I didn't need to be convinced by Martin of the value of creative nonfiction in the curriculum of a writing major. However, I was thinking about how creative writing faculty may not agree that composition and rhetoric has the authority to claim creative nonfiction or even associate it with our major. In some programs (such as the one at DePaul University) creative writing remains in the English Department and rhetoric and composition is housed in a separate program. The relationship between these different faculty members and departments can vary, depending on personal and institutional

histories, so that there may be more (or less) opportunity to include creative nonfiction in the major.

The issue of the relationship of creative nonfiction to composition is not new (as Martin acknowledges, citing the appropriate composition voices in the debate) just as the relationship between digital or electronic literacy and composition is not a new discussion in the field. Although there seems to be little disciplinary disagreement about whether multimedia composing belongs in an undergraduate writing and rhetoric major, in my experience there are still some debates depending on one's particular situation. The potential conflict among departments and disciplines, however, isn't one of the issues that Joddy Murray tackles in his chapter, "Composing Multiliteracies and Image: Multimodal Writing Majors for a Creative Economy." Drawing on *The Rise of the Creative Class: Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, by Richard Florida, as well as other theorists and his own teaching experiences, Murray argues that students need to learn how to compose with both discursive and non-discursive images if they are to be prepared for the creative economy. In fact, Murray argues that "in order for students to become multiliterate *composers*–we need to develop courses within the major that put image at the center of the 'spiral' so students can gain experiences in the classroom that leads [*sic*] to rhetorical proficiency for any textual mode" (emphasis in the original, 219). While I found Murray's argument intriguing–and one that kept spinning around in my mind as I thought about rationales for courses and our major's learning aims–I couldn't help but wonder what other image-composers–visual artists, graphic designers, filmmakers, and others across the campus–would say if we made this kind of argument in reference to our curriculum, not to mention the resistance I would meet (and am already meeting) with some department colleagues over efforts to infuse more digital composing in our curriculum. Besides these discussions, one of my own reservations about recentering the field through image is that there are not many people in composition and rhetoric who are adequately prepared to teach this kind of

composing. Creating–and understanding–visual compositions in terms of image, design, color, and other features, is complex, requiring the appropriate education and not just a passing familiarity with theories of art and design. As Murray admits, "[F]ew compositionists view what they are doing when they write as composing images" (223). If this is the case, then how would we recenter the discipline on this notion? Or, is Murray moving toward an interdisciplinary articulation of an undergraduate major in writing and rhetoric?

Although coming earlier in the collection than Murray's chapter, David Beard, in his chapter "Dancing with Our Siblings: The Unlikely Case for a Rhetoric Major," offers one way of responding to my questions about issues of visual design and creative nonfiction. Beard points out that the subject of rhetoric has already been fragmented at the undergraduate level. Creating an undergraduate major that has rhetoric at its core will depend on particular institutional configurations and history. Although Beard is explicitly referring to rhetoric, his reasoning seems to transfer easily to Murray's argument about image or Martin's about creative nonfiction. Engaging in these debates theoretically is one thing, but enacting them in a particular institution is much more complicated, as Beard illustrates. He provides an historical examination of rhetoric in the undergraduate curriculum, showing how particular institutional contexts influence a major or department. He concludes by proposing that rhetoric scholars need to "work at the intersections and must develop curricula that respects the local conditions at each institution" (132). His advice seems to respond to my reservations about Murray's argument for centering our work on *image*. In other words, the recentering and definition of the undergraduate major are not going to happen in the pages of a book or journal but in the particular, lived experiences of teachers, students, and scholars at particular institutions.

This perspective concurs with my own experiences in the different departments and institutions in which I have worked. Arguments about disciplines and scholarship did not convince

administrators and peers when proposing new departments, programs, or majors. What seemed to matter the most, was the particulars–the faculty, resources, competing programs, and other political realities of working in a large bureaucracy with limited resources–as well as the personal relationships and reputations of the people involved. My experience is not unique as many of the chapters in *What We Are Becoming* affirm. (The same situation seems to hold true for the formation of independent writing departments and programs as detailed in *Field of Dreams* and other publications.) For instance, Wallis Anderson's chapter on Oakland University's writing program and writing and rhetoric major makes this point. In explaining how the program expanded its curriculum, Anderson says that the "rhetoric program won the turf war over upper-division coursework largely due to the political astuteness of the Department of Rhetoric, Communication, and Journalism chair" and her placement on the college curriculum committee (71). She concludes that if the department had not been represented on the curriculum committee, then "we would surely not have been permitted to create upper-division classes at that time" (71). The influence of the particular situation also is apparent in Chapter 8, "Writing Program Development and Disciplinary Integrity: What's Rhetoric Got to Do with It?" In this chapter, Lori Baker and Teresa Henning attempt to "give the reader a better understanding of the ways a rhetorical perspective and local practices interact in the development of a new major . . . " (152). While they admit their context is unique, they claim that "the framing of the major from a rhetorical perspective and the application of our core principles are possible by any campus" (160). I tend to agree that any program can use a rhetorical framework to approach the task of building a major, but when it comes to actually defining the curriculum, Beard's argument about how rhetoric is parsed at a particular institution is a significant factor in how it is defined.

A quick review of the various institutions and programs covered in *What We Are Becoming* verifies Beard's point–each defines the undergraduate writing major in its own way; even the

name varies depending on the context. The dependence on context is most apparent by the two programs–Rowan University's Writing Arts Major and Mount Union College's Writing Major–that are the topics of two chapters, each written by different writers with different angles. This coverage allows the reader to get a fuller understanding of the programs. For Rowan University, Jennifer Courtney, Deb Martin, and Diane Penrod describe the initial development of the major and the independent department using "revision" as a central trope for the narrative. As they explain, the department and major have continued to change and develop over the last fifteen years in response to changing circumstances. This chapter is followed by one that focuses on a specific course, Introduction to Writing Arts, that is required for all of Rowan's Writing Arts majors. In this chapter, Sanford Tweedie, Jennifer Courtney and William I. Wolff explain why the course (one of the revisions that occurred over the life of the major) is required and how it is organized around the particular program that Rowan offers. This chapter made me consider how an introductory course in my department would be structured and what it might cover. Clearly, ours would be different than the one at Rowan, but still, it was useful to see how their course functioned and how it defined the major.

What We Are Becoming offers something for all different types of readers. For those just starting the process of developing a major in writing, rhetoric and/or composition, the collection provides ideas about how to frame a major and identifies some of the concerns or issues that may need to be addressed as well as some ways of tackling practical and theoretical obstacles. For readers like me, who have lived through these same experiences, there are moments of identification as well as realizations of missed opportunities. I have to admit that some of the detailed nuances of department curriculum, such as Rodney Dick's discussion of the development of the writing major at Mount Union College, were hard to follow because I am not in an English department and am not interested in these kinds of discussions. However, for many readers, this particular chapter may be especially relevant and the

grids and tables quite useful. In any case, no matter the reader's current institutional home, for all of us in the field of rhetoric and composition/writing studies, there are issues of disciplinary identity to consider as we attempt to define an undergraduate major in rhetoric and composition.

After all, the undergraduate major is a significant movement in the field and a contributing factor to how the field is defined. As I was working on this review, the September 2010 issue of *College Composition and Communication* arrived in my mailbox. A special issue on the Future of Rhetoric and Composition, several of the articles spoke directly to the contents in Giberson and Moriarty's collection, including Douglas Hesse's "The Place of Creative Writing in Composition Studies" and Stephen Fraiberg's "Composition 2.0: Toward a Multilingual and Multimodal Framework." However, I saw the link between this collection and the future of rhetoric and composition most directly with "Making the Case for Disciplinarity in Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Studies: The Visibility Project" by Louise Wetherbee Phelps and John H. Ackerman. The "data-drive aim" of the Visibility Project, according to *CCC* editor Kathleen Blake Yancey, "is to gain national attention and recognition for rhetoric and composition by collecting and representing the data showing who we are and what we do" (9). The focus of the project is on how "fields of instruction and research are identified, coded, and represented statistically and descriptively for the purposes of data collection, reports, records, comparison, analysis, and assessment of higher education" (Phelps and Ackerman, 184). Phelps and Ackerman explain that although the effort of the Visibility Project started with a focus on doctoral programs, they learned that it needed to consider much more than that as they collected data to argue for recognition of composition and rhetoric/writing studies as a distinct field of study. Giberson and Moriarty's volume, then, helps make the undergraduate major more visible, contributing to the documentation of the discipline as well as to our ongoing conversation about disciplinary identity.

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