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The Rhetorical Situations of College Writing Assessment: Exigence, Constraints, and Audience in the Education Policy Discourse of the P-16 Reform Movement

John Steeves Dunn Jr.
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

THE RHETORICAL SITUATIONS OF COLLEGE WRITING ASSESSMENT: EXIGENCE, CONSTRAINTS, AND AUDIENCE IN THE EDUCATION POLICY DISCOURSE OF THE P-16 REFORM MOVEMENT

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John Steeves Dunn, Jr.

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
The School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

John Steeves Dunn, Jr.

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August, 17, 2007	Signature on File
_____	_____
	Michael M. Williamson Professor of English, Advisor
August, 17, 2007	Signature on File
_____	_____
	Brian Huot Professor of English (Kent State University)
August, 17, 2007	Signature on File
_____	_____
	Jean Nienkamp Associate Professor of English

ACCEPTED

	Signature on File
_____	_____
Michele S. Schwietz, Ph.D. Assistant Dean for Research The School of Graduate Studies and Research	

Title: The Rhetorical Situations of College Writing Assessment: Exigence, Constraints, and Audience in the Education Policy Discourse of the P-16 Reform Movement

Author: John Steeves Dunn, Jr.

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Michael M. Williamson

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Brian Huot

Dr. Jean Nienkamp

While literacy educators in the field of composition studies have traditionally approached the issue of writing assessment from a classroom perspective that emphasized assessment's role in the processes of teaching and learning, recent trends in American public policy have made data gathered from educational assessment the basis for arguments of education policy reform. In particular, during the past 15 years, a loose affiliation of advocacy groups known as the P-16 movement has sought to use educational assessment data in arguments promoting greater coordination and collaboration between all levels of American public education, from pre-school ("P") through college graduation (grade "16"). Based on these circumstances, this study raises two main research questions: 1) What happens to educational assessment data when it enters the public sphere of education policy reform debates? and 2) How can literacy educators in the field of composition studies constructively participate in contemporary education policy reform debates around issues of pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment?

In response to these questions, this study makes two main arguments. Addressing the first question, the study argues that when educational assessment data circulates in the public sphere, it enters what I term, drawing upon the theories of rhetorician Lloyd Bitzer (1968; 1980), the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment. Rather than neutral,

objective descriptions of the learning process, assessment data now functions as a means of persuasion through which advocacy groups can define problems, or exigencies, with current educational practices that then justify their specific reform proposals. Following Bitzer's model, the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment also include the audiences of policymakers and administrators who have the political and institutional authority to enact large-scale policy reform within American higher education. Finally, this model considers the rhetorical constraints that guide how such audiences interpret assessment data and deliberate on matters of education policy reform.

In response to the second question, this study argues that literacy educators should use the proposed model as a heuristic through which to plan discourse that strategically participates in education policy debates such as those of P-16 reform.

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most to my Dad in his final days. I know he'd be pleased to see that dream has now been realized.

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CHAPTER I

THE RHETORICAL SITUATIONS OF COLLEGE WRITING ASSESSMENT: AN OVERVIEW

> "[R]hetoric as a discipline is justified philosophically insofar as it provides principles, concepts, and procedures by which we [can] effect valuable changes in reality." – Lloyd Bitzer (1968: p. 14)

Introduction: The Rhetorical Exigence of This Study

This study arises from concerns I have developed over a number of years of experience within contemporary higher education, first as a composition instructor and writing program administrator, then as a graduate student studying writing assessment theory and practice, and more recently as an observer of American public policy toward higher education and current trends in education policy reform. At the outset I want to provide a brief overview of the project, beginning with the specific problem that motivates my work, what rhetorician Lloyd Bitzer (1968; 1980) has called the *exigence* in the rhetorical situation which prompts my writing of this dissertation. In the early spring of 2006 the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2006) dedicated an entire issue of its supplement, *School & College,* to the education policy reform initiative known as the *P-16 movement*. With a style that unmistakably suggests an exigence, the *Chronicle*'s Peter Schmidt wrote:

> If college administrators listen beyond their institution's walls, they can hear crowds of students and parents voicing frustration over colleges' higher remediation rates and low graduation rates, visionaries urging the creation of entirely new education systems that would closely link schools and colleges, and

> political leaders issuing an ultimatum: Tend to the education of the masses, or the next thing you will hear will be battering rams. (2006: p. B4)

My ongoing study of the P-16 movement, its policy proposals, and the rhetorical discourse through which its advocates promote higher education reform initiatives leads me to agree with the general characterization Schmidt offered in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, even as I am skeptical of the histrionic tone of that characterization.

Adding to the sense of exigence that I feel around the issue of P-16 reform has been the general reaction toward matters of education policy within the fields of English and specifically composition studies. I note two main responses. First, as I describe in Chapter Two of this study, many literacy educators remain unaware of, and uninterested in, issues such as the P-16 movement and education policy generally. The dangers posed by such a professional stance Charles Schuster (2001) has expressed from the vantage point of both an English professor and an academic administrator: "What I am most concerned about is that major changes are looming, and there is little evidence that college faculty are prepared for them. English departments in particular are often resistant to change, and they remain so at their own peril" (p. 89). Of the three major trends Schuster went on to discuss in his essay, two of them—involving the issues of recruitment and student retention—fall directly within the concerns of the P-16 movement. The source of this resistance and the general ignorance about education policy reform among college literacy educators I explain in Chapter Two of this study through the notion of professional identity and a general orientation that literacy educators in the field of composition studies often take toward their work, what I call a *classroom perspective* on education. From this perspective, matters become of

increasingly less concern to literacy educators the further such matters appear to be from the experience of classroom teaching. Such a classroom perspective on higher education contrasts with what I call a *policy perspective*, which looks beyond individual classrooms towards a system-wide view that sees specific grade levels, institutions, and classrooms as parts of a larger, collective system or organization. Because the P-16 movement arises from a policy perspective, I argue, it presents unique challenges for literacy educators to understand, and as Charles Schuster pointed out, such challenges have vital consequences for our future in the field of composition studies.

A second response toward education policy initiatives such as the P-16 movement relates to this contrast between classroom and policy perspectives on higher education. Here, the response involves not ignorance on the part of literacy educators so much as a sense that policy reform initiatives represent unstoppable forces which administrators, policy makers, and the larger society employ to control the work of literacy educators. In Chapter Four of this study I suggest that such a response may follow from the decreased sense of political agency many humanists feel generally in the wake of claims from contemporary critical theory and postmodern philosophy. As important, however, are the specific power dynamics through which institutions of higher education and faculty are positioned according to socially and politically constructed hierarchies. One key mechanism by which such power dynamics operate is education policy. As Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Jeff Sommers (1999) have observed, "the greatest difference between teaching composition in research university programs and at two- and four-year open access institutions, programs, or divisions is […] the way that public will becomes translated into local legislation" (p. 443). This experience of local legislation dictated by

a public will that appears to be centered far from the college classroom but which affects the teaching and learning that takes place there can understandably promote a sense of apathy, if not hostility, around issues of education policy. Equally important for my purposes, Lewiecki-Wilson and Sommers also described the role that writing assessment and other forms of educational testing often play in enacting policy reform initiatives. The "local legislation" they discussed "may come in the form of entrance and exit exams mandated by the institution or in its articulation agreements with senior colleges [or] state-wide assessments or exit exams that drive local curricula" (p. 443). My concerns with contemporary education policy reform, then, grow out of, and return back to, issues arising from the theory and practice of college writing assessment.

The Main Point of This Study: Paying Attention to the Rhetorical Situations of College Writing Assessment

Against this backdrop of what I consider unsatisfactory responses to the exigence posed by education policy initiatives such as the P-16 movement, I hope to persuade literacy educators in the field of composition studies to consider an alternative stance. Such a stance focuses on what I describe as *the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment*. As my title suggests, this approach seeks to bring together insights from scholarship on rhetoric and on writing assessment in order to provide a basis from which literacy educators might constructively engage education policy initiatives such as the P-16 movement. Such an approach I consider more viable than the present stances of either ignorance or apathy. Among other things, my approach elaborates upon a series of developments in writing assessment theory over the past several decades. Early proponents of college writing assessment (White, 1985) sought to alert literacy educators

of the need to make assessment part of their work as teachers. Out of this early scholarship came the imperative that composition teachers should carefully consider how to gather assessment data that might describe their students' learning, most often involving strategies for classroom grading and response to student writing. A subsequent generation of scholarship (Broad, 2003; Huot 2002; Huot & Williamson, 1998; Smith, 1993; Williamson & Huot, 2000) then explored the theoretical issues involved with assuring that the interpretation of such assessment data might be conducted ethically and in line with the findings of academic disciplines such as educational testing and measurement (Cronbach, 1988; Messick, 1988; 1989; Moss, 1998).

A key concept in this recent scholarship on writing assessment has been validity theory, a concept whose definition has also provoked ongoing debate among assessment theorists. Out of these debates, validity theory has expanded from an early focus on understanding tests and test scores to include the social consequences that testing, assessment data, and the judgments made from such data can have on a growing variety of constituencies involved with formal education. (For a review of validity theory's evolution, see Williamson, 2004.) Assessment scholar Pamela Moss (1998) has expressed the implications of such an expanded notion of validity:

> While our validity research typically focuses on establishing the validity of fixed interpretations of test scores, the meaning of these messages in local contexts is not a fixed property of the message itself. Rather, it depends on how the individuals [in these local contexts] draw on the resources available to them in their particular sociohistorical circumstances to understand the messages they receive. (p. 7)

Among other things, what Moss has described here is a rhetorical transaction in which "messages" constructed by assessment experts to communicate their interpretations of tests and other assessment data attempt to persuade audiences (Porter, 1992; Selzer, 1992), who, as Moss noted, often bring different priorities and backgrounds to the apprehension of such messages. The examples Moss herself offered to illustrate this version of validity theory dealt with audiences such as students, parents, and teachers, and the differing possible ways such groups might understand test results and assessment decisions. However, building on Moss's observations, I argue in this study that we need to broaden our professional attention around validity theory still further to include other groups who today are also the recipients, and interpreters, of assessment data in various capacities: education policy makers with a range of potential jurisdiction over literacy teaching and learning in American higher education.

In calling for greater attention to policy makers as audiences for assessment data and interpretations based upon such data, I seek to extend the work of assessment scholars concerned with validity theory. Likewise, I draw upon recent work in composition studies that conceives of the writing process more broadly than the act of composing alone. Composition theorist John Trimbur (2000) has argued that "neglecting [the rhetorical canon of] delivery has led writing teachers to equate the activity of composing with writing itself and to miss altogether the complex delivery systems through which writing circulates" (pp. 189-190). This process of *circulation*, Trimbur claimed, has implications for composition pedagogy: "By privileging composing as the main site of instruction, the teaching of writing has […] largely erased the cycle that links the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of writing" (p. 190). Here, I see

a comparison between Trimbur's observations about composition pedagogy and the approach toward writing assessment still typical in the field of composition studies today. Despite the efforts of validity theorists, literacy educators, to the extent we have undertaken such work at all, have tended to privilege the gathering of data as the main site of professional activity around assessment, with consequences similar to those Trimbur pointed out. That is, we have thus far neglected the process of circulation he described and as a result we are generally unaware of the possible rhetorical situations in which our assessment data may end up as it circulates through increasingly complex and interconnected networks of education policy making and jurisdiction. Such rhetorical situations include administrative forums in which education reform initiatives are conceived, deliberated, and made into the sort of "legislation" to which Lewiecki-Wilson and Sommers referred.

As literacy educators, when we think about gathering writing assessment data in our classrooms, composition programs, or elsewhere, we likewise need to consider the rhetorical situations, the forums for policy level decision-making, where interpretations or data drawn from our writing assessments may circulate and ultimately serve as evidence in support of policy reform proposals. If I am successful with this project, literacy educators in the field of composition studies will become better able to see, as my title suggests, connections between *college writing assessment* and the *rhetorical situations* of education policy making, connections that will eventually allow for more constructive engagement in such deliberations by literacy educators. That is, I believe my notion of *the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment* can function as a heuristic (Young, Becker, & Pike, 1970) for college literacy educators as they attempt to

constructively engage education policy reform initiatives such as the P-16 movement. As a heuristic, my title is intended to raise several questions that I hope literacy educators will seek to ponder: *1) In what rhetorical situations might the assessment data I am gathering potentially circulate, and 2) how can I ensure that as it circulates, my assessment data or interpretations of it retain meanings associated with literacy teaching and learning that I value as a member of the field of composition studies?* As Trimbur noted, because "public forums are diffuse, fragmented, and geographically separated" (p. 190), pursuing these questions will inevitably lead us beyond the classrooms where our assessments, and our work as literacy educators, typically originate.

Moreover, following such circulations of our writing assessment data through the rhetorical situations of education policy making will likely alter our sense of professional identity by adding another area of responsibility for us to attend to in our work as literacy educators. Like a number of the validity theorists cited above, I consider this responsibility to entail not merely technical but ethical implications for assessment theory. In this way, I share Trimbur's sentiment that "to my mind, delivery can no longer be thought of simply as a technical aspect of public discourse. It must be seen also as ethnical and political—a democratic aspiration to devise systems that circulate ideas, information, opinions, and knowledge and thereby expand the public forums in which people can deliberate on the issues of the day" (p. 190). Again, where Trimbur described the circulation of writing, I would add the circulation of writing assessment data in the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment.

The Organization of This Study: The Importance of Paying Attention to the Rhetoric of Education Policy Reform Discourse (and How to Do So)

Given the sense of rhetorical exigence that motivates me, I conceive of this project around goals similar to another study focused on the role of education policy making in literacy instruction, Cynthia Selfe's (1999) *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century*. While Selfe explored a different topic, computer technology and its influence upon the literacy pedagogy, she framed her discussion around the impact that education policy making has had, and will continue to have, upon how writing is taught and learned. For this reason, I consider her orientation helpful in describing the goals of my study, and specifically what I see as our shared concern that literacy educators become more willing to consider issues that at first seem distant from the work of classroom teaching. That is, "by *paying attention* to the unfamiliar subject […] in sustained and critical ways, and from our own perspectives as humanists," Selfe has claimed, "we may learn some important lessons about how to go about making change in literacy instruction" (p. 134; italics in original). Selfe's observation that paying attention to a typically "unfamiliar subject" such as education policy reform represents the first step toward effecting political change around literacy education informs my own work in this study. More precisely, the subsequent chapters of this study can be understood as a guide for literacy educators on specific matters related to the discourse of education policy reform about which, I argue, the field of composition studies needs to be "paying attention." In particular, I see the chapters of this study within the following framework:

- *Chapter Two* calls for paying attention to the manner and the circumstances in which we as literacy educators gather and interpret writing assessment data at the college level.
- *Chapter Three* focuses attention on the influence that choices of vocabulary and broader values orientations can have on how assessment data is interpreted and used as evidence in education policy deliberations.
- *Chapter Four* calls attention to how such values orientations appear in specific instances of education policy making within particular rhetorical forums, and thus influence the deliberations that occur there.
- *Chapter Five* draws attention to the rhetorical features and characteristics of a key genre through which assessment data and reform arguments typically circulate in the contemporary public sphere, the genre of the education policy report.
- *Chapter Six* brings together implications from the preceding chapters around several issues underlying those analyses: the professional identity that the field of composition studies might choose for itself and the effects that such choices will have for what we collectively consider worth "paying attention" to in our work as literacy educators.

Ultimately, I argue that constructively engaging education policy reform debates such as those of the P-16 movement is a process that must begin by paying attention to the matters outlined in this study.

My Own Rhetorical Stance in This Study: Advocacy for Deliberation and Collective Engagement by the Field of Composition Studies on Issues of Education Policy, Not Specific Reform Proposals of the P-16 Movement

To conclude this overview, I want to describe my own stance as a scholar in the present study. By arguing that issues of P-16 reform and education policy deserve the attention of literacy educators in the field of composition studies, I will likely appear to some readers as an "advocate" of specific P-16 proposals. My own sense of purpose, however, is more complex. Rather than adopting the stance of an advocate arguing that our field should wholly support P-16 reform initiatives, I view my purpose instead as advocating for a conscious dialogue among literacy educators representing a broad range of constituencies in the field of composition studies which might eventually lead to consensus-based decisions about how to address P-16 reform, the sort of deliberative process that would promote the collective engagement of our field as a whole and the political power to be gained from such collective action. I am, therefore, less concerned with the ultimate position that literacy educators might take regarding the P-16 movement; rather, I hope that the field of composition studies undertakes a process of concerted dialogue, debate, and deliberation over the issues raised by such education policy reform proposals. Indeed, there is much in the P-16 movement that can, and should, make college literacy educators skeptical, and hence should make us cautious about immediately signing on to such reform proposals, despite the often powerful administrative and policy level advocates who often support them. Equally importantly, I argue that regardless of what position we finally adopt as a field, the expectations of contemporary education policy reform debate require that even a negative position, or

active resistance to P-16 reform, be based upon constructive engagement with the issues raised by such reform. That is, simply ignoring initiatives arising from a policy perspective on higher education, what I take to be the default stance of our field presently, will not be a viable response to policy reform in an era of change such as the United States currently faces. Instead, even resistance to initiatives such as P-16 reform will call for active, conscious, collective engagement on the part of literacy educators at the college level. Such engagement likewise, I believe, will have the potential to transform how we see ourselves and our work in the field of composition studies.

Finally, despite having adopted a stance other than advocacy for this project, I'll close by noting what I regard as at least one incontestable benefit available to literacy educators in the field of composition studies from the overall perspective taken by P-16 reform. This benefit involves the potential for P-16 reform and a policy perspective generally to disrupt the established expectations that have conspired to limit the status and effectiveness of college writing instruction since the founding of the modern university over 130 years ago. Composition scholar Mike Rose (1985) has explained the default attitude of many college faculty and administrators toward issues of curriculum reform around literacy education through what he described as "the myth of transience." This myth serves many functions, among these:

> [It] assures its believers that the past was better or that the future will be. The turmoil they are currently in [over students' literacy abilities] will pass. The source of the problem is elsewhere; thus it can be ignored or temporarily dealt with until the tutors or academies or grammar schools or high schools or families

> make the changes they must make. The myth, then, serves to keep certain fundamental recognitions and thus certain changes at bay. (p. 356)

According to Rose's myth of transience, the challenges of literacy learning that college students face are temporary—transient in nature—and ultimately the responsibility of constituencies other than college faculty or administrators: students themselves, their high-school teachers, the contemporary culture in which education takes place, and so forth. Hence, these challenges do not call for faculty in disciplines other than composition studies to reflect upon or change how they teach, grade, or otherwise make use of literacy in their work as educators.

Several generations of scholars in the field of composition studies (Bazerman, 1988; Bruffee, 1986; Elbow, 2000; Geisler, 1994; O'Neill, Crow & Burton, 2002; Prior, 1998; Williamson, 1983) have actively disputed these assumptions around the myth of transience, with mixed results. While concerted resistance to the myth of transience led ultimately to the emergence of composition studies as a full-fledged academic field during the late twentieth century, the myth remains a powerful barrier to reform on matters such as composition instruction (Crowley, 1998; Goggin & Beatty, 2000) and writing across the curriculum (Russell, 1991). Part of the reason that the myth of transience remains so prevalent in American higher education is the way in which it gives order to a powerful set of forces that arise where different grade levels, institutions, and program meet and contact one another, often around matters of assessment. Rose likewise observed:

> [T]he myth plays itself out against complex social-political dynamics. One force in these dynamics is the ongoing struggle to establish [college] admissions

> requirements that would protect the college curriculum, that would, in fact, define its difference from the high school course of study. Another is the related struggle to influence, even determine, the nature of the high school curriculum, "academize" it, shape it to the needs of the college (and the converse struggle of the high school to declare its multiplicity of purposes, college preparation being only one of its mandates). Yet another is the tension between the undergraduate, general education function of the university vs. its graduate research function. To challenge the myth is to vibrate these complex dynamics; thus it is hard to dispel. (pp. 356-357)

Regardless of whether the field of composition studies chooses to embrace or reject its specific education policy reform proposals, the P-16 movement, I believe, provides a means by which to constructively "vibrate" the institutional dynamics that Mike Rose described as maintaining the myth of transience in college-level literacy instruction. Such a challenge to the myth of transience has the potential to open new opportunities for literacy educators engaged from a classroom perspective in the work of teaching college composition as well as for scholars and administrators who wish to redefine how "writing" and "literacy" are understood throughout American higher education. Hence, I believe that the efforts of paying attention to the P-16 movement can have broad benefits for the field of composition studies, a point this study will demonstrate.

CHAPTER II

EXIGENCE IN THE RHETORICAL SITUATIONS OF COLLEGE WRITING ASSESSMENT: THE P-16 REFORM MOVEMENT, WRITING ASSESSMENT, AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN THE FIELD OF COMPOSITION STUDIES

> "The future of assessment is bound up with the future of education, and the future of education reflects the values of the entire society." – Edward White (1996: p. 111)

Introduction

Perhaps fittingly for a project with the term *assessment* in its title, I want to begin this chapter with a pop-quiz. In Figure 1 below are two columns of acronyms. For each acronym you can recognize in either column A or column B, give yourself one point; for each one you can both recognize *and* identify, give yourself two points. Keep track of the column in which you score the highest.

Column A	Column B
C.C.C.C.	E.C.S.
M.L.A.	N.A.S.H.
N.C.T.E.	N.G.A.
R.S.A.	S.H.E.E.O.

Figure 1. A pop-quiz on acronyms associated with contemporary American higher education.

While the circumstances here are admittedly artificial, there are several patterns I've noticed in using versions of this quiz with colleagues from college and university English departments on a number of campuses during the past several years. As you might guess, the scores from column A tend to be higher than column B; in fact a majority of English faculty test-takers have been unable to score any points at all in column B, neither identifying nor even recognizing the acronyms listed there. Needless to say, this quiz, like many assessments used today, appears without proper context, and for this reason potentially prevents test-takers from demonstrating the full extent of their knowledge. Still, I'm struck that few, if any, of these English faculty test-takers seemed to experience

the same struggle with the acronyms in column A: Most recognized at least three of the four, and many identified correctly what at least three of the four acronyms stood for. I'll leave it to my present readers to determine how their own scores fit with the patterns I've described.

My purpose with this exercise is to begin thinking about how we define our work in the field of composition studies—and ourselves—as indicated by the sorts of knowledge we consider relevant to our sense of professional identity as post-secondary literacy teachers and scholars. The acronyms in column A, as you no doubt identified, denote major professional organizations concerned with the study and teaching of writing (the Conference on College Composition and Communication and the National Council of Teachers of English) and the study and teaching of literature and rhetoric (Modern Language Association and the Rhetoric Society of America), activities that have come to define what it means to be a member of the field of English studies today. In contrast, the acronyms in column B denote professional organizations, including the Education Commission of the States (E.C.S.), the National Association of Systems Heads (N.A.S.H.), the National Governors Association (N.G.A.), and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (S.H.E.E.O.), that are likely not as familiar to literacy educators. However, I'll argue throughout this study that the concerns of these groups, known collectively as the *P-16 movement*, and the perspective on American education they represent, in fact have vital implications for the field of composition studies, and particularly for our field's work in the area of writing assessment.

The P-16 movement, whose acronym indicates the desire to see greater coordination between the various components of American public education so that

students can experience smoother transitions among institutions and grade levels as they move from preschool (“P”) through college graduation (grade “16”) and beyond, includes a diverse range of members and an array of reform proposals. Indeed, membership can be most easily gauged by an advocacy group’s use of the term “P-16” (or alternatively, “K-16” for “kindergarten through grade 16”) to frame its proposals, rather than any single reform initiative. As a result, a variety of organizations and advocacy groups have adopted the P-16 moniker since the early 1990s. Roughly speaking, P-16 membership includes agencies of the federal government (the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement [O.E.R.I.] and the Department’s Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs [G.E.A.R. U.P.]), advocates for state government officials (the National Governors Association and the National Conference of State Legislatures [N.C.S.L.]), higher education planning organizations (the Consortium for Policy Research in Education [C.P.R.E.] and the Institute for Educational Leadership [I.E.L.]), associations of higher education administrators (the National Association of System Heads and the State Higher Education Executive Officers), nonprofit organizations dedicated to improving public education at all levels (Achieve, Inc., the American Youth Policy Forum [A.Y.P.F.], and The Education Trust), ad-hoc special commissions (the National Commission on the High School Senior Year), academic think tanks (Stanford University’s Bridge Project: Strengthening K-16 Transition Policies), advocates from the private sector (the Business-Higher Education Forum), and the nation’s leading producers of standardized testing materials (ACT, Inc., and the College Board) (Van de Water & Rainwater, 2001).

Clearly, the diverse backgrounds of these advocacy groups represent a broad range of priorities under the heading of the P-16 movement. Among these groups, at least eight areas of education reform typically appear in association with P-16 advocacy efforts. These reforms include: 1) strengthening teacher education programs, and the recruitment and retention of future K-12 teachers; 2) increasing resources for early childhood education; 3) helping families become better aware of resources for financing a college education; 4) making the senior year of high school more academically substantial; 5) raising the academic performance and achievement of students from non-mainstream and minority backgrounds; 6) reducing the scale of remedial coursework in college; 7) easing students' transitions across grade levels and institutions through greater alignment of pedagogy and assessment; and 8) fostering greater coordination between academic training and current trends in the labor market (Kirst 1998; Krueger & Rainwater, 2003; Van de Water & Rainwater, 2001). Given the variety of proposals these groups advocate, perhaps it is not surprising that estimates suggest approximately half (24) of U. S. states have thus far adopted some version of P-16 reform (Education Commission of the States, 2002).

Even this brief synopsis of the P-16 movement suggests at least three key considerations for the field of composition studies. First, college-level literacy educators will likely note areas of shared interest with P-16 advocates. While survey research (Tafel & Eberhart, 1999) indicated that at least through the late 1990s the main emphasis of P-16 activity in most states had been in the area of teacher education, the remaining topics mentioned above receive consistent attention from P-16 advocates, and of these areas, certainly the last four, if not five, touch directly on concerns shared by many literacy

educators in the field of composition studies. Second, even though many of the names or acronyms of P-16 reform organizations are likely unfamiliar, it should be clear that these groups represent powerful constituencies in contemporary American higher education. Besides the federal government and state lawmakers, the P-16 movement includes representatives from the highest levels of academic administration as well as the nation's major testing companies. Although the everyday work of teaching and scholarship rarely brings most literacy educators into direct contact with these elements of contemporary higher education, their positions of institutional authority and political influence make representatives of the P-16 movement worthy of careful attention. A final point builds upon the previous observations. That is, despite a number of areas of common interest, there are important differences in how literacy educators and representatives of the P-16 movement approach matters of education reform because members of each group typically experience higher education from different institutional positions, leading to distinct perspectives about what education means and the process by which it occurs.

At the risk of oversimplification, we can distinguish between a *classroom perspective* on higher education, the pedagogical orientation favored most often in the field of composition studies, and the approach underlying the efforts of many P-16 advocates, what I'll call a *policy perspective*. The differing orientations of the classroom and policy perspectives help explain the typical results on the quiz that opened this chapter. Not surprisingly, college faculty, whose experience of higher education is most frequently, if not exclusively, through the classroom perspective, have little opportunity to encounter the policy perspective in their professional lives, unless they find themselves serving in academic administrative capacities (Schuster, 2001) or as writing program

administrators (Kinkead & Simpson, 2000; White, 2002). Even more troubling—and the origin of my motivation for the present study—is the opposite scenario; that is, just as most literacy educators in the field of composition studies are unfamiliar with the policy perspective on higher education as it is represented by reform initiatives such as the P-16 movement, it is equally likely that many advocates of P-16 reform and education policy reform in general are themselves unfamiliar with the classroom perspective and its orientation towards teaching and learning. For instance, as Edward White (1996) noted, speaking about the development process for a proposed nationwide standardized test of college students' communication abilities, "we should not expect English faculty to be much involved, for we are not normally seen as players in these high-stakes games" (p. 104). Given the political and institutional power wielded by advocates of P-16 reform, however, if we do not at least attempt to become "players" in current education policy debates, the field of composition studies risks being vulnerable to reform proposals, especially concerning issues of writing assessment, that fail to incorporate the knowledge and insights of the classroom perspective.

As important, the field of composition studies has much to learn about itself by attempting to better incorporate both a classroom *and* a policy perspective on education into our professional identities as literacy educators. Out of this context, then, emerges the main research question informing this study:

> How can literacy educators in the field of composition studies constructively engage in education policy debates such as those surrounding the P-16 reform movement?

The responses I'll develop throughout this study involve a combination of theoretically grounded reforms around college writing-assessment practice as well as the rhetorical analysis of discourse associated with education policy advocacy groups, such as those of the P-16 movement. I believe these proposals can help our field gather the sorts of evidence and learn the conventions of argument and persuasion through which we might then advocate constructively for our own interests and those of our students in current education policy debates that have vital implications for the teaching of composition in American higher education now and in the decades to come.

To begin the process of elaborating these responses, this chapter consists of the following three parts and a concluding summary. Section Two establishes some of the rationales that P-16 advocacy groups typically offer to justify a broad range of reform proposals, beginning with a key analogy that guides their concept of public education. Next, Section Two explains a set of themes common to P-16 discourse concerning large-scale changes in America's population demographics, government responsibilities related to public education, and national economy, before presenting some qualifications that critics have made of these assumptions. Finally, Section Two describes the implications that these aspects of a policy perspective on higher education have for how P-16 advocates conceive the nature and function of college writing assessment. Section Three then introduces some recent scholarship in the field of rhetoric centering on Lloyd Bitzer's (1968; 1980) concept of the rhetorical situation that offers a way to made sense of how interpretations of assessment data function in education policy reform discourse. What I term the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment provides a model for the study of education policy discourse that can help literacy educators begin to make

sense of the relations between pedagogy, assessment, and education policy in contemporary higher education reform initiatives such as the P-16 movement. Finally, Section Four begins developing this model of the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment (a process that continues in Chapters Three, Four, and Five as well) by taking up the first component of the model, rhetorical exigence, and the influence it has upon how education policy makers interpret assessment data.

Understanding the Policy Perspective and Arguments for P-16 Reform

A Guiding Analogy and Its Implications

One way to understand the policy perspective of the P-16 movement can be found in an analogy often used by its advocates: public education as a "pipeline" (Ewell, Jones & Kelly, 2003). From this perspective, education is defined not primarily as a collection of individual classrooms occupied by individual teachers who work with unique groups of students for the duration of a semester or academic year, what I'm calling a classroom perspective on education, but instead as a collection of institutions at different grade levels through which students move over several decades from preschool through college and which, ideally, form a unified system allowing those transitions between levels and institutions to be smooth and without disruption. From the policy perspective, a loss of students at any point in the system, whether through dropping out or flunking out, represents a "leak" in the educational pipeline that must be fixed. From this perspective, likewise, fixing such leaks in the pipeline requires not merely the efforts of individual teachers or students, or changes in pedagogy alone, but reforms at the level of system wide policy. The meaning of the term *policy* itself suggests such an approach. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1978) defined it, the term policy means, among other things,

"a course of action adopted and pursued by a government, party, ruler, statesman, etc." Note the definition's emphasis on collective rather than individual agents. This emphasis on collective or institutional action in the policy perspective not only contrasts with the classroom perspective's orientation toward education as a process of collaboration between individual teachers and particular students; such a policy perspective is what will drive the future course of education policy reform.

As literacy educators, we most often experience higher education from what I've called a classroom perspective, through which we encounter students individually or in small numbers within the immediate contexts of a specific classroom and a particular campus. However, if we step back from our individual experiences and attempt to conceive of American higher education as a system, that is, if we adopt a policy perspective that looks beyond individual classrooms, campuses, or institutions to the scope of education in the nation as a whole, important patterns appear which P-16 advocates typically use to justify their reform proposals. Based on their interpretations of such patterns, many P-16 advocates have adopted the position expressed by Sandra Ruppert, writing for the Education Commission of the States:

> Providing a wide variety of postsecondary learning opportunities for all citizens is critical to both individual and collective well-being. This is the new public mandate for our age, just as extending a high school diploma [to all citizens] was to an earlier generation. Without universal and lifelong access to the benefits of a college education, the nation simply will fail to meet the social and economic changes of the years ahead. (2003: n.p.)

The implication of this position, and the unifying theme of many specific P-16 policy initiatives, is that more students than in the past need to continue their formal education beyond high school and through college graduation. For P-16 advocates, this policy proposal arises from their interpretation of large-scale changes in demographics, politics, and economics affecting contemporary America.

Demographic Trends in the Twenty-First Century

Most powerfully, broad demographic trends promise to alter American society during the twenty-first century. Already, the Census Bureau predicted that by October, 2006, the U.S. population will have reached 300,000,000 inhabitants, making the United States the third largest nation in the world, behind only China and India (El Nasser, 2006). More than half of the most recent growth has come through immigration, with the result that while America's K-12 student population was 86% Caucasian in 1950 and approximately 65% in 2000, by 2040 projections put that figure at just under 50% (Education Trust, 2000). Likewise, census data (El Nasser, 2006) indicated that women of Latino origin have almost one child more on average than Caucasian women (2.8 versus 1.85 children, respectively), a birth-rate difference leading to the projected growth of Latino students in the school-aged population from 15.3% in 2000 to almost 28% by 2040 (Education Trust, 2000). Additionally, with the projected doubling of the school-aged population of Asian Americans (from 4.1% in 2000 to just over 8% by 2040) and the steady rate of African American enrollment at roughly 14%, we can anticipate not only more children but children of more diverse backgrounds entering American schools in coming decades.

P-16 advocates see several implications in these trends. The Education Trust's (2002) interpretation of data from the National Assessment of Education Progress claimed that only 1 in 17 high-school seniors read effectively in order acquire information from expository texts. More troubling, disaggregating the data indicated only 1 in 50 Latino and 1 in 100 African-American students performed at that level while 1 in 12 Caucasian students did so. Likewise, in the case of mathematics, the Education Trust's analysis found that only 1 in 12 of all high-school seniors could solve elementary algebra problems, but again, for minority students the achievement rates were even weaker, with only 1 in 30 Latinos and 1 in 100 African Americans contrasting with 1 in 10 Caucasian students. Troubling patterns concerning demographics appeared as well around social-economic class. For instance, the U.S. Department of Education reported that of 1992 high-school graduates from high-income families (earning over $75,000 per year), only 14% were deemed unqualified for admission to a four-year college, while 32% of students from middle-class families (earning between $25,000 and $74,999 per year) and 47% of students from low-income families (earning under $25,000 per year) were so designated. Such achievement patterns continue to play out as students enter college. The 2004 Condition of Education (U.S. Department of Education) figures indicated that nationally some 28% of students required remedial course work upon entering college, with 11% in the case of reading and 14% for composition. P-16 advocates emphasize that the need for remedial coursework adversely affects students' prospects for graduating and lengthens the time needed to obtain a degree.

Shifting Political Responsibilities for Public Education

Not surprisingly, such demographic trends led to projections that college enrollment will increase by some 19% between 1995 and 2015, with 80% of that increase generated by minority students (Educational Testing Service, 2000). Even now, the scale of American education is enormous. Almost 72 million students participated in American education at all levels from preschool through college during 2004 (N.C.E.S., 2005). Just under 55 million of these students enrolled in the K-12 system and approximately 17 million at the post-secondary level. To serve all these students required some 3.5 million teachers and 3.2 million administrative staff at the K-12 level, along with 800,000 faculty and 1.7 million support staff employed in American higher education. At the post-secondary level, the American system consists of some 2000 institutions that grant the bachelor's degree and slightly more than this number that award the associate's degree (N.C.E.S., 2003). While most of these institutions are private, most students are enrolled in public colleges and universities.

As these figures suggest, the costs of funding such a system is enormous, and P-16 advocates have noted that the burden of paying for public education is forcing state governments to rethink their expectations for the different institutions under their control. As an example, the recent state budget in Pennsylvania illustrates some of the political challenges higher education encounters in the current public policy climate. Pennsylvania is the sixth largest state in the Union, with a population of approximately 12.4 million residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005) and an annual state budget of some $50,000,000,000 in 2004-2005 (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Office of the Budget, 2004). Of that amount, funding for public education as a whole constituted $945,000,000,

divided between $765,000,000 for the K-12 system and approximately $180,000,000 for public colleges and universities. Most importantly, state governments such as Pennsylvania face both demographic and policy challenges concerning public higher education funding. Besides the demographic trends mentioned earlier regarding the school-aged population, it is crucial to note that in the twenty-first century the American population overall is aging. (In fact, Pennsylvania most often ranks behind only Florida and West Virginia as having the oldest population of any state.) Especially as the so-called “baby-boom” cohort moves towards retirement, state governments must contend with budgetary responsibilities that extend beyond education funding.

Adding to this pressure, government policy traditionally defines the funding of higher education as *discretionary* spending, in contrast to *mandatory* spending required for competing budget items. Moreover, widely accepted predictions have called for several of the non-negotiable government programs to grow rapidly during the next decades, among these in particular state-government contributions to the Medicare program of health provision for the elderly, and the funding of prisons and other correctional institutions (which at $135,000,000 for 2004-2005 nearly equaled higher education funding in Pennsylvania). This combination of demographic change and policy constraints leaves education generally, and higher education especially, in a vulnerable position at the level of state policy making. Lawmakers must decide how to spend increasingly scarce resources on a range of initiatives, some of which are both mandatory and rapidly expanding. Consequently, American higher education faces the need to justify its use of resources more fully than ever before. Doing so calls for greater rhetorical awareness on the part of literacy educators, and college faculty generally, about

the kinds of arguments concerning education that such audiences of policymakers find persuasive.

The Economic Influences of Globalization and Technology

A final trend that P-16 advocates call attention to involves changes in the United States' economy arising from the influence of globalization and the growing role of technology in the American workplace. Accompanying the rise in commerce and trade between nations made possible since the fall of Communism, globalization has led to more stratified national economies in which low-skill and low-wage jobs gravitate toward less developed nations in the former Communist and Third worlds with lower production costs, leaving fewer opportunities for low-skilled workers in advanced economies such as the United States (Friedman, 2003). Even the factory jobs remaining in the United States have come to be filled during the past thirty years by workers holding increasing levels of formal education. Whereas in 1973 over half (54%) of American factory workers were high-school dropouts, by 2001 that figure had declined to less than a quarter (21%) (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2004). Likewise, the percentage of these workers who had completed at least some form of college rose from under 10% in 1973 to almost one-third (31%) by 2001. Based on these findings, P-16 advocates believe that such rising levels of educational attainment indicate increasing demand for workers with advanced training.

Indeed, the decades following the collapse of Communism have witnessed a continuation of the shift away from a manufacturing-based economy in the United States towards what has been called an "information society" (Bell, 1976). In such a society, the economy produces knowledge rather than material goods and depends on workers who can actively manipulate new technologies instead of simply following mental routines

that characterized the repetitive, assembly line oriented workplaces of the old industrial economy. This new economy has rewarded most generously those workers with advanced levels of formal education. As Carnevale & Desrochers (2004) of the Educational Testing Service have noted, the average American worker with a bachelor's degree earned $23,000 more in 2001 than the average high-school graduate ($52,600 versus $29,600). The difference ballooned to over $30,000 between college graduates and high-school dropouts ($52,600 versus $20,700). A darker side to these economic trends, however, has been the rising sense of instability felt by many American workers (Ehrenreich, 1990). Rather than spending their entire careers with a single corporation, or even in a single occupation, as their parents and grandparents often did, contemporary workers face the prospect of changing jobs, if not careers, many times between graduation and retirement. In this way, the calls of P-16 advocates for greater access to higher education can be understood as reactions to both sets of consequences resulting from the new American economy. On the one hand, P-16 reform expresses the hope that American workers might take advantage of new opportunities provided by an economy now based on information and advanced technologies. On the other, it responds to fears felt by growing segments of the population that powerful social forces threaten to diminish their opportunities not only in the workplace but across all facets of contemporary American life.

Cautions about the Rationales for P-16 Reform

It is important to acknowledge, however, that not all commentators on American public education interpret the aforementioned demographic, political, and economic trends either as a rationale for sending more young people to college or as signs of a

leaky P-16 pipeline. Notably, sociologist James Rosenbaum (Person & Rosenbaum, 2003; Rosenbaum, 2001) has argued that these same trends point to growing career options in parts of the national economy that do not call for college education. These careers include work in clerical and administrative support, construction, financial services, graphics, printing, social services, technical specialties, and certain trades, among others. Failing to bring such career options to students' attention in a rush to send more students to college, Rosenbaum has argued, does a disservice both to students themselves and to the nation's economy. More importantly, for Rosenbaum the problem with the current system of public education involves not leaks in the pipeline to college but a failure to help more students acquire knowledge and competencies associated with the early years of high school. Many of his non-college career options call for reading, writing, and math abilities at the ninth-grade level of high school, but he has cited surveys indicating that as of the mid-nineteen-nineties, some 40% of high-school seniors lacked such competencies in math and 60% in reading. Indeed, some P-16 advocates (ACT, 2003) have in fact addressed these concerns by proposing that all students, regardless of their college ambitions, be required to complete ninth-grade level math (algebra I), among other core subjects, in order to graduate high school.

P-16 Reform, the Policy Perspective, and Writing Assessment

In response to these broad trends, the P-16 movement's policy perspective conceives of American public education as a "pipeline," with institutions or other administrative units at each level integrated seamlessly to those at adjoining levels of a single system. Such a pipeline model attempts to see relationships between grade levels (elementary, secondary, tertiary) and administrative units (the high-school language arts

curriculum and the college writing program, for instance) that have historically developed and have in practice operated separately (Conley, 1996; Mitchell & Torres, 1998; Schultz, Laine, & Savage, 1988). One way to visualize such a pipeline in relation to literacy instruction as well as the P-16 movement's key criticisms of the present system of American public education appears in Figure 2:

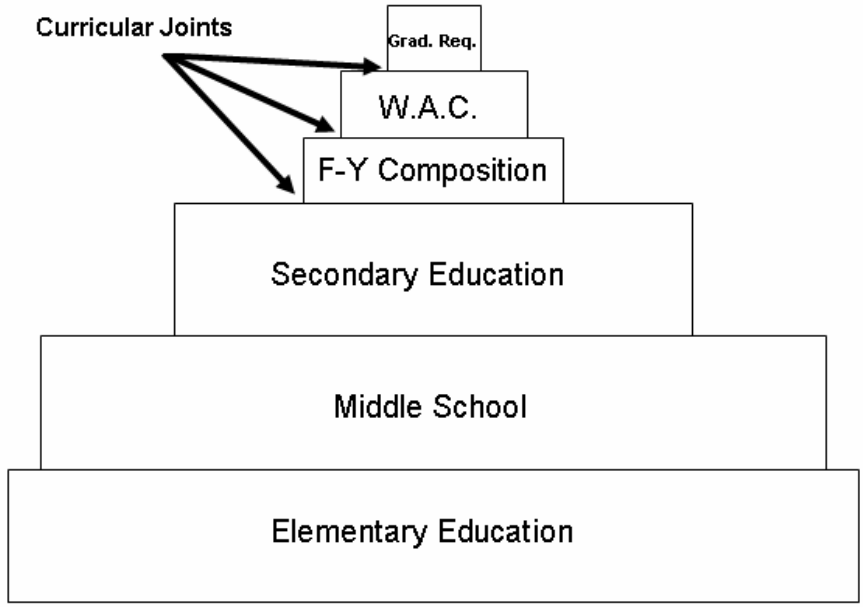

Figure 2. Curricular joints in the American public education "pipeline" associated with literacy instruction.

The diagram in Figure 2 depicts as rectangles the major grade levels and administrative units students will likely encounter as they study literacy and writing from preschool through college graduation. The pyramid shape of the diagram indicates that the number of students participating in the system decreases with each subsequent level of instruction. That is, the present system of American public education manages to educate (or at least to graduate) the overwhelming majority of young children at the elementary and middle-school levels. At the high-school level, participation begins to fall off, especially for minority and non-mainstream students. The top part of the diagram shows the possible administrative units of college-level literacy instruction as increasingly

smaller “pipes.” Here, student participation drops off considerably from first-year composition and basic writing through writing-across-the-curriculum (W.A.C.) instruction and upper-division writing requirements leading eventually to college graduation. As P-16 advocates Patrick Callan and J. E. Finney (2003) of the *Jobs for the Future* project have characterized the current pipeline of American public education, out of every 100 ninth graders, 67 graduate from high school, 38 enter college, 26 return for their sophomore year, and only 18 graduate from college within six years.

Before I continue, let me acknowledge briefly several qualifications of the literacy education pipeline depicted in Figure 2. First, my version of college literacy instruction in the diagram is admittedly optimistic, as many college writing programs today offer instruction only at the first-year level, and many institutions lack viable W.A.C. programs. However, commentators (Crowley, 1997; Fleming, 1998; Howard, Shamoon, & Jamieson, 2000; O’Neill, Crow, & Burton, 2002) on the future of composition studies have argued that developing the undergraduate writing curriculum beyond first-year composition represents the next major challenge for our field, and thus, it is worthwhile to conceive of literacy education beyond first-year composition at least in theory, if not in practice. Second, the focus on literacy instruction in Figure 2 should not be taken to imply that college composition instruction alone, or the lack thereof, causes the increased rates of attrition seen at the upper levels of the American education pipeline. Indeed, the P-16 movement emphasizes a wide array of factors—cultural, economic, and attitudinal, among others—that may affect students’ success in college.

At the same time, such foregrounding of the college literacy curriculum in the context of the P-16 movement’s pipeline model of public education should lead us to ask

what in fact happens to students at those "joints" where the different sections of curricular and institutional "pipe" meet. According to the interpretation favored by P-16 advocates, many of these joints in the current pipeline are "leaking" badly, that is, responsible for unacceptable losses of students, especially at the higher levels (secondary and postsecondary) of the system, and hence are in need of repair through the mechanism of policy reform. Yet it is crucial to recognize—as many literacy educators no doubt do—that such interpretations are just that, interpretations. Despite the elegance some observers may find in the P-16 movement's "pipeline" analogy of public education, this figure of language and its related components of "pipes," "joints," "leaks," and so forth represent not an immediate, tangible reality of what happens in the process of American education but rather a version of that reality which serves specific political ends.

While the power of the analogy and the interpretations it sanctions result in part from the positions of authority and influence held by many advocates of P-16 reform, this vision of public education also depends crucially for its persuasiveness upon the role of writing assessment plays in arguments for education policy reform. That is, another way to conceive of these curricular joints in the education pipeline is as what Peter Elbow (2003) called *crunch points*. He has observed:

> Most educational institutions create gateways where students may get messages like these: "We will not admit you." "You may go no further." "You flunk." "You get no diploma." I call these crunch points to highlight the fact that they are not just matters of negative evaluation or bad grades; they are places where students can be stopped or excluded. (p. 15)

Elbow's remarks highlight the role our assessments play in creating the crunch points that students encounter and must successfully negotiate in order to continue through the education pipeline. To the extent that we as literacy educators fail to acknowledge or pay adequate attention to the crunch points our assessments bring about, we risk being vulnerable to what advocates holding a policy perspective *claim* happens at those crunch points, with those claims serving as justifications for their policy proposals. For this reason, college writing teachers should concur with Elbow, when he claimed, "I'm interested in how institutions or programs create their own crunch points" (2003: p. 16), because the initiatives of the P-16 movement suggest that advocates of the policy perspective already are.

The Rhetorical Situations of College Writing Assessment

Another way to phrase the interest Peter Elbow expressed comes in the form of what will serve as the other main research question for this study:

> What happens to assessment data when it enters the public sphere of education policy reform debates?

To address this question, as the title of my project suggests, I want to consider Lloyd Bitzer's (1968; 1980) concept of the rhetorical situation. For Bitzer, the rhetorical situation denoted the "complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence" (1968; p. 6). That is, rhetorical discourse arises out of a situation that includes an *exigence*, or a problem requiring action, an *audience*, or persons besides the rhetor whose participation is necessary in order to solve

the problem, and *constraints*, or the factors in the situation that influence the rhetor and audience toward a particular course of action to solve the problem. Figure 3 illustrates the basic components of Bitzer's rhetorical situation:

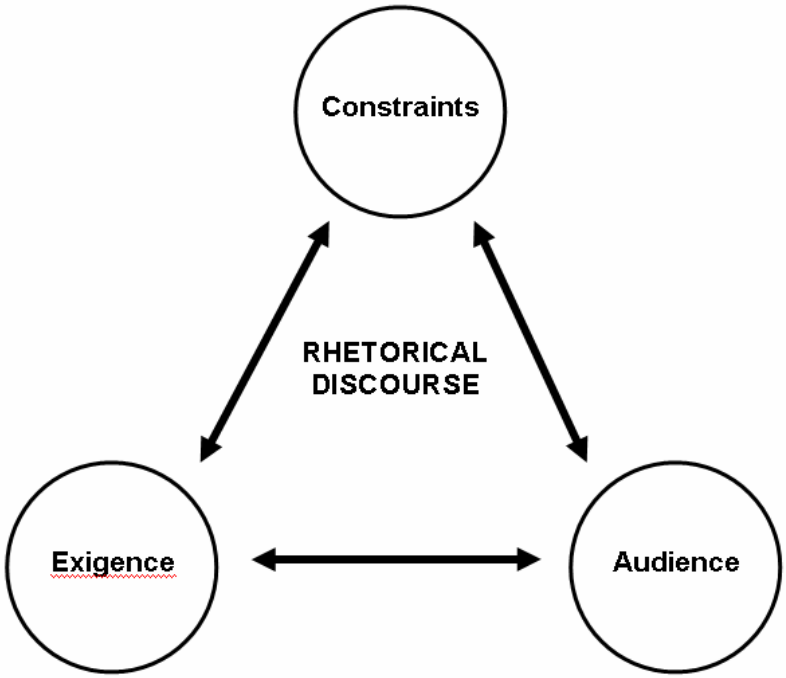

Figure 3. A depiction of the factors influencing rhetorical discourse according to Lloyd Bitzer's (1968; 1980) theory of the rhetorical situation.

Bitzer's original notion of the rhetorical situation assumed an independent reality external to the rhetor from which its components of exigence, audience, and constraints were derived. Subsequent commentators (Vatz, 1971; Consigny, 1974) critiqued an objectivist bias in the original model, leading Bitzer (1980) in later formulations to emphasize the socially constructed nature of the rhetorical situation. Such an orientation suggests that a rhetor's discourse calls into being, or *invents*, the exigence, audience, and constraints as much as it reacts to the external reality of these components in a given rhetorical situation. According to Bitzer's theory, all parties involved in deliberation can be considered rhetors who use discourse not merely to advocate for a specific judgment but

more broadly to shape versions of reality that serve to justify their own positions and proposals.

More specifically, I believe the concept of the rhetorical situation can help explain what happens to assessment data when it enters public policy debates surrounding education reform and the discourse of advocacy groups such as those of the P-16 movement. To accomplish this goal, I have revised the basic components of Bitzer's theory into a model that provides the title for this project, *the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment*, and appears in Figure 4:

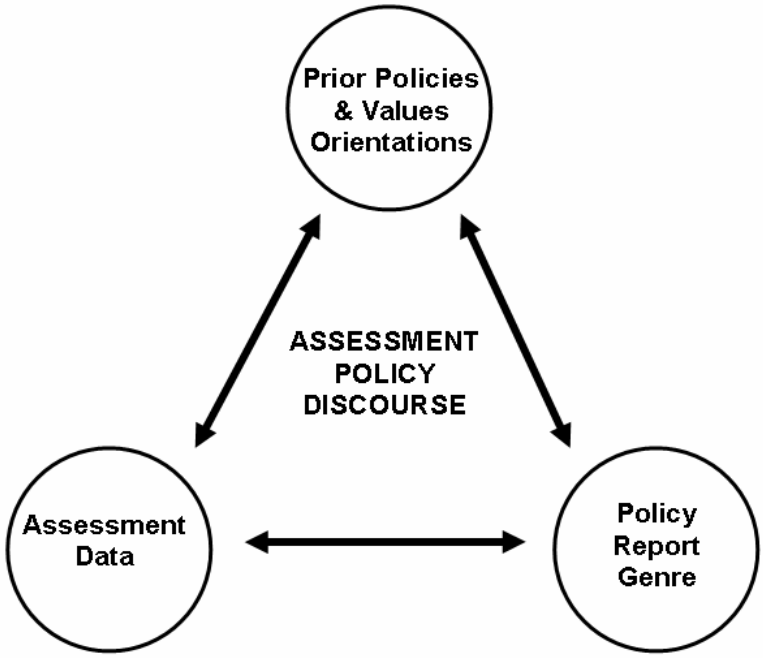

Figure 4. The rhetorical situations of college writing assessment—An adaptation of Bitzer's theory depicting factors that influence contemporary education policy reform discourse.

According to this model, judgments based on data gathered from writing assessment activities, whether from standardized test scores, portfolio ratings, course grades, or other sources, allow advocates of education reform to define a rhetorical *exigence*, what Bitzer defined as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (1968: p. 6). Despite the

appearance of scientific objectivity that surrounds writing assessment as a technology, in the public sphere (Goodnight, 1982) of education policy debates, the exigencies that interpretations of writing assessment data define are inherently rhetorical, in that they are orchestrated by policy advocates to foster rhetorical discourse as Bitzer (1968) conceived it: “Rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to situation, in the same sense that an answer come into existence in response to a question, or a solution in response to a problem” (p. 5). If nothing else, then, my model emphasizes that in the public sphere of contemporary education policy debate, assessment data serves to define “what’s wrong,” whether with students, teachers, curriculum, or other components of formal education as a system.

Most crucially, and my reason for developing a model based on Bitzer’s notion of the rhetorical situation rather than other possible conceptual schemes, this use of assessment data and interpretation to invent rhetorical exigences within the public sphere of education policy debate also differs from the favored stance toward assessment among literacy educators. That is, to the extent that the field of composition studies chooses to pay attention to writing assessment at all, it often prefers the stance expressed by the title of Paul Diederich’s (1974) well-known guide for teachers, *Measuring Growth in English*. From this stance, assessment represents primarily a means by which to describe the literacy learning processes of students, with the goal of helping all parties involved better understand those processes, and hence assist students in achieving the greatest possible “growth” as literacy learners. Clearly, there is much to recommend such a stance toward assessment. My concern, however, is that such a view of assessment fails to acknowledge the way assessment data may serve less descriptive ends when it enters the public sphere

of education policy debate. Failing to acknowledge this possibility leaves literacy educators vulnerable to the discourse of reform advocates that uses assessment data to critique the various facets of education practice.

In the remainder of this chapter, I consider the implications for writing assessment theory and practice of exigencies in the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment. But, first, let me briefly note the other key components of my model. Besides inventing exigencies through interpretations of assessment data, education policy reform discourse must also adapt itself appropriately to a second component of Bitzer's rhetorical situation, what he calls *constraints*. Bitzer describes constraints as aspects of the rhetorical situation that "have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (p. 8). More specifically, for Bitzer they include, among other things, "beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives, and the like" (p. 8). In the case of education policy discourse, especially relevant is a certain category of beliefs concerning the appropriate goals, or priorities, that formal education as a whole should serve. Such beliefs, what I call *values orientations*, arise out of the history and culture of a society, and are often taken for granted by the participants in policy debates. Rhetoricians such as Kenneth Burke (1950), Michael Calvin McGee (1980), and Richard Weaver (1953) have described how language works to embody values orientations through mechanisms they describe variously as *god terms*, *ideographs*, and *ultimate terms*. Chapter Three of this study analyzes one such values orientation, expressed in recent education reform discourse through the ultimate term accountability. Moreover, with education policy discourse, we can add to Bitzer's list of constraints already existing policies as well as the precedents established by prior policies

that may no longer be in effect. Chapter Four considers another values orientation appearing in the discourse of P-16 reform, this one associated with the ultimate term *access*, and analyzes certain precedents arising from policies over government financial aid allocation originally debated during the 1940s as part of the so-called "G.I. Bill." Such precedents established by the prior policies of the G.I. Bill, I argue, continue to have implications for current education policy debates involving college writing assessment, for example, in calls for nationwide standardized testing of college graduates, an issue arising most recently from the efforts of the Bush Administration's "Spellings' Commission" on higher education reform (Arenson, 2006; Insidehighered.com, 2006a; 2006b).

Finally, Bitzer distinguished specifically rhetorical discourse as that which is addressed to an *audience* who has the capacity to act upon and alleviate the exigence. As he noted, an "rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (1968: p. 8). While the notion of audience originated to describe the workings of oral discourse, attention to writing has led contemporary rhetoricians to incorporate as well insights from the study of discourse communities (Bruffee, 1986; Clark, 1994; Harris, 1989; Killingsworth, 1992; Porter, 1992; Prior, 1998; Rafoth, 1990; Selzer, 1992) and rhetorical genre theory (Bawarshi, 2003; Bazerman, 1988; Bazerman, Little & Chavkin, 2003; Devitt, 2004; Miller, 1984; Park, 1986; Russell, 1997). Both these directions in the study of audience have implications for the analysis of education policy discourse. Specifically, I argue in Chapter Five that the worldview represented by a policy perspective on higher education can be best understood if literacy educators give careful attention to the genre of

education policy reports through which advocates of P-16 reform attempt to persuade legislators, administrators, and other policymakers—genuinely rhetorical audiences in Lloyd Bitzer's sense—who hold the authority to implement large-scale change in American higher education.

This model of the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment structures my analyses throughout this study. Overall, I make several claims regarding the model. First, I believe it provides a rudimentary analytic tool[1] for literacy educators who wish to understand the nature and function of education policy reform discourse. That is, I claim the components of the model will influence the rhetorical decisions made by advocates that result in any given piece of reform discourse. Hence, critical attention to these components provides a means by which we might become more familiar with how and why education policy discourse occurs as it does in contemporary reform debates. Second, the model helps explain the differences of rhetorical performance between various policy advocates within a given education reform debate. Although I argue the components of the model operate in every instance of policy discourse, each particular reform advocate in such a debate exercises her rhetorical capacities by making particular choices concerning each component of the model—which exigence matters, what constraints apply, which qualities of the audience must be addressed. For this reason, I describe the model as *the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment* in order to emphasize that within any single policy reform debate, there will be as many rhetorical

[1] My intent in proposing this model is to offer literacy educators in the field of composition studies an accessible starting point for paying attention to the discourse of education policy reform. Therefore, I have purposely attempted to make the model as basic as possible while acknowledging that many other factors, including aspects of language, culture, and institutional activity, may affect to a greater or lesser extent particular instances of policy argument. I hope that literacy educators will elaborate and qualify the components of this model as they attempt to apply it for their own purposes.

situations in operation as there are advocates participating in the debate. Successful reform rhetoric thus depends on persuasively defining the rhetorical situation for a particular issue against alternative versions proposed by one's opponents. As a result, the discourse of particular advocates in a single debate takes up different positions, presents different arguments to support those positions, and often characterizes the topic itself in radically different ways. Finally, and most importantly, I conceive this model as serving both analytic *and* heuristic purposes for literacy educators in the field of composition studies. That is, at least initially, I hope literacy educators will adopt my model in order to analyze and make sense of the education policy discourse they encounter as observers of contemporary reform debates. Ultimately, however, I want my model to serve as a heuristic (Young, Becker, & Pike, 1970) that might guide the inventional processes of literacy educators who seek to compose their own policy arguments so as to constructively participate in such education policy reform debates, with all the challenges and opportunities such participation will entail. In this way, I hope my model can be *rhetorical* in the fullest sense of the term.

Exigencies in the Rhetorical Situations of College Writing Assessment

Assessment Data as Exigence in Education Policy Reform Discourse

Turning to the first main component of my model, in the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment, as I conceive them, an *exigence* constitutes the answer each rhetor in a given policy debate offers to the question, *what problem defined in part through assessment data does my reform proposal address?* That is, assessment data helps reform advocates rhetorically invent arguments that support their specific proposals by providing the basis for exigences which define "what's wrong" with some aspect of

the educational process. Such a capacity for rhetorical invention allows different rhetors to define distinct exigences even when reacting to what seems to be a common subject. Indeed, rhetorical theorists such as Young, Becker, & Pike (1970) claimed that the art of a persuasive rhetor depends in large measure upon being able to define a unique exigence which leads her audience to the particular proposal, the solution, that she advocates.

As an example of how different rhetors can invent distinct exigences around a common subject using assessment data, consider some recent positions on literacy training at the college level. For instance, Edward P. J. Corbett (1989) recalled that when he first arrived at Ohio State University to direct its writing program in the mid 1960s, the key exigence surrounding introductory composition at that flagship research campus was how many students needed to fail in order to maintain the university's upper-level curriculum, which was far too small to accommodate all the first-year students admitted in a decade marked by the baby boom generation's arrival on campus. In that context, assessment, specifically student course grades, helped define first-year composition as a "flunk-out course." That is, according to the rhetorical situation Corbett encountered, the *problem* with literacy education at Ohio State in the 1960s resided in the students themselves, and their supposed lack of appropriate college-level abilities. A decade later, however, in the context of the open-admissions policies at the City University of New York (CUNY), Mina Shaughnessy (1977) used assessment to define a very different problem. Rather than an exigence based on students' inability to do college-level work, her discourse as a teacher, administrator, and scholar sought instead to define as a problem the literacy pedagogies of traditional higher education. Assessment, this time in the form of rating and interpreting placement essays, allowed Shaughnessy to identify a

new conceptual category, “basic writers,” for describing under-prepared college students, which she then used to argue for changes in teaching strategies and increased academic support for such nontraditional students.

Finally, rhetors of P-16 movement have used assessment, in the form of measures such as rates of remediation in so-called basic-skills subjects (composition, reading, and math), amount of time between university admissions and degree completion as well as overall graduation rates, to define problems involving what they consider to be a lack of connection between curricula and assessment at the secondary and post-secondary levels of American public education. Here, the problem needing reform is one of inappropriate or confused expectations that students bring with them to each new level of public education due to their previous experiences of curriculum and assessment. In each case, interpretations of assessment data allowed these different rhetors to define different exigences for explaining student performance, first as a problem with the students’ own natural abilities, then as a problem with teachers’ pedagogies and assumptions about literacy, and finally as a problem of misaligned curricula and assessment between different institutions or grade levels.

Some Challenges for the Field of Composition Studies of Defining Exigencies around College Writing Assessment

If one implication of P-16 reform is to call attention to the crunch points generated by our assessments, then the challenge for the field of composition studies becomes to understand, and ultimately to shape, what happens at these crunch points. Unfortunately, a number of factors arising from the history of composition instruction and the nature of our work with students can prevent us as college writing teachers from

identifying and addressing adequately the crunch points in our literacy curricula. Most notably, the origins of composition as a college subject can be understood as a reaction to perhaps the earliest crunch point in the history of modern American higher education. Historians of composition (Brereton, 1996; Eliot, 2005; O'Neill, 1998) have documented the changing enrollment patterns during the decades following the Civil War that brought more students of more diverse backgrounds to American higher education than ever before. Among the institutions affected was Harvard College, where these enrollment trends prompted Adams Sherman Hill, Harvard's writing program administrator, to implement the nation's first modern composition placement exam. Based on an interpretation of what he considered the disappointing results of that placement exam, Hill argued for moving literacy instruction to the first year of college in what was originally conceived as a temporary measure. Over 130 years later, the continued existence of first-year composition as a nearly "universal requirement" (Crowley, 1998) on American campuses demonstrates higher education's ongoing acknowledgement that the transition between the literacy expectations of high school and college constitutes a crunch point for students.

Unfortunately, these origins of college composition have led to a "flat" curriculum in which instruction typically occurs only during the first year (Trimbur, 1999). One result of this curricular arrangement is that many writing instructors end up teaching first-year students almost exclusively. For this reason, they may be unfamiliar, except anecdotally, with potential crunch points that occur beyond one or two semesters of introductory composition. Another consequence of locating composition instruction at the crunch point of the first year of college involves the psychological, or emotional,

challenges writing teachers encounter as they interact with students. “We are the personnel on campus,” noted community college writing teacher Patrick Sullivan (2003), “who most often deliver bad news to students about their ability to do college-level work” (p. 379). The repeated process of communicating such messages through grading and other forms of writing assessment can make for “painful and emotionally exhausting work” (p. 379). It’s not surprising, then, that many composition teachers come to “hate” grading and other forms of assessment in general, and hence may wish to avoid searching out the various other curricular crunch points where assessments take their toll on students. Moreover, the curricular location of composition at a crunch point may help explain the strong appeal for many teachers of pedagogies associated with the writing process movement. Across its many variations (Bishop, 1997; Elbow, 1973; 2000; Murray, 1968; 1982), the process approach has tended to emphasize the positive potential of student writers, regardless of their backgrounds or ability levels. Such optimism is captured in the title of Peter Elbow’s recent collection of essays, *Everyone Can Write* (2000). Needless to say, the assumption behind identifying and studying crunch points in the college literacy curriculum calls that optimism, at least partially, into question.

Finally, the contested ownership of assessment generally within contemporary American higher education can make college faculty unsure of their actual responsibility for crunch points in the literacy curriculum. That is, many of the activities associated with faculty work—research, teaching, and curriculum development, among others—are typically recognized by formal agreements, whether the guidelines of professional organizations such as the American Association of University Professors or the contracts of faculty labor unions, as being under the jurisdiction directly, if not exclusively, of

faculty themselves. However, the case of assessment, and writing assessment in particular, is often more complicated. On the one hand, some matters of assessment, for instance, the choice of writing prompts used for placement testing or exit exams, seems clearly to impinge upon the work of teaching, and thus to call for direct input, if not outright control, by faculty. On the other hand, certain assessment activities, particularly those occurring outside individual courses or classrooms, often depend on decision-making typically associated with administrative control. For instance, composition placement testing may also be influenced by factors such as the scheduling of other first-year orientation events during which such testing must occur. So it may be, for example, that a writing prompt which reflects the pedagogy and curriculum of a composition program is deemed inappropriate by campus administrators because it generates placement essays that require more time for raters to score than the schedule of orientation activities allocates. Under such circumstances, it's unclear who, as Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Director of Orientation Programs recently noted, writing assessment practices such as composition placement testing actually "belong to" (C. Dugan, personal communication, August 8, 2006). Needless to say, college faculty can find themselves encountering issues concerning assessment in which their own jurisdiction is neither obvious nor generally accepted, with the result that assessment can appear an issue better left to someone else. Indeed, assessment specialists (White, 1990; 1996; Huot, 2002) have bemoaned the fact that many writing teachers historically have been content to do so, especially in the case of large-scale assessment or assessment beyond the classroom (Eliot, 2005).

Defining Exigencies—and Ourselves: Contrasting Roles for Assessment between the Classroom and Policy Perspectives

Interestingly, the two perspectives on higher education I have described so far, the classroom perspective and the policy perspective, assume very different relationships to the activity of assessment. As noted earlier, for many teachers holding a classroom perspective, assessment is a source of stress or discomfort. It is also an activity that can seem foreign in several ways, first, because forces beyond the classroom such as mandates, requirements, and public pressure (Lewiecki-Wilson & Sommers, 1999) often give rise to particular assessments that teachers must then implement, whether they agree with them or not, and second, because many teachers experience the act of assessment as somehow separate from their other work of teaching writing. "I love teaching writing," many literacy educators will say, and then add, "I just hate giving grades." For this reason, much of Brian Huot's effort in *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment* (2002) involved demonstrating that the activity of assessment is fundamental to the processes of reading and responding to student writing, which most composition teachers see as their primary jobs. That such a relationship appears less than organic to many literacy educators attests to the distance between writing assessment and the classroom perspective as traditionally understood. In contrast, a policy perspective on higher education not only embraces assessment, it fundamentally depends on it. That is, the notion of public education as a system, or "pipeline," extending beyond the individual classroom—the major environment in formal education that can be directly observed—requires the collection of data about student learning at different grade levels and across a range of individual institutions. Without the interpretation of data gathered using

assessment technologies, conceiving of public education as a system or pipeline becomes impossible. From the policy perspective, therefore, assessment is an issue that cannot be ignored; indeed, assessment serves to define the meaning of education for advocates holding a policy perspective.

My point here is that the typical stance of the classroom perspective toward writing assessment leaves literacy educators vulnerable to claims and proposals from policy perspectives such as the P-16 movement. By failing to attend to assessment as a vital part of our professional identity as literacy educators, we not only allow other constituencies in higher education to define what happens at key crunch points in our literacy curricula, we risk accepting as "reality" notions such as *education as a system* or analogies of "education as a pipeline," when instead these entities exist as the result of interpretation, reasoning, and persuasion—processes of rhetoric—based on evidence derived from assessment data, as I'll discuss momentarily. Therefore, I approach this study as neither an advocate of the P-16 movement nor as a critic of its proposals. Instead, I want to emphasize the importance of assessment as an activity underlying both the classroom perspective, as Huot argues, and policy perspectives such as the P-16 movement. Because as literacy educators we have neglected issues of assessment and what goes on at the crunch points in our curricula, we need to be skeptical of claims by P-16 reform advocates, not because their proposals automatically lack merit due to their origins, but because it is likely that the assessment data and interpretations upon which they base their proposals are incomplete.

Addressing Exigencies in the Rhetorical Situations of College Writing Assessment

Fortunately, recent innovations in assessment theory offer a means for beginning to understand what goes on at the crunch points of the education pipeline. Most relevant has been Brian Huot's (1996; 2002; O'Neill, Schendel, & Huot, 2002) work on approaching assessment as a form of research. Rather than conceiving of assessment as a neutral technology that can generate truthful scores designating students' writing abilities in the absence of context, he advocated that literacy educators foreground the local circumstances in which teaching and learning occur and use their knowledge of that context to actively explore what takes place there. "Research-based assessment," Huot explained, "requires that the community of teachers, students, and administrators come together to articulate a set of research questions about student performance, teaching, curriculum or whatever they are interested in knowing about" (2002: p. 178). What Huot has described here, I'll call an *assessment forum* to emphasize the collaborative dialogue among participants necessary to formulate and study the research questions that Huot believes assessment practice should raise.

Such assessment forums also provide a key mechanism for assuring the *validity* of assessment practice. Traditionally, at least within the field of composition studies, the concept of validity has been defined as whether a given assessment tool (a test, exam, etc.) actually measured what it purported to measure (White, 1985). However, such an understanding has been questioned in academic fields such as educational measurement (Cronbach, 1988; Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Messick, 1988; 1989) and in more recent theorizing among writing assessment specialists (Huot, 1990; 2002; Huot & Williamson, 1998; Williamson & Huot, 1993; 2000). Instead of being a quality inherent within a given

assessment tool, so that we could say, for instance, “this grammar test is a valid measure of students’ linguistic knowledge,” recent theorizing locates validity in each particular use of a given assessment tool. Thus, determining the validity of the grammar test would depend, among other things, on how the test was being used, on what specific decisions were being made based upon the test scores and on what happened to the students involved as a result. For instance, if the grammar test in question were being used to place students into a basic writing course, determining the test’s validity for that use would call for, among other things, finding out the extent to which the students placed into the basic writing course were in fact helped by that curricular decision (O’Neill, 2003; Smith, 1993).

Current notions of validity might likewise be understood through a comparison with classical rhetoric. Aristotle (1954) famously distinguished among three types of rhetorical discourse: the epideictic, the forensic, and the deliberative. Based on this framework, “common-sense” understandings would probably define college writing assessment as a variety of epideictic rhetoric. That is, to non-experts, assessment typically means deciding whether to “praise” or “blame” the quality of student writing. By way of contrast, for measurement specialists traditional notions of validity tended to make assessment a variety of forensic rhetoric, in that the matter at issue hinged on questions of past fact: for instance, what *was* the student’s actual performance on this test, and how can we be sure that performance has been accurately measured? Finally, current notions of validity according to Cronbach, Huot, Messick, Williamson, and others in effect shift assessment from the forensic to Aristotle’s deliberative mode of rhetoric. Rather than focusing exclusively on the student’s past performance, current validity

theory emphasizes future action in the form of the specific decisions to be made based on interpretations of assessment data. Such decisions must depend upon the persuasiveness of arguments supported by those interpretations. Hence, according to current notions of validity theory, validating a particular use of the grammar test in the above example would, among other things, depend upon considering not only what knowledge the test asked for in practice but to what extent the evidence drawn from the test scores of particular students justified the decision on a course of action that, for instance, placed those students in a basic writing class.

The insights of current validity theory emphasize the deliberative nature of writing assessment, and in doing so point toward the link between assessment and policy development in contemporary higher education. Both the implications of validity theory and the policy perspective of the P-16 movement call for the establishment of assessment forums to study and oversee the crunch points that assessment brings about in the process of education. That such assessment forums are necessary can be seen in the recently revised guidelines on institutional accreditation published by the major regional accreditation agencies such as the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2003). In addition to asking that college and universities develop student learning outcomes and then gather assessment data related to those outcomes, the previous benchmarks for best-practices in institutional assessment, the guidelines now for the first time include a feedback-loop model which conceives of assessment as a process of ongoing interpretation and collaborative policy-making. That is, once outcomes have been agreed upon and assessment data collected, the new guidelines recommend the establishment of committees, what I have termed assessment forums, officially

responsible for analyzing that data and then recommending policy changes, such as curriculum revision, which better support student learning. As part of this feedback model, assessment forums thus may potentially alter the outcomes for the program and/or the sources of assessment data collected, leading then to another loop of collection, interpretation, and policy revision. By directly prompting colleges and universities to plan for the development of assessment forums, the action of institutional accreditation agencies indicates that such assessment forums are not yet typical on most campuses, a circumstance, I argue, literacy educators should work to change.

Summary, Implications, and Overview of This Study

Broadly speaking, this study concerns the influence of rhetoric and public policy debates involving American higher education on college writing assessment. In particular, it focuses upon the discourse of education policy reform associated with the P-16 movement, a loose affiliation of advocacy groups that in the past decade has called for closer and more coordinated relations between K12 public education and the nation's colleges and universities. Conceiving and bringing about greater coordination between systems of education requires policy-level decision-making that implicates the practices of college writing assessment in several ways. First, as I suggested in this chapter, arguments from a policy perspective that attempt to justify proposed reforms depend on interpretations of data made available through technologies of writing assessment. Likewise, these reforms promise to affect the manner in which writing assessment is carried out both in classrooms and elsewhere across the K12 and college levels. Hence, this topic deserves careful attention from literacy educators in the field of composition studies.

With this rationale in mind, the present chapter framed two main research questions as the basis for the overall study. The first of these involves the options that literacy educators have for responding to the challenges posed by the initiatives of the P-16 movement and education policy reform generally:

> How can literacy educators in the field of composition studies constructively participate in education policy debates such as those surrounding the P-16 reform movement?

In response to this first main research question of the study, I argue that *as literacy educators we can constructively participate in education policy debates, first, by using the knowledge of language, writing, and rhetoric that in large measure defines the professional identity of our field to study the discourse of reform initiatives such as those of the P-16 movement in order that we might learn the persuasive strategies and rhetorical appeals favored in the public sphere of education policy debates, and, second, by then applying such rhetorical knowledge so that we can compose our own discourse on matters of education policy which more persuasively addresses the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment*. Ideally, this study can be seen as the first step in a broader agenda under which literacy educators might enter public policy debates concerning higher education that are currently dominated by what I characterized as a policy perspective on education and bring to bear the knowledge and insights available from attention to the classroom perspective that most literacy educators know intimately.

Equally so, because I purposely adopt research methods that are either familiar to literacy educators, such as textual interpretation or historically oriented analysis, or that represent current areas of professional interest and attention within the field of

composition studies, such as genre theory, I hope that readers of this study will recognize the political agency inherent in our work as academics. During a postmodern age which has thoroughly critiqued the notion, if not the possibility, of political agency, I see this study following the spirit of Edward White's (2002) observation on the role of political power for literacy educators: "We must empower ourselves in order to do our jobs" (p. 108). Drawing upon the resources of our typical academic training in literacy, writing, and rhetoric may be the best way to address the challenges that we will likely encounter in an age of reform throughout all levels of American education.

Regarding this first question, I also observed that data gathered through the activities of college writing assessment plays a key role in the inventional processes of education policy reform advocates, in how they define the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment. That is, the "leaks" which rhetors of the P-16 movement see in the our nation's education "pipeline" come into being as the result of interpretations made from assessment data. Hence, I proposed that as college writing teachers we pay attention more carefully to what Peter Elbow termed the crunch points in our literacy curricula. However, such paying attention (Selfe, 1999) to writing assessment, I believe, cannot stop at the borders of our own curricula, programs, or academic departments but entails also paying attention to what happens to our assessment data as it circulates through increasingly elaborate systems of genres and literate activity that constitute contemporary education policy reform debates. The previous observations led, then, to the other main research question raised in this study:

> What happens to assessment data when it enters the public sphere of education policy reform debates?

In response to this second main research question, I argue, as the title of this project implies, that *when it enters the public sphere of education policy reform debates, assessment data becomes an available means of persuasion by which policy advocates can invent rhetorical situations that lend support to their reform proposals*. As I indicated in this chapter, assessment data constitutes an available means of persuasion for inventing rhetorical exigencies, claims that something is other than it should be and thus in need of collective action to be resolved. Such proposals for collective action (whether direct or indirect) are the substance of much P-16 discourse.

The framework described above organizes the remaining chapters of this study in the following manner:

Chapter Three begins an analysis of *constraints* on the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment. After describing the notion of values orientations generally, I discuss how values orientations appear in discourse on education reform, specifically through the use of what rhetoricians Kenneth Burke (1950) and Richard Weaver (1953) have described as *god terms* or *ultimate terms*, specific words that imply goals, values, and priorities. One powerful example of an ultimate term in current education policy reform initiatives such as the P-16 movement is *accountability*. Through attention to the early policy reforms around educational assessment implemented by Sylvanus Thayer, Superintendent of the United States Military Academy at West Point during the 1820s and 1830s, and then a broader analysis of the influence of that assessment practices have had on the definition of learning favored in modern higher education, an analysis based on the research of scholar Keith Hoskin, I describe potential resources for persuasion around the term accountability that literacy educators might draw upon to participate

constructively in current education policy reform debates such as those surrounding the P-16 movement.

Chapter Four continues the analysis of *constraints* on the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment begun in the previous chapter, this time focusing on a second component, the precedents established by prior education-related policies. Here, I introduce a model of what I term the *policy cycle* in education reform that attempts to explain how specific policy decisions of the past can act as rhetorical constraints on the potential of current reform initiatives such as those of the P-16 movement. As an example of the policy cycle, this chapter considers another key values orientation in contemporary education policy reform initiatives such as the P-16 movement, one associated with the ultimate term *access*. Based on an analysis of deliberations that occurred in the administration of President Franklin Roosevelt and later in the U.S. Congress during 1943 and 1944 around the "G.I. Bill" of government aid to veterans of World War II, and specifically its provision for allocating government financial aid to college students, I argue that the precedent established by this piece of legislation concerning financial aid allocation functions as a powerful rhetorical constraint that will ultimately thwart calls for "greater accountability" in higher education generally and specifically for national standardized testing of college students as a mechanism of contemporary education policy reform.

Chapter Five shifts focus to the component of *audience* in the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment. Here, I propose that rhetorical analysis of the genre of discourse typically read and composed by reform advocates, the education policy report, provides one way by which literacy educators might begin to learn about the worldview

of audiences holding a policy perspective on higher education. In particular, I describe some rhetorical characteristics and genre conventions appearing in a recent example an education policy report arising from the P-16 movement, the report entitled *America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future* and published by the Educational Testing Service in early 2007. The implication of this analysis is the genre of the education policy report offers a potential medium through which literacy educators and assessment specialists might constructively engage audiences holding a policy perspective on matters such as P-16 reform.

Chapter Six concludes this study by taking up some of the key implications raised in the preceding chapters. Building from the analysis offered in Chapter Five, I suggest that entering contemporary education policy debates such as those involving P-16 reform will require more than as literacy educators we simply learn a new set of genre conventions or rhetorical strategies. Instead, I believe a key implication of P-16 reform concerns redefining the "public" nature of literacy and literacy education. Drawing upon the theories of rhetorician G. Thomas Goodnight (1982), I argue that beyond its particular initiatives and proposals, the P-16 movement at its core represents an attempt to shift a set of issues involving testing, curriculum, and pedagogy from one sphere of argument to another, from either the personal sphere of classroom teaching or the technical sphere of assessment research and scholarship to the public sphere of education policy debates. Such a move, I believe, represents a profound change in our society's assumptions about education, and this change calls for extensive debate and deliberation in order to be fully understood by all parties involved.

If large-scale changes are being proposed for American education, the field of composition studies needs to reflect upon the collective stance we wish to adopt toward policy reform initiatives such as the P-16 movement. So far, large segments of our field appear to have adopted a stance of ignorance, if not apathy, as suggested by the results of the pop quiz that opened this chapter. Such a collective stance leaves our field profoundly vulnerable to the efforts of policy reform advocates for the same reasons that assessment scholars such as Brian Huot and Edward White have argued ignoring issues of writing assessment leaves literacy educators vulnerable to unethical uses of testing. The collective stance that our field chooses to adopt, however, will ultimately depend upon the sense of professional identity we believe characterizes our work, and ourselves. In this era of education policy reform, such decisions, I argue, deserve extended and conscious attention from each of us as literacy educators as well as collective discussion, debate, and deliberation within our field as a whole. If I am successful, I hope the present study might promote such collective deliberation among literacy educators in the field of composition studies.

CHAPTER III

CONSTRAINTS ON THE RHETORICAL SITUATIONS OF COLLEGE WRITING ASSESSMENT (PART #1): VALUES ORIENTATIONS AS MEANS OF PERSUASION IN EDUCATION REFORM DEBATES

> "Rhetoric, as the great energizer of judgment decisions in public affairs, draws its potency from axiology." – Ralph T. Eubanks & Virgil Baker (1971: p 347)

Introduction

Having described some of the rationales, assumptions, and goals of P-16 reform generally, I begin this chapter by considering a specific example of advocacy discourse from the P-16 movement. The 2004 collection *Double the Numbers: Increasing Postsecondary Credentials for Underrepresented Youth* (Kazis, Vargas, & Hoffman) brought together contributions by a range of scholars and reform advocates associated with P-16 initiatives, including David Conley of the University of Oregon and the *Standards for Success* project, Peter Ewell of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Kati Haycock of the Education Trust, and Michael Kirst of Stanford University and the *Bridge Project*. The collection's title signaled a key P-16 concern: helping more students of more diverse backgrounds to attend and complete college. Additionally, as co-editor Richard Kazis (2004) noted in the introduction, "all but a few of the essays in this volume were prepared as background papers for a conference [that] brought together over 450 policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and others" concerned with P-16 reform (p. 14). Therefore, the language and presentation of

these pieces may suggest something of the worldview associated with a policy perspective on higher education.

Also in the introduction, Richard Kazis summed up his sense of the P-16 movement's concerns through a diagram (p. 3) I have reproduced here as Figure 5:

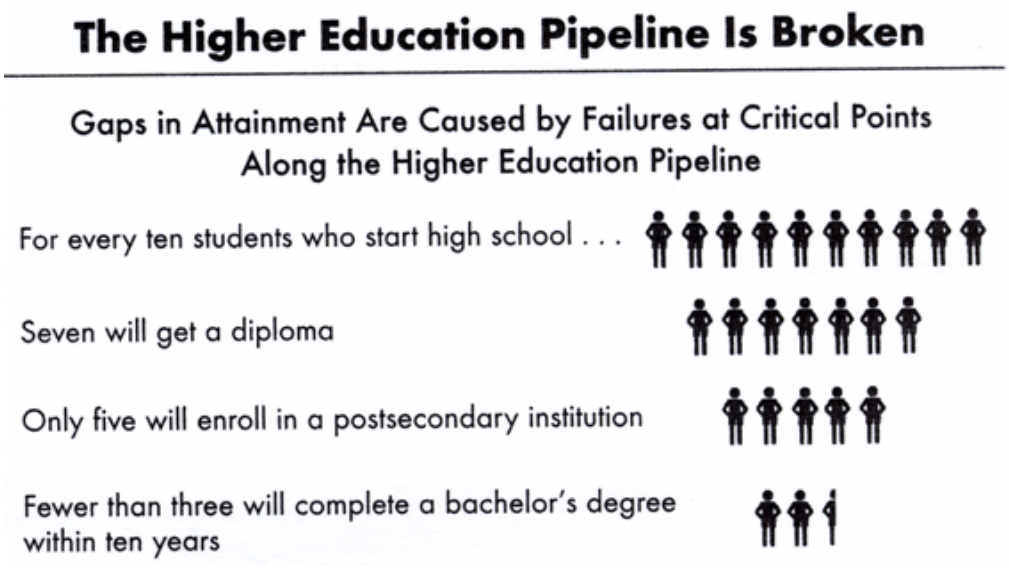

Figure 5. A P-16 advocate's reform argument (from Kazis, 2004: p. 4).

In conjunction with this diagram, Kazis recounted three main themes he considers typical of P-16 reform discourse: 1) too few students currently graduate high school; 2) many students who graduate are under-prepared for the expectations of college-level education; and 3) too many college students fail to graduate or to graduate in a timely manner. Figure 5 reinforces these themes through several persuasive strategies noted in Chapter Two. For instance, the argumentative claims are stated strongly, without the sort of qualifications that many faculty who experience education from a classroom perspective might immediately point out. The "pipeline" analogy again provides a very particular frame through which to interpret the otherwise complex phenomenon of what happens when students move between different levels of formal education. Moreover,

interpretations of assessment data function as rhetorical exigences in the argument for education policy reform being made. That is, in the worldview implied by Figure 5, the shrinking population of "students" descending the right side of the diagram represents a *problem* needing action. Such students can also be understood as the victims of assessment practices at Peter Elbow's (2005) curricular "crunch points." Equally importantly, any traces of those actual assessment practices have disappeared from the reform argument Richard Kazis makes. That is, in practice some combination of course grades, test scores, and other assessments as well as interpretations of that data helped bring about the attrition which Figure 5 depicts, yet readers of Kazis' introduction, or the other contributions to *Double the Numbers* that share this manner of presentation, will not likely be prompted to reflect on what this combination of assessments might actually be, or how well the resulting judgments address crucial issues such as validity and reliability in the interpretation of assessment data (Cronbach, 1988; Huot, 2002; Messick, 1988; 1989).

Likewise of interest, several pages later Kazis turned to the justifications for why his audience should take seriously these "leaks" in the education "pipeline." Within a single paragraph, he made the following series of claims (p. 6):

1. "Employers are much more likely to provide additional training to workers who already have postsecondary education."
2. "Individuals from lower-income families are much [more] likely to enter or complete postsecondary programs that can raise their family incomes."

3. "Better educated individuals are more civically engaged as well: they vote in higher proportions than do dropouts or those with only a high school education, electing candidates and supporting policies that further their advantage."

At the most obvious level, these statements appear to be simply reasons that support Kazis's argument for P-16 reform. Yet, as my presentation seeks to highlight, there are features of Kazis's discourse that deserve further attention. For this reason, I have altered Kazis's claims from their original appearance in his text by reformatting as a list what were consecutive sentences in a single paragraph; likewise, I have underlined certain words. What I hope to show through these changes is the role that a certain kind of justification plays in arguments for education reform such as those of the P-16 movement. While they appear to refer primarily to a concrete reality of everyday social experience, Kazis's reasons also evoked a different set of references related to the goals, priorities, or aspirations that our society frequently associates with public education. That is, within consecutive sentences, Kazis's rhetoric called upon a range of what I'll describe as *values orientations* that are implied by the underlined words. This phenomenon I am describing in education reform discourse that arises from a policy perspective has also received attention from literacy scholars approaching education from a classroom perspective. Notably, C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon observed in *Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy* (1993):

> The choices teachers make in their classrooms are always, in part, choices about what children "ought" to become, what the nation "ought" to aspire to through the productive action of succeeding generations. These are political questions: the question is, what indeed *should* students become and who should have the power

> to say so? What indeed *should* the nation aspire to, and who should compose the stories about that aspiration? (p. 6)

In an important sense, then, the reasons in Richard Kazis's argument function as answers to the sorts of questions Knoblauch and Brannon raised.

Additionally, the values orientations embodied by the underlined words are so well known that it's likely the persuasive appeals they imply may go unnoticed at a conscious level by Kazis's audience, even as they potentially strengthen his overall argument. At the same time, it's worth considering whether, or in what ways, these different values appeals in fact work compatibly with one another. That is, while in the context of education policy discourse, such values appear to sit comfortably side by side in consecutive sentences of a single paragraph, recent policy related scholarship has found their influence on the history and practice of education in America to be more complicated. Historian of education David Labaree (1997), for instance, has argued that the sorts of values orientations I pointed out above actually imply quite different conceptions of what a national system of education will look like and how it will function. At the very least, each values orientation assumes its own set of goals for what should matter most in our society, again, as suggested in the above example through the underlined terms; each values orientation implies a different array of priorities that a system of education should enact, and each requires distinctive uses of assessment to achieve its goals. Hence, what in Kazis's original presentation appeared a coherent and unified set of justifications might actually represent a collection of at least three distinct values orientations that in practice more likely function as rivals instead of allies. Based on his analysis, Labaree viewed the history of American education as series of conflicts

between different values orientations vying for influence—at best coexisting but never fully integrating with one another—and in fact proposed that historical eras in the development of American education can best be distinguished according the particular values orientations that dominated education reform discourse and practice.

Given the importance of values orientations in education policy reform arguments such as those of the P-16 movement, this chapter concerns the influence that such values orientations may have on how policy makers and other audiences in the public sphere of argument (Goodnight, 1982) interpret a wide array of assessment data that increasingly circulates within debates related to education policy reform, what I've characterized as the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment. Drawing upon the model I developed in the preceding chapter, the first of three main questions raised in this chapter can be stated as the following:

> How do values orientations function as *constraints* on the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment?

In response, I argue in that *values orientations provide a vocabulary of* ultimate*, or* god*, terms (Burke, 1950; Weaver, 1965) which policy reform advocates apply to frame their interpretations of assessment data and other issues in education policy reform in order to help justify their reform proposals, and which represent part of "the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle, 1954: 1355b) that exist within a given culture and time period.* Because values orientations arise from the accumulated traditions, priorities, and history of a given society, they develop slowly, and hence the vocabulary of terms they provide achieve their meanings tacitly, with the result that most audiences of education policy discourse (and many rhetors themselves) are likely unfamiliar with the origins of such

terms and, more importantly, the underlying assumptions they imply. In extreme cases, these ultimate terms may function as what rhetorician Richard Weaver (1965) described as *charismatic terms*, in that certain words seem to gain persuasiveness with public audiences to the extent that their meanings become increasingly vague, or otherwise taken for granted.

Closer attention to these available means of persuasion may allow us to understand how rhetors in contemporary education policy debates persuade their audiences on matters such as those involving college writing assessment. To do so, however, we'll need to go beyond more traditional notions of rhetorical analysis. As rhetorician Michael Halloran (2005) has recently observed, "For an Aristotelian [critic], the means of persuasion are simply 'available'—on hand, ready for the rhetor to take up and deploy" (p. 121). Instead, Halloran claimed, rhetorical analysis must also consider "how those means of persuasion came to be 'available' in the first place, how values and beliefs became sufficiently common that a rhetor could hope to move an audience by invoking them" (p. 121). With Halloran's observations in mind, then, this chapter raises a second set of questions about the function of constraints in the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment, and specifically the case of a particularly prominent ultimate term in contemporary education policy discourse (Huot, 2002; Katz, 1998; Kinkead & Simpson, 2000; Ohmann, 2000) and likewise P-16 reform arguments (Field, 2005), the term *accountability*:

> When in the history of American higher education did the ultimate term *accountability* become "available" as a means of persuasion for advocates of education policy reform?

> What are the implications of this history for literacy educators in the field of composition studies who will confront the term *accountability* as they attempt to enter contemporary education policy reform debates such as those involving the P-16 movement?

In response I argue, drawing upon the research of education and management studies scholar Keith Hoskin (1979; 1993; 1994; 2004; Hoskin & Macve, 1988; 1994), that, concerning question two, *an education policy reform initiative implemented at the United States Military at West Point, NY, during the early nineteenth-century first introduced assumptions deriving from notions of* accountability *into American higher education*; and that, concerning question three, *these historical origins potentially make "available" to contemporary literacy educators additional layers of meaning than those typically associated with the term* accountability *today, meanings that might potentially serve as the means of persuasion for policy reform arguments which support literacy learning practices valued by teachers and students*.

To develop these claims, the remainder of this chapter includes the following four parts. Section Two addresses the first main question raised and begins by presenting a rhetorical view of language that foregrounds the role of values in public policy argumentation. Using the theories of rhetoricians Kenneth Burke and Richard Weaver, it then offers a description of how values orientations appear in discourse through the mechanism of particular *ultimate*, or *god*, *terms*. Next, section two explains how the choice of an appropriate set of ultimate terms helps rhetors generate *identification* (Burke, 1951; 1969) with their audiences, a process that can also be understood through

Aristotle's notion of *ethos*. Section Two concludes by describing the influence that values orientations can have on acts of interpretation involved with college writing assessment.

Section Three takes up the second main question and opens by identifying two prominent ultimate terms in the discourse of P-16 reform, *accountability* and *access*. After describing how the values orientation of accountability has been experienced by educators from a classroom perspective, this section reviews the observations of commentators on education policy that describe aspects of accountability as typically understood today. Section Three next argues that the ultimate term accountability first became available as a means of persuasion in American higher education policy debates through a series of reforms at West Point in the early nineteenth century, and details the role that innovations in educational assessment played in these early reforms.

Building on this historically oriented analysis, Section Four then considers the last main question and argues that knowledge of the complex history of meanings surrounding accountability can help literacy educators of today appropriate this term in support of policy arguments that express our commitments to sophisticated versions of literacy teaching and learning. In particular, Section Four explains how early reforms involving accountability marked a transition for the first time toward assumptions about teaching and learning that we now associate with modern university education. Finally, this section details three such innovations that accompanied early reforms related to accountability, including the use of assessment to provide more direct feedback on the learning process, the shift toward classroom pedagogies that promoted active student learning, and the use of student writing assignments which fostered greater individual subjectivity.

Chapter Three as a whole concludes by considering the implications that these arguments have for how we might more persuasively characterize our work as literacy educators to audiences holding a policy perspective on higher education who accept accountability as a rhetorical constraint.

How Values Orientations Function as Rhetorical Constraints

"Practical" and "Rhetorical" Views of Language

The present study grows out of a broad concern with how literacy educators can use language more effectively to persuade audiences who hold significant influence in contemporary higher education outside the field of composition studies. Among the other scholars sharing this larger project are Kinkead & Simpson (2000), whose work attempts to help college faculty serving as writing program administrators better communicate with representatives of their local campus administrations. They began their piece by offering the following rationale:

> The perception of WPAs as lacking administrative skill may stem from their ignorance of the frames of reference higher level administrators use. To move closer to solving this problem, it is helpful to know some of the key terms that pepper a typical provost's meeting. […] Using this common language in reports and proposals written by the WPA is part of finding common ground. (p. 72)

Based on this problem definition, Kinkead & Simpson spent much of their piece elaborating a glossary of "key administrative terms," including *student retention*, *student attrition*, *student credit hours*, *productivity*, *mission statement*, *assessment*, and *accountability*. They concluded their glossary by claiming: "Administrators use these terms frequently. Their meanings are well-understood and so embedded that, as with a

nation's currency, everyone is expected to know how to use them and how they relate to each other" (p. 77). The orientation that characterizes this approach I describe as a "practical" view of language, in that it sees language principally as a more-or-less neutral medium through which everyday affairs may be transacted. Although a practical view of language asks literacy educators to pay attention to the language they use, it neglects the implications that I believe language choices may have beyond the immediate affairs they transact.

So far as it goes, the practical view of language that Kinkaid & Simpson favored provides a useful service to literacy educators. At the same time, the present study goes beyond a merely practical view of language in education policy discourse to explore other, political consequences that choices such as vocabulary can have on our work as literacy educators. Such an orientation I describe as a rhetorical view of language. Here, my concerns follow from recent observations by rhetorician Sharon Crowley (2006) about the neglect of values in contemporary argument and American discourse generally. Crowley, in her book, *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism*, observed:

> Value (quality) is an important topic in ancient systems of invention. Ancient rhetoricians were able to list values held in common by their communities—honor, justice, expediency—with enviable ease. [However,] unless they are motivated to argument primarily by religious beliefs, Americans don't ordinarily frame disagreements as arguments about values. Our lack of explicit talk about values permits fraudulent value arguments to be accepted regularly. (pp. 88-89)

Crowley's discussion helps explain what is missing from Kinkead & Simpson's glossary, despite its other benefits. In the same manner that Crowley believed characterizes Americans generally, Kinkead & Simpson assumed that the communication problems they rightly point out can be resolved in ways that downplay the contrasting priorities, or what I've termed values orientations, that potentially underlie disputes between campus administrators and literacy educators on matters related to education policy such as writing program administration. In contrast, I've suggested that vocabulary choices will not only influence what happens in the immediate context of policy making but will likewise shape the means of persuasion available for subsequent deliberations, and thus have political implications that go beyond the concerns of a solely practical view of language.

Moreover, Crowley's orientation also helps frame my observations at the beginning of this chapter about the rhetoric of Richard Kazis and similar advocates of P-16 reform. That is, changing the ways American education operates, as Kazis and all P-16 advocates want in one form or another, will undoubtedly have the most practical of consequences for how administrators, faculty, and students transact the everyday affairs of American higher education. Yet such changes will require not merely practical decisions about issues such as how writing assessment will be used but a broader discussion of what goals, priorities, and values such decisions must ultimately serve. Even the most apparently "practical" of issues, writing assessment, necessarily implies assumptions about values because, as Brian Huot (2002) noted: "The ability to assess is the ability to determine and control what is valuable" (p. 107). For this reason, the mixture of values orientations to which Kazis appealed in rapid succession to justify his

P-16 reforms suggests that this larger discussion of values is unresolved or yet to be undertaken.

Values Orientations as Rhetorical Constraints: Ethos, Identification, and Ultimate Terms

From a rhetorical view of language such as I described above, understanding the role of values orientations in policy reform discourse becomes crucial. To do so, I draw upon the model of the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment that I developed in Chapter Two of this study to argue that values orientations function as potential rhetorical *constraints* (Bitzer, 1968; 1980) on education policy discourse. This component of Bitzer's rhetorical situation includes, among other things, the language conventions adhered to by a rhetor's audience. Successful rhetors recognize the vocabulary favored by their audience and draw upon it as they formulate their arguments. For this reason, Bitzer's "constraints" were constraining not simply in the negative sense of limiting the rhetor's choices but rather provide potential resources that can help guide, direct, or constrain an audience to accept the rhetor's proposal.

Such choices of language may also be understood as appeals to what Aristotle described as *ethos,* in modern terms appeals to the character of the rhetor, or the credibility a rhetor gains not from the rational appeal of her arguments (*logos*) but from the embodiment in the discourse of larger cultural values shared by the rhetor and her audience. More precisely, Aristotle divided ethos into three components that a discourse may call attention to in order to enhance the rhetor's credibility. These components include *phronesis*, or the rhetor's practical wisdom concerning problem at hand; *arete*, or the overall moral disposition of the rhetor; and finally, *eunoia*, or good will toward the audience (1378a). As Aristotle noted, "people always think well of speeches adapted to,

and reflecting, their own character" (1390a). Within a piece of discourse, the prime resource for conveying goodwill toward the audience will be the language a rhetor chooses to acknowledge her audience's culturally defined values. That is, values orientations help determine the varieties of *ethos* that reform advocates can invent through their discourse. Such a process of invention, then, entails choosing terminology that embodies the values orientations adhered to by the intended audience.

When successful, this process results in a state of identification (Burke, 1951; 1969) between audience and rhetor that supports the persuasiveness of her discourse. Rhetoricians have long recognized a link between the notion of identity, whether individual or collective, and arguments over values. Among recent theorists to explore this connection have been Kenneth Burke and Richard Weaver. For Burke modern rhetoric marked a break with the classical tradition because the process of rhetorical communication no longer focuses primarily on logical persuasion (1951; 1969). Instead, Burke understood modern rhetoric to operate by a process of *identification*. According to Burke, contemporary rhetors seek to convince their audiences to identify with the messages they communicate. The process of identification occurs by means of what Burke (1950; 1969) called consubstantiality. As he explained in *A Rhetoric of Motives*:

> A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so. […] To identify A with B is to make A "consubstantial" with B. (pp. 20-21)

Among the key strategies by which a rhetor may promote identification and consubstantiality are through choices about language that set up favorable relations

between the rhetor and her audience. Burke noted, “you persuade a man [sic] only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his…. And you give ‘signs’ of such consubstantiality by deference to an audience’s ‘opinions” (p. 55). For Burke language choices project a set of values, and the successful rhetor makes her choices based on the values with which she anticipates her audience will wish to identify.

Richard Weaver’s theory of rhetoric also gave attention to the importance of identification in the workings of modern discourse. Weaver focused on the effect that vocabulary choices can have upon how audiences respond to a rhetor’s discourse. In his essay “Ultimate Terms in Contemporary Rhetoric” (1965), Weaver argued that in any successful discourse, a particular terminology will appear which embodies a set of values that the audience finds compelling. These words Weaver referred to as *god terms*. As he explained, “by ‘god term’ we mean that expression about which all other expressions are ranked as subordinate and serving dominations and powers. Its force imparts to the others their lesser degree of force, and fixes the scale by which degrees of comparison are understood” (p. 212). The appearance of these key terms in discourse signals to an audience that the rhetor shares its values, and thus has a basis from which to promote identification or consubstantiality. Ultimate terms function in ways similar to rhetorician Michael Calvin McGee’s (1980) characterization of the *ideograph*: that is, an ultimate term can be thought of as “an ordinary language term found in political discourse [which is] a high-order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal” (p. 16). Successful rhetors draw upon terminology that their audiences recognize then invent discourse which organizes this

vocabulary into hierarchies that motivate those audiences to believe and act according to the positions those rhetors advocate. Ideally, successful rhetoric promotes a rhetor's specific proposal as well as projects a sense of identity that is potentially both recognizable and transformative for the audience.

Values Orientations and the Interpretation of Assessment Data

After I recently presented a version of this study at the national convention of the Modern Language Association, the first response from the audience came from a professor born and educated in Germany, who later came to teach in America. He spoke passionately about his reactions to the new environment of higher education in which he found himself. Specifically, he mentioned the excitement he initially felt about the wide range of opportunities available in American higher education and about the diversity of students who entered college, a range that far exceeded his experience in European universities. Then, however, he expressed his frustration with the previous training of his undergraduates and their struggles with what he considered the expectations for college-level academic work. He went so far, he explained, as to sneak looks into the student portfolios many of his composition colleagues left, often unclaimed, outside their offices at the end of each semester in order to see if other teachers better handled the challenges he encountered. And, he said, his frustrations were confirmed when he read through the writing of his colleagues' students. This professor concluded by announcing his skepticism about our system of American higher education that favors broad the goal of access over other priorities, or what I've labeled values orientations.

What's noteworthy to me about these comments is the link between values orientations, education policy, and assessment that this European professor's experience

dramatized. Among other things, although his remarks ostensibly dealt with assessment in the most obvious sense, that is, the judgment of quality in student work, the most appropriate response to the issues he raised requires, I believe, not discussions of T-Units, cohesive ties, subject-verb agreement, or any of the other standards by which the quality of student writing has traditionally been measured. Rather, his comments deal instead with the cumulative effects of the underlying priorities, or value orientations, which inform decision-making on matters such as assessment across institutions and systems of education—at the level of education policy. That is, no analyses of textual features in those students' portfolios alone will serve to persuade this professor that his campus or his colleagues who teach writing are doing their job successfully. What's needed instead is a discussion of the values orientations that the circumstances in which he finds himself, in the culture of American higher education at the turn of the 21st century, are serving to uphold; and equally so, those values orientations that contemporary higher education policy in America tends to downplay. Yet, as Sharon Crowley observed, our society generally is less willing to acknowledge the place of such values orientations in education policy arguments, or elsewhere. For this reason, the sense of frustration my respondent described can seem intractable, and thus the need for the sort of rhetorical analysis I offer in this study is, I believe, crucial.

How *Accountability* Became "Available" as a Constraint on the Rhetorical Situations of College Writing Assessment

Accountability and Access as Ultimate Terms in P-16 Reform Discourse

Over time, persistent patterns of choice concerning vocabulary and *ethos* in part help to distinguish discrete discourse communities of all sizes from one another, whether

the Athenian city state that Aristotle himself experienced in the fourth century B.C.E. or the ever-growing variety of specialized academic discourse communities studied by contemporary scholars of writing across the curriculum (Bazerman, 1988; Herrington, 1985; Prior, 1998; Williamson, 1983). So, for example, within the field of education studies generally, scholars such as Brodkey (1986) and Knoblauch (1990) have described the function of the word *literacy* as an ultimate term that embodies a range of powerful values orientations for many teachers. Moreover, Wiley (1992) argued for the vital role played by *process* as an ultimate term that helped synthesize a range of values and priorities around the teaching of writing into what would eventually become a new and distinct discourse community, the field of composition studies in which we work today. Despite the great complexity and diversity of perspectives that in practice constitute our field, Richard Weaver's notion of a hierarchy of key words aligned between *god terms* and *devil terms* at each extreme can also be recognized in the professional discourse of composition studies, expressed most famously perhaps in Donald Murray's (1982) well-known call to teach "process, not product."

As with the scholarship previously noted, my approach to identifying ultimate terms within the discourse of the P-16 reform movement involved observing patterns of usage that occurred repeatedly and appeared significant. Using this strategy, an otherwise routine instance of deliberation over education policy reform highlights some tendencies in vocabulary choice among P-16 advocates which this chapter (and the next one) will explore. During the spring of 2005, when Kati Haycock, director the Education Trust, and a well-known P-16 advocate, gave testimony before the United States Senate's Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee on matters needing reform in

American higher education, press coverage characterized the event with the headline: "Senate Panel Debates Access, Accountability" (Field, 2005: p. 1). According to reports, the hearings considered policies "to make higher education more accessible to adult learners" as well as "what Congress could do to hold colleges accountable for the graduation rates of their students" (p. 1). That these terms, *access* and *accountability*, appear prominently in media coverage of this Congressional hearing follows a pattern that other commentators on contemporary education reform (to be discussed momentarily) have likewise noted. While Chapter Four of this study explores the rhetorical constraints posed by *access* as an ultimate term in discourse of P-16 reform, the remainder of this chapter concerns the ultimate term accountability and the values orientation it embodies.

Charismatic Terms as "Rhetorical Onions": A Note on Methodology

Although the ultimate terms of more specialized discourse communities may remain unknown to outsiders, education policy reform debates typically occur in a public sphere of argument (Goodnight, 1982) that exposes a broad range of citizens to their messages. For this reason, the terms *accountability* and *access* are likely familiar at some level to most literacy educators in the field of composition studies. Indeed, Huot (2002) has rightly warned composition teachers against the dangers posed by some meanings of *accountability* in writing assessment practice, while the term *access* has figured prominently in the discourse of composition studies around issues such as basic writing (Fox, 1993; 1999). Given this background, it may be easy for literacy educators to assume a hierarchy for *accountability* and *access* similar to the one for *product* and

process that I suggested Donald Murray's famous mantra implied, where *accountability* functions as a devil term in a hierarchy that makes *access* as an ultimate god term.

Although such an arrangement may generate an apparent symmetry, there are complexities of meaning I hope to show with both these terms that should lead us to question such an easy hierarchy of value orientations when encountering the discourse of education policy reform or when making rhetorical choices ourselves about the vocabulary to employ in presenting our work to audiences outside the field of composition studies. Instead of taking for granted common-sense definitions or hierarchies, the analyses in this chapter and the next seek to enact an approach rhetorician Jean Nienkamp (2001) described as a type of research whose result "complicates [a] concept far beyond what common parlance would recognize" (p. xi.). Borrowing a description from author Dorothy Sayers, Nienkamp called this process "onionisation" (p. xi). That is, I hope to show some of the layers of meaning that have accumulated upon the rhetorical "onions" of the ultimate terms *accountability* and *access*. Peeling back these layers by describing some of the historical circumstances through which references to accountability began to emerge in the discourse of American higher education policy may at least help prevent these ultimate terms of education policy discourse from functioning as purely *charismatic terms*, without any clear referents and with the tacit persuasiveness that Richard Weaver has argued such terms otherwise possess. On a more modest scale, Weaver claimed, "perhaps the best any of us can do is to hold a dialectic with himself to see what the wider circumferences of his terms of persuasion are" (1965; p. 232). I intend this chapter and the next to enact the methods of rhetorical analysis that Nienkamp and Weaver suggest.

Experiencing Accountability from a Classroom Perspective

One implication of a rhetorical approach to the language of education reform arguments such as I described earlier is that meanings occur not solely via the logic of formal definitions but likewise through the often mundane, sometimes emotionally charged, experiences that over time come to form our professional identities as literacy educators. That is, while I will be discussing some of the implications that different meanings for the ultimate term *accountability* might have from a policy perspective on education reform such as that represented by the discourse of the P-16 movement, the force of the values orientation associated with this term when experienced from a classroom perspective in some ways transcends issues of language or vocabulary entirely. To illustrate what I mean here, consider the following anecdote narrated by composition scholar Chris Gallagher in his book, *Radical Departures* (2002), of an episode from his life as a young college writing teacher:

> [A]s I pass [an academic building while crossing campus], a professor steps out, motions for me to stop. She seems agitated. […] "Why is it," she asks without introduction […], "these students can't write?" My head spins. These students can't write? None of them? Are they illiterate? Bad spellers? Can't use commas? And I'm responsible for this? And I can "fix" this? Before I can formulate a response, she adds, "You have to keep on top of them. You're not doing them any favors by being lax on grammar. These kids need to be able to function in their jobs. Just give them what they need." I don't know what to say. I stammer, I stutter, and all I am able to say is "Thanks for the advice." And I rush off, even more quickly[….] (p. 62)

I consider Gallagher's narrative to be perhaps the second most frequently told story characterizing the professional identity of literacy educators in this country.[2] Whether we use the term *accountability* to describe the events Chris Gallagher described, I suspect most educators holding a classroom perspective have experienced some version of this story, and, as Gallagher dramatized, the meanings arising from it sometimes go beyond the power of language to describe. What stands out to me in Gallagher's description is how institutional expectations, in this case around issues of student literacy, work to enact power relations between educators who inhabit different roles. Over time, such expectations come to influence not merely the institutional positions occupied by different educators but the sense of professional identity that such educators develop about themselves and their work. Stated more directly, also from a classroom perspective, and specifically concerning the assumptions of P-16 reform, were the comments of a participant in a collaborative project between secondary and post-secondary faculty coordinated by Miles McCrimmon (2005): "As a high school teacher, I felt like the finger was always pointed at me as to what I did not teach my students and how unprepared they were for college. I began questioning my skills and strategies. […]" (p. 252). This feeling of being beholden to, or under the influence of, others appeared in the characterizations of both Gallagher and McCrimmon from the classroom perspective and perhaps captures some of the peculiar force carried by the phrase "being held accountable."

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[2] I suspect the *most* well-known such story characterizing the professional identity of American literacy educators would be Wayne Booth's famous anecdote which opens his essay "Borrowing from Within: The Art of the Freshman Essay" (1963/1992): "Riding on a train, I found myself talking with my seat-mate, who asked me what I did for a living. 'I teach English.' Do you have any trouble predicting his response? His face fell, and he groaned, 'Oh, dear, I'll have to watch my language" (p. 405).

Accountability from the Policy Perspective of Contemporary Higher Education Reform: The First Layer of Meanings in a "Rhetorical Onion"

Shifting from the classroom perspective to a policy perspective, the notion of accountability has received considerable attention from critics and observers of recent trends in contemporary higher education reform. By reviewing only a few such characterizations that attempt to define accountability and its implications, I want to foreground several patterns which emerge from these descriptions. Most obviously and immediately, the values orientation represented by accountability contains much that can potentially threaten the work of literacy educators as well as a viable sense of professional identity. Besides the imbalance of power relations described above, appeals to accountability often originate with critics who themselves are removed from the immediate circumstances (in the case of education, specific classrooms or the campus) where the activities they criticize actually occur. Moreover, when brought against other persons, a charge concerning accountability functions as much to indict the ethical character of those persons as anything about their specific behavior. Finally, the focus of attention implied by the notion of accountability often works to mask the power relations it ultimately reinforces. While charges related to accountability serve in practice to control others, or specifically, to "hold them accountable," the clash between participants in such a conflict typically unfolds indirectly, through an intermediate set of references. That is, rather than direct confrontation, in the sense of claiming, "I say you are not doing your job as you should," which is the undercurrent of the power relations Gallagher and McCrimmon articulated, appeals to accountability often refract such confrontation through an intermediate set of references, usually some form of assessment. So, for

instance, instead of the above indictment, an appeal to accountability will likely be phrased in a claim such as "You need to be held accountable because, according to our assessment data (test scores, ratings, observations of student performance, etc.), you are not doing your job as you should." Instead of the direct conflict fore-grounded in the first claim, the second claim uses an appeal to accountability and assessment data in order to redirect attention away from the sense of agency that actually underlies this conflict. That is, instead of "you" and "I" engaging in a conflict, appeals to accountability and assessment data reframe this power dynamic into a conflict between "you" and "our assessment data," with the result that it becomes more difficult to determine what specific political agents are actually in conflict and, as Gallagher and MacCrimmon dramatized, how literacy educators placed in the role of "you" might constructively respond.

A second pattern also runs through these attempts to describe and define the notion of accountability, one perhaps less apparent than the first but, I want to argue, equally important. While appeals to accountability represent genuine and potential threats to our work as literacy educators, such appeals are in fact *rhetorical* in nature. That is, the power relations that appeals to accountability help bring about and reinforce do not exist inherently but are constructed rhetorically. In particular, at least three key elements associated with contemporary meanings of the ultimate term accountability can be explained in relation to rhetorical principles. These elements relate to matters of audience, rhetorical purpose, and credibility. First, the notion of accountability implies the existence of an audience of some sort beyond the participants immediately involved in the activity under consideration. For instance, in their glossary Kinkead & Simpson's (2000) definition of accountability hinged on the issue of audience. They claimed that

"*accountability* refers to reports to off-campus authorities or stakeholders, such as the institution's governing board, the state governing body, the commissioner for higher education, the governor, or the legislature" (p. 77; emphasis in original). This definition essentially catalogues a series of specific audiences whose rhetorical needs define the meaning of accountability as a concept, rhetorical needs presumably different from those of a writing program administrator or educators holding a classroom perspective. The reserved tone that Kinkead & Simpson have adopted downplays the sorts of emotionally charged conflict with such audiences of "others" that Gallagher and McCrimmon dramatized around issues of accountability. At the same time, the need to encounter an audience of others different from oneself figures prominently in all these understandings of accountability.

The rhetorical nature and purpose of such communication is likewise crucial to contemporary notions of accountability. That is, accountability implies not merely contact with an audience that is somehow "other" than ourselves but a rhetorical dynamic that emphasizes the necessity of persuasion. So, for example, after giving a very basic definition of accountability as the "responsibility for the justification of expenditures, decisions, or the results of one's own efforts," assessment scholar Michael Scriven (1991) added that it "often requires some kind of cost-effectiveness evaluation where it is taken to imply more than the ability to *explain* how one spent the money ('fiscal accountability'), but it is also expected that one be able to *justify* this in terms of the achieved results" (p. 46: emphasis in original). Putting these observations in the context of rhetorical theory and the issue of purpose, Scriven's distinction implies the need, when

addressing an audience concerned with issues of accountability, for argument and persuasion rather than merely neutral explanation or presentation of facts.

More precisely, appeals to accountability function rhetorically to shift what rhetoricians refer to as the *burden of proof* assumed between parties in a debate. The party who makes a charge concerning the accountability of another positions herself as the one whose assumptions, or versions of reality, are to be taken as having the presumption of truth. So, for instance, P-16 advocate Kevin Carey (2004), writing for the Education Trust in a 2004 policy report entitled *A Matter of Degrees: Improving Graduation Rates in Four-Year Colleges and Universities*, used the ultimate term *accountability* to support a negative evaluation of contemporary higher education:

> [R]ight now most colleges and universities simply don't have to perform at a higher level than they already do. This absence of urgency exists because higher education is largely insulated from the accountability for success normally created by competition in the marketplace. (n.p.)

Carey's argument immediately positioned colleges and universities on the defensive, and his use of accountability implied a particular version of reality, one favoring the economic system of capitalism, as the default. Higher education, and all those associated with it, become the "other" in Carey's argument. These others who are to be "held accountable"—the "you" in my example above, the young college composition teacher in Gallagher's narrative, the high-school teacher dealing with P-16 reform whom MacCrimmon quoted—are placed in a position where their versions of reality must be "proved" rather than being taken for granted. Against this burden of proof, literacy educators, like other faculty, face an additional rhetorical challenge in responding to

policy reform arguments that invoke accountability. Not surprisingly, argumentation and legal scholar Richard Gaskins (1992) has claimed that the principle technique by which institutions wield power in modern society involves controlling assumptions about the burden of proof in matters of deliberation.

Related to the previous point, and a final aspect in the rhetorical construction of the ultimate term *accountability*, the sorts of argument that arise with concerns about accountability also depend upon matters of *ethos* or credibility among the participants in education policy debates. Elaborating further on the distinctions Michael Scriven raised, education administration scholar Richard N. Katz emphasized how assumptions about credibility underlie calls for "greater accountability." "At the core" of accountability, Katz stated bluntly, "is the suggestion that something is 'rotten in Denmark,' as regards the use of public funds" (p. 87). Here, the focus of attention becomes not specific actions or behavior but broader assumptions about the trustworthiness of public servants, such as literacy educators, a concern that Aristotle described through the concept of *ethos*. More ominously perhaps, Katz believed that "the call for increased accountability is the clear signal of a shift from a belief that faculty and administrators are faithful stewards of our young people's and nation's future, to a belief that we are 'pigs at the public trough,' who—like many others—must be overseen and regulated if we are to make wise use of public funds" (p. 87). The rise of accountability as an issue and an ultimate term in contemporary education policy debates suggests that, as Katz noted, the sense of trust and credibility that public audiences perceive in the rhetoric of college faculty and American higher education generally may be under increasing challenge. Kinkead & Simpson acknowledged a similar trend when they observe that "given the erosion in public trust

and respect for universities, accountability receives increasing emphasis" (p. 77). For these reasons, closer attention the language and rhetoric through which we as literacy educators present ourselves and our work to public audiences outside the field of composition studies will likely be of greater importance during this era of education policy reform than any time in our past.

Finally, concerns over the meanings of accountability in education policy discourse are particularly germane to the topic of writing assessment, as Brian Huot (2002) pointed out. He observed: "Accountability is often constructed as an integral component in assessment practice. In this way, assessment is seen as calling teachers and administrators to task, so that they can account for their programs and students to a higher authority defined by the assessment itself" (p. 173). The "higher authority" that educational assessments create around the values orientation of accountability is also in part, as I have suggested, a rhetorical construction. And I propose that viable strategies for addressing the challenge posed by the above meanings associated with accountability require applying the rhetorical perspective on the language of education policy reform discourse described earlier. The remaining sections of this chapter illustrate one approach for doing so.

A Second Historical Layer of Meanings in a Charismatic Term: Accountability and Assessment at the United States Military Academy in the Early Nineteenth-Century

Here, I want to begin the process of peeling away layers of meaning from the rhetorical onion that the ultimate term *accountability* represents in the discourse of education policy reform by exploring the institutional practices regarding assessment and pedagogy at the United States Military Academy at West Point during the earlier decades

of the nineteenth century. I choose this institution and moment of history because recent scholarship outside the field of composition studies (Hoskin, 1993; 1994; 2004; Hoskin & Macve, 1988; 1994) associates this environment with a series of education policy reforms that consciously introduced notions of accountability into American higher education for the first time. Historians of composition have not yet, however, acknowledged this influence on developments in American literacy pedagogy of the nineteenth century. Instead, attention has focused on more well-known examples of change from a classroom perspective such as the current-traditional writing pedagogy devised at Harvard by Adams Sherman Hill (Crowley, 1997; Kitzhaber, 1990; Paine, 1997), the rival new-rhetorical curriculum pioneered by Fred Newton Scott at the University of Michigan (Stewart, 1992; 1997) and his disciples such as Gertrude Buck (Campbell, 1996), or the larger shift of nineteenth-century American higher education toward the research model embodied by German universities (Paul & Blakeslee, 2000; Russell, 1991).

Because the scholarship of composition history has thus far neglected the case of West Point in the early nineteenth century, to help understand the changes occurred there, I'll draw upon a different line of research for the remainder of this chapter, the work of British historian of education and management studies Keith Hoskin. To literacy educators in America, Keith Hoskins is probably best known for his 1979 piece, "The Examination, Disciplinary Power, and Rational Schooling," which scholars of writing assessment occasionally cite to help describe changes in examination practices at European colleges during the seventeenth- through nineteenth-centuries. Since that publication, however, Hoskin's academic affiliation has moved from education to an

appointment in a school of management and his object of study has shifted to the history of accounting and accountancy (Hoskin, 1993; 1994; 2004; Hoskin & Macve, 1988; 1994). At the same time, he has continued to pursue connections between historical developments in the fields of education and business management, most prominently through analysis of the influences that the notion of accountability and the assessment practices it helps foster have had on both areas of Western society during the past three centuries. For Hoskin, the key environment for understanding the rise of accountability as a concept defining the practices of assessment and pedagogy in American higher education turns out to be the United States Military Academy in the first half of the nineteenth century (Hoskin, 1993; 1994; Hoskin & Macve, 1988).

With this context in mind, I want to describe some of the events that transpired at West Point during that era, using Hoskin's historical research as a starting point. Despite the references to history and a narrative frame in the upcoming discussion, my methodology is not strictly historical in nature, however, if only because I depend primarily upon secondary sources to construct my interpretation; likewise, space limitations here prevent anything approaching a full-fledged historical study of the years discussed. More to the point, I'm concerned less with the history of West Point in itself than with what that history might offer as a way of understanding the complex nature of the term accountability and its function as a persuasive appeal in contemporary education policy debates. In this way, I see my approach as aligned with composition historian Robert Connors' (1988) perspective that "the [historical] hypotheses we evolve are all either implicitly or explicitly a commentary on what is going on in the teaching of writing and its meaning in our culture today. […] Meaningful historical writing must teach us

what people in the past have wanted from literacy so that we may come to understand what *we* want" (p. 7; emphasis in original). By exploring the history of reform at West Point, then, I hope to pull back additional layers of meaning from the "rhetorical onion" that is accountability. Ultimately, based on Hoskin's analysis, I believe there exist meanings associated with the history of accountability that might make this term something other than a devil term for literacy educators. Such historically derived meanings link the notion of the accountability in education to the very core of assumptions that gave rise to the modern university which as college faculty today we have ultimately come to inhabit. With such an historically grounded notion of accountability in mind, it becomes possible this ultimate term might in fact offer resources for making persuasive appeals that literacy educators today can employ to argue for policy proposals which support the versions of teaching, learning, and assessment that our field values. Such, in any case, is my hope.

To be fair to the studies of composition history I referenced earlier, the innovations of West Point between approximately 1820 and 1860 do not center exclusively on matters of writing instruction. That is, there emerged at West Point no discernable composition pedagogy equivalent to Hill's current-traditional model at Harvard or Scott's new rhetorical approach at Michigan. Instead, the reforms at West Point altered fundamental assumptions about how learning and teaching would take place across all subject areas, including the sciences, mathematics, and engineering, and specifically the role that assessment might play in both processes. At the same time, Hoskin argued, such reforms depended on a more prominent role than ever before for student writing, and for assessment generally, across the curriculum.

West Point before and after Education Policy Reforms based on Accountability

At first glance, the origins of the United States' Military Academy seem to make it an unlikely place for innovation of any kind. Founded in 1801, the first fifteen years of its history were marked by little to distinguish West Point from many of the other colleges which existed in America at that time. Despite its mission to prepare soldiers, Hoskin (1994) noted that discipline and formality were less a part of the military training offered than we might expect today. The environment overall fostered social relations among students and between students and faculty based more upon shared backgrounds of culture and social class than academic achievement. Likewise, its original academic curriculum was not considered especially rigorous even by the relaxed standards of the era, and as a result, some students were able to graduate in fewer than three years. As education historian Frederick Rudolph (1977) observed:

> The colonial college student was essentially ungraded and unexamined. At the high-water mark of the classical college, grading and examining were poisoned by the recitation system and made somewhat ridiculous by the extent to which public oral examinations were gestures in public relations and therefore not designed to show up student deficiencies. (pp. 145-146)

On a variety of academic and extra-curricular matters, then, the early West Point fit with Halloran's (1982) general description of American college life during the nineteenth century in which education emphasized the shaping of a certain type of culturally sanctioned moral character over the mastery of specialized content knowledge (see also Geiger & Bubolz, 2000).

The factors which brought about change in this otherwise undistinguished environment appeared on at least two levels. More generally, the growing influence of the industrial revolution across Europe during the preceding decades began to reach the United States in the 1810's. With it came growing attention to the need for training in the physical sciences, math, and especially engineering. Hoskin (1994) pointed out that the United States as a nation had essentially no formally trained, native-born engineers during the early nineteenth century. Among European institutions, the national military academies had played a prominent role in reshaping how engineering and mathematics were taught, a point to which I'll return momentarily, and for this reason the U.S. government sought to reform its own military academy by modeling it upon European innovations. To accomplish this goal, Congress employed an individual who would go on to serve as the more immediate, concrete factor that brought change to West Point: Sylvanus Thayer. Prior to assuming his post as Superintendent at West Point in the autumn of 1817, Thayer spent over a year traveling Europe at government expense to gather insights about math and engineering education that might be applied to reforms at West Point. Among the results of his travels, Thayer brought back a collection of almost 1000 textbooks on math, science, and engineering, which would supplement West Point's library. Even more importantly, he returned with a set of assumptions about education that would establish *accountability*, through specific policy reforms around assessment, as a priority in the process of education at West Point and as a values orientation through which to justify future policy reforms in American higher education.

The system that Sylvanus Thayer introduced at West Point shares much with the descriptions of accountability by the contemporary critics of higher education discussed

previously. Among the first things Thayer did upon assuming leadership at West Point in September, 1817, was to institute an examination of all the current cadets. Hoskin & Macve (1988) reported the results of this exam showed that of the 180 cadets tested, 43 were deemed to have "serious deficiencies," to the extent that 21 were "recommended for removal" (p. 46). Here, the power of assessment as political tool appears in Thayer's early action. That is, the failing grades on his exam helped emphasize to the cadets, as well as the existing faculty, Thayer's determination to change the institution's status quo, with these test scores providing the basis for a rhetorical exigence (see Chapter Two) out of which a series of policy level reforms were to be justified and soon implemented.

Following quickly upon this initial use of assessment, Thayer established a marking system for student performance that made the accountability of both students and teachers a daily part of the learning process. In particular, Thayer's system featured three key aspects. First, assessment became a daily occurrence through the use of regular exams covering small units of course material. Rather than being tested at the end of an academic term or semester, Cadets attended daily recitations for their courses in which they were tested on the previous day's lessons. Second, the grading of these daily recitations occurred using a *quantitative* format. While other historians of assessment (Foucault, 1979) have viewed the use of examinations generally as one of the crucial technique through which institutions came to wield increased political and psychological power in Western Society, Hoskins (1993) has argued that the true force behind this trend arose from a shift to quantitative rather than qualitative judgments of assessment data. The actual marking scale Thayer settled upon for student exams used quantitative measurement to reinforce the institution's power to make normative judgments of student

performance. That is, Thayer's six-point scale ran from +3 to -3, with a +3 score designated "best," a -3 score judged "worst," and the score of zero called "indifferent" (Hoskin & Macve, 1988: p. 47). Among other results, such a format allowed the institution not only to reward and punish but, equally importantly, to control the expectations of all parties involved as to what constitutes "normal" or "average" performance in the learning process. Moreover, this approach to assessment embeds the notion of accountability in the process of education because it allows the evaluation of student learning to be described as the accumulation of either credits or debits, just as the practice of financial accounting keeps track of such monetary profits and losses in business settings.

A final aspect of Thayer's reforms at West Point that highlighted the notion of accountability centered upon what happened to the assessment data collected. Not only were West Point cadets tested on a daily basis and those results interpreted quantitatively, but this assessment data moved through an elaborate system of reporting mechanisms that transmitted the evaluations made of students, and of faculty, across the Academy's administrative units. In conjunction with the daily exams, Thayer implemented weekly "class reports" which brought together assessment data to describe the activities of learning and teaching for each class, or cohort, of cadets. These class reports included results of the daily examinations of students and, likewise, explanations on the part of faculty concerning the specific accomplishments achieved each week in specific courses. So, for instance, Hoskin & Macve quoted an excerpt from one such weekly class report from 1821 in which a faculty member teaching intermediate level philosophy reports: "Progress from Proposition 315 to Proposition 380 in Gregory's *Mechanick's Vol. 1*" (p.

47). In this way, Thayer's class reports allowed assessment data to help describe the work of faculty as well as students. One result of this assessment scheme, Hoskin (1994) has argued, was a radical transformation in how mathematics and engineering textbooks were used, and subsequently written, by West Point faculty. Hoskin singled out the work of Charles Davies, a young math instructor who went on to become one of the best-selling textbook authors in nineteenth-century America. Among the distinguishing features of Davies' math texts that Hoskin attributed to the effects of Thayer's assessment system include the careful division of content into units that could be learned and tested through daily lessons, the integration of verbal explanations with diagrams and other visual aids, as well as a writing style that clearly linked the goals of the lessons with the content to be learned.

Some Implications of the West Point Reforms around Accountability

With their combination of assessment data for individual student learning and for the activities of faculty teaching specific courses, Thayer's weekly class reports provided West Point's administration a means of centralizing its authority and influence over growing areas of campus life. Indeed, by the mid-1820s Thayer expanded his quantitative format of assessment to include the social as well as academic performance of West Point cadets. Besides numerical grading of exams, Thayer's system came to provide quantitative judgments of the cadets' extra-curricular conduct based upon a collection of behavioral infractions arranged into seven distinct categories, which were divided so that each one included "those [offenses] of nearly the same degree of criminality" (quoted in Hoskin & Macve, 1988: p. 48). According to this system, the most serious violations earned ten demerit points, with gradations descending to a single demerit for the least

serious offenses, and an overall cap of 200 demerits total before a cadet would be dismissed from the Academy.

Within the immediate contexts of United States' Military Academy itself and nineteenth-century America, the influence of Sylvanus Thayer's reforms around accountability and assessment appears to be, at least in part, as one might expect. For instance, writing to Army Secretary John Calhoun in January, 1818, Thayer claimed about his new system of educational accountability that "by recording the degree of knowledge which each Cadet evinces of his lesson at his daily recitations [...] [t]he emulation excited by the Class-Reports and by the merit-rolls has produced a degree of application to study which is believed to be unexampled at this institution" (quoted in Hoskin & Macve, 1988: p. 46). The confidence expressed by Thayer about his accountability system aside, his observations on the influence it had upon student behavior were likewise paralleled by the reaction of the West Point cadets themselves. In an incident assessment specialists of today might take heart at, Hoskin (1994) reported that the cadets expressed their views of Thayer and his accountability system in a fashion befitting their future profession: In December, 1821, they orchestrated an elaborate protest that consisted of setting fire to the campus mess hall as a diversion for an attempt to fire a cannonball at the Superintendent's residence. Additionally, within the broader context of nineteenth-century America, Hoskin pointed out that several generations of West Point graduates under Thayer's system went on to positions of prominence in American education, where they implemented the pedagogy and the set of assumptions about learning to which they were exposed at West Point. Among these figures included well-known engineering faculty such as William Norton of Yale, Henry Lockwood of the

U.S. Naval Academy, and Henry Eustis of Harvard, as well as Alexander Dallas Bache, who became Principal of Central High School, in Philadelphia, and brought the accountability system of West Point to American secondary education in the decades of the mid-nineteenth century (Labaree, 1988).

Why This History Matters for Literacy Educators Attempting to Participate in Contemporary Education Policy Reform Debates: A Final Layer of Meanings Surrounding Accountability and the Origins of the Modern University

At this point, having peeled back layers of meanings embodied by the ultimate term *accountability* in American education policy that range from contemporary versions through the arrival of the concept in American education at West Point in the 1820s, it may appear that accountability can only be understood as one of Weaver's devil terms, and its presence as a charismatic term in contemporary education policy reform discourse such as that of the P-16 movement should be viewed by literacy educators as an ominous sign. While sharing these concerns, I want instead to suggest in the remaining sections of this chapter that peeling back yet another layer of meanings might complicate somewhat how we understand the term accountability and reveal this term as a potential means of persuasion that can support some of the arguments literacy professionals in the field of composition studies might wish to make concerning education policy reform. That is, in addition to altering the practices and relations through which the process of education occurred at West Point, such reforms around accountability also fundamentally transformed our understanding of what it means to learn, and in particular helped establish our modern expectations for how educational institutions should operate.

The expectations that emerged during this earlier era of reform around accountability may well have enacted for the first time principles involving teaching and learning that many literacy educators and much theoretically oriented scholarship in the field of composition studies values today. Keith Hoskin (1993) has argued that what happened at West Point occurred as the result of a broader transformation in how students "learned *to* learn" (p. 273; emphasis in original) based on the influence of three new technologies that developed in European higher education during the eighteenth century and together helped establish the assumptions around learning and teaching that we associate with the modern university of today. These technologies include the use of quantitative assessment in the form of numerical grading; the environment of active, collaborative learning fostered by the modern classroom; and the development of individual subjectivity within the learning process made possible by student writing assignments.

Assessment and the Laboratory

If the aforementioned assessment system at West Point put students in the (sometimes uncomfortable) position of being accountable for their learning through frequent tests and examinations, it's also worth nothing that Thayer's system accentuated the role of learning outcomes in the process of education. By breaking the rapidly expanding subject areas of science, math, and engineering into small units of instruction, each of which coincided with a specific assessment, the accountability system at West Point reinforced both learning outcomes and the means of gauging student progress toward those goals. Moreover, the use of quantitative measures compelled faculty to decide about common expectations for different levels of ability that such numerical

scores would represent. Whether or not these measures were applied in ways that were valid and reliable (which is doubtful), the move to quantitative measures offered a new way to describe what happened to students and teachers in the process of learning. Such a system also generated a wealth of assessment data that could provide feedback to individual students as well as to faculty about the overall effects of their pedagogies. Again, my point here deals less with how ethically such assessment measures were actually used at West Point during this period than with the potentials that such new forms of assessment technology made available, potentials that could be subsequently developed through consideration of issues involving validity and reliability to which more recent assessment theory has rightly called attention.

This linkage of teaching and learning processes through quantitative assessment technology is an aspect of the accountability system at West Point that Hoskin (1993) traced to the changing assumptions about learning that developed with the rise of laboratory science, particularly in France between the 1760s and the 1830s. Among the institutions that Sylvanus Thayer visited during his European travels included the *Ecole Polytechnique* of Paris. Here, French scientists were developing the methods of research based on laboratory observation of physical phenomena, and the active stance of the scientific method carried over to how these scientists went about training students. In particular, the new, assessment-driven pedagogy of laboratory science education made students accountable for what they could *do* to an extent greater than more traditional forms of education had previously. Older versions of science education depended upon lectures and demonstrations which placed students in a passive role while the infrequent use of individual assessments meant many students were able to graduate without having

demonstrated that they could actually perform the work of science themselves. Whether as educators today we align our pedagogies with the frequent use of formal assessments or numerical measures of student performance, the assumption that successful learning requires active participation on the part of students constitutes one of the foundational assumptions in the field of composition studies, one to which many literacy educators today are rightly committed. Such innovations concerning the use of assessment in early reforms around accountability may help us complicate the meanings implied when this charismatic term appears in the discourse of education policy reform today.

Active Learning in the Classroom

Building on this role for assessment, the model of accountability that arose at West Point under Sylvanus Thayer also altered fundamental assumptions about the environment in which learning ideally took place. The daily exams to which students submitted and the numerical grading of their work that resulted served, on the one hand, to distinguish, separate, and rank students individually; yet, on the other hand, this assessment occurred in an environment that brought students together for a common purpose and provided an opportunity for them to interact with one another as they demonstrated the sort of active learning called for by the assessments. That is, Hoskin has noted that in a response to the feedback provided by the daily assessments, the cadets became engaged both with their instructors and with each other in the process of figuring out the expectations and the appropriate means of learning that would help them succeed on those exams. Such interaction—question-and-answer exchanges or extended dialogues, which instructors reported often took place during the daily recitations—helped form an environment of quasi-collaborative learning that differed fundamentally

from the pedagogy of one-way communication followed in the more traditional lecture-based approach typically favored by American higher education previously.

Moreover, these daily recitations occurred in a physical space which has become the defining feature of what I've described as the classroom perspective on education: the modern classroom. That this statement seems obvious beyond mention only illustrates the power of the classroom perspective to shape how we think about our work as educators. Yet, as Hoskin pointed out, the origins of the classroom room make it a thoroughly modern innovation. Here, the European influence runs through the universities of Scotland during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Education historian David Hamilton (1989) documented the results of a meeting at Glasgow University on May 11, 1762, during which the faculty voted to convert part of a campus building into a "class room" (p. 76), the first reference to such an arrangement in Western education, according to Hamilton. In contrast to the large lecture halls which favored one-way communication from teacher to large groups of students en masse, the classroom environment accommodated a smaller number of students (between 30 to 40 in early versions) under the guidance of an instructor who now had the circumstances through which to interact more directly with students individually or in smaller groups. An early champion of this classroom-based approach to teaching and learning was Scottish rhetorician George Jardine, who taught at Glasgow in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Both Hamilton and Hoskin note that Jardine saw the classroom as a place where the teacher might prompt individual students into dialogue while drawing upon the social support provided by the group of students as a whole to facilitate the learning process.

As with the innovations previously discussed, my claim here is *not* that the reforms enacted around accountability and assessment at West Point constitute best practices of the sort that the field of composition studies should directly emulate today. Indeed, there is much to question, from our perspective today, in what early reformers were doing with—and to—their students through these innovations related to assessment. Instead, when we consider the meanings of accountability potentially available to us today as literacy educators in education policy reform debates, my claim is that it's worth acknowledging that some aspects of accountability may not be entirely foreign to certain principles that our field has come to recognize as relevant to the processes of literacy learning. With this awareness drawn from attention to the history of meanings surrounding the term accountability, we might then be better able to decide how these available meanings fit into our professional identity as literacy educators, and then how we might persuasively communicate such an expanded version of professional identity to public audiences holding a policy perspective on higher education. With this view in mind, my goal for discussing accountability shares much with Huot's argument for acknowledging the place of writing assessment in the work of literacy education, not as a necessary evil done to us but as an integral part of how we do our work as writing teachers.

Student Writing and the Development of Individual Subjectivity

Finally, the policy reforms at West Point involving accountability that emphasized as never before learning outcomes related to quantitative assessment and active learning based in the social environment of the modern classroom also created a new role for student writing, one which modern university education today typically

assumes. Hoskin (1993) has argued that innovations arising from accountability depended in part on a greater reliance upon writing and written texts in the processes of teaching and learning. The “new learning-to-learn” which Hoskin associated with accountability helped introduce a range of new text genres into the process of education, including “student essays, lab reports, exam scripts, and grade sheets” (p. 280). Such text genres likewise helped facilitate new forms of literate activity (Prior, 1998; Russell, 1997) among students and instructors in newly emerging social environments such as the science laboratory and the university classroom. With these new text genres, activity systems, and learning environments that now appear commonplace in the modern university came likewise, Hoskin has claimed, a new set of assumptions about what students were expected to accomplish as part of the learning process. Such expectations went beyond the more traditional mode of learning favored in universities previously which asked students to display familiarity with the already established body of knowledge sanctioned by the existing culture (Halloran, 1982). Instead, the reforms surrounding accountability and assessment introduced a more active role for students in generating knowledge, one that also helped alter the subjectivity associated with being a student.

In particular, Hoskin has argued for the new institutional environment of the philology seminar as it emerged in German universities during the 1760s as the key point of innovation around student writing assignments. Out of this new learning environment came new expectations for student writing and the subjectivity associated with being a student, expectations that assessment practices helped reinforce. Among the first innovators to use writing assignments in a way that fostered a new version of student

subjectivity was Christian Gottlob Heyne, who taught at the University of Gottingen, and as early as 1763 required of his philology students extended writing assignments calling for original research and interpretation. Such writing assignments, which Heyne used as the principle means of assessing his students' learning, placed student writers in the role of generating a form of new knowledge through their compositions and the interpretations of ancient texts that those compositions conveyed, and this process, Hoskin argued, helped foster a new subjectivity among those students as independent scholars who viewed their work as a means by which to contribute to an expanding field of knowledge. The opportunity to make original interpretations that these student writing assignments presented, and the approach to assessment demanded, placed students in the role of knowledge-generators in a way that the older curriculum typically did not. These students were themselves to become the generation of faculty and academic leaders who helped originate the research-oriented model of the modern German university, a model that would attract the attention of American education reformers such as Sylvanus Thayer in the early nineteenth century and entire generations of American students throughout the century (Paul & Blakeslee, 2000).

Clearly, the version of this new approach to writing that made its way to West Point through the accountability and assessment reforms of Sylvanus Thayer represented only one variation of what would be a wide-ranging series of innovations and change in the nature of higher education entering the modern period. Indeed, Thayer's version of reform differed in significant ways from the innovations that Hoskin described in European laboratories, classrooms, and seminars of this period, and there are obvious aspects of Thayer's reforms that as literacy educators today we should rightly question

and reject. At the same time, West Point's version of teaching and learning under an accountability model called for behaviors and subjectivities that today remain a part of our experience in higher education. While the exams that West Point cadets completed on a daily basis ran the risk of becoming a burden both to students and faculty as well as potentially narrowing the learning process in an unproductive manner, it's important to acknowledge also that this format of assessment emphasized student writing as never before. Halloran (1982) has described the examination process favored under the older college curriculum of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Under such a format, assessment favored oral performance by students in formal speeches and debates. While writing figured in this older curriculum as a means of preparing for such oral performances and documenting the results, the emphasis on stock issues and established perspectives tended to position students more in the role of members within a tradition than as individual speakers with distinctive viewpoints. In contrast, the newer accountability system of assessment positioned students as individuals who were called upon to distinguish themselves by applying increasingly specialized knowledge found in their textbooks to solving problems through the medium of written communication. Also in line with such an approach, studies of contemporary literacy practices in higher education (Geisler, 1994) likewise point to the role of writing in helping students learn to specialized strategies of problem solving through which academic disciplines go about generating new knowledge.

Conclusions and Implications

My goal in this chapter has been twofold: First, to show how ultimate terms and the values orientations they embody function as constraints on the rhetorical situations of

college writing assessment, and second, to demonstrate how an historically oriented analysis of ultimate terms, in this case *accountability,* can begin to suggest a greater complexity of meanings that might alter the potential of such terms as rhetorical constraints. To conclude, I see implications of this chapter for both writing assessment practice and for rhetorical theory.

Implications for Writing Assessment

From the perspective of writing assessment, the trajectory I've outlined here seeks to move the term accountability closer to the concept of *responsibility* that Brian Huot (2002) described in *(Re)articulating Writing Assessment*. Just as Huot found a basis for assessment in the processes of reading and responding that we identify closely with our work as literacy educators, so, too, I've argued in this chapter that meanings related to accountability have helped bring about the modern university environment which most faculty today assume. That is, by recognizing the extent to which early layers of meaning surrounding accountability actually represent values that most literacy educators today accept, we might avoid simply rejecting this term out of hand, either in our own work or in our discourse advocating education policy reform. Following Huot's general argument about the activity of assessment, then, my analysis in this chapter suggests that accountability in some sense is likewise inherently part of our work as literacy educators today. While not the only part or the most important part of that work, I believe that certain meanings arising from the history of accountability that I have described can be used to argue for practices that our field considers vital to literacy learning.

Perhaps the key difference between the potential function of notions of accountability and the actual, and ominous, influence of this concept, both historically at

places like West Point, and in our own times, hinges on the issue of power. As Huot explained:

> [I]t is possible to understand assessment as responsibility rather than accountability. […] Being responsible rather than accountable alters power relationships, so that the responsible person has control and ownership over the programs and practices for which she provides evidence. (p. 173)

That is, to the extent assessment technologies generate data which is controlled and interpreted by stakeholders other than teachers and students, as literacy educators we risk becoming accountable to those outside stakeholders in the worst possible way. Yet, if we strive to make ourselves "accountable," so to speak, to ourselves, to our colleagues, and to our students as well as to outside constituencies; that is, if we ourselves become more "responsible," as Huot argues, for the inherent role of assessment in our work, then we have the opportunity to begin altering that established power dynamic.

Implications for Rhetorical Theory

From the perspective of rhetoric and the study of persuasive discourse, this chapter builds upon rhetorician David Zarefsky's (1997) observations about the role of definitions in public arguments. Because they embody values that hold together discourse in an otherwise diverse, if not fragmented, society like ours, ultimate terms necessarily resist easy or clear-cut technical definitions. As Burke, McGee, Weaver, and other rhetoricians have pointed out, the power of such terms arises in part from their flexible meanings and often charismatic status in public discourse. Still, Zarefsky noted, successful rhetors demonstrate the ability through their discourse to adjust, alter, or otherwise reframe certain aspects of meaning associated with the ultimate terms of a

given culture. Such a process of rhetorical redefinition is never immediate or complete, but over time constituencies within a society gain political power and influence to the extent that they succeed in adding layers of meaning to the ultimate terms they inherit.

Given the long, complex, and likely unexpected history of meanings this chapter has described as embedded within the ultimate term *accountability*, even this word that otherwise holds so little appeal to a constituency such as literacy educators might in fact potentially admit additional layers of meaning, meanings that can support the work of teaching and learning. Such a process of rhetorical redefinition will require neither that we reject whole heartedly the term accountability to describe parts of our work nor that we slavishly adhere to the status quo of meanings currently surrounding it and the power relations those meanings enforce. Rather, as literacy educators, I believe we should attempt a process similar to the one I've begun in this chapter. When we encounter ultimate terms like accountability in the discourse of education policy reform, or when we choose to employ similar words in our own discourse, we need to highlight the specific meanings available that support our best practices and then document as concretely as possible the ways in which our work as literacy educators relates to those meanings. So, for instance, the meanings of accountability I've described that imply conscious use of learning outcomes, active participation by students in the learning process, and the fostering of independent thought through student writing assignments—all of these practices that we already employ in our work need to be highlighted when addressing audiences that view accountability as an ultimate term. (Addressing such audiences likewise will require awareness of the rhetorical and genre conventions familiar to constituencies who favored a policy perspective on higher education, an issue

to be taken up in Chapter Five of this study, with a rhetorical analysis of education reform policy reports.)

CHAPTER IV

CONSTRAINTS ON THE RHETORICAL SITUATIONS OF COLLEGE WRITING ASSESSMENT (PART #2): THE POLICY CYCLE AND ITS APPLICATION IN PREDICTING THE POTENTIAL SUCCESS OF RECENT P-16 REFORM PROPOSALS CONCERNING A NATIONAL GRADUATION EXAM FOR AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

> "[T]he more you press in towards the heart of a narrowly bounded historical problem, the more likely you are to encounter in the problem itself a pressure which drives you outward beyond those bounds."
> – Arthur O. Lovejoy (1960: p. 6.)

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I traced certain meanings associated with the ultimate term *accountability* and the influence of the values orientation represented by it on American higher education going back at least two centuries. My discussion suggested that notions of accountability run far deeper in how Americans define the purpose of modern education than merely recent calls for "greater accountability" orchestrated at the K12 level by the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind legislation or at the college level by some P-16 advocates. The values orientation surrounding the term accountability and a constellation of related words such as *efficiency* and *standardization* provides some advocates of education policy reform with powerful means of persuasion (Aristotle, 1954) that can be drawn upon in debates over reform issues including writing assessment (Williamson, 1994). Moreover, elements of this values orientation have increasingly influenced debates over higher education reform as well. Reviewing a group of current books on the trend toward "corporatization" in the management of American colleges and

universities, cultural theorist Jeffrey Williams (2006) has drawn connections between these changes in higher education administration and a more general acceptance by policy makers in recent years of priorities favoring standardization, managerial oversight, and commodification of services across a range of government programs. These shifting assumptions, Williams claimed, reflect an ongoing decline of political support for the twentieth-century model of the welfare state, a decline that began in the United States with a series of election victories by the Republican party and neoconservatives during the 1970s and 80s.

Given this general pattern, the direction of national debates on college-level assessment policy under the administration of President George W. Bush appears ominous, to say the least. The so-called Spellings Commission, chaired by U.S. Department of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, and charged with reviewing the state of American higher education, had worked since late 2005 to identify areas of the U.S. system in need of possible reform. Commentators (Arenson, 2006) noted that the language in early drafts of the commission's report emphasized the values orientation associated with accountability, as currently understood. In an incident that provoked wide-spread consternation among representatives of higher education, leaks from the Commission's early deliberations revealed that some members believed a viable policy approach toward assessment might include the creation of standardized exams to be taken by prospective graduates of the nation's colleges and universities (Insidehighed.com 2006a; 2006b). While the ensuing uproar caused the Commission to backtrack quickly and eventually release a draft report of the proposals under consideration in order to demonstrate that their reform priorities lay elsewhere, this exchange probably confirmed

for many higher education observers that efforts toward greater alignment between systems of public education, such as those advocated by the P-16 movement, as well as the more general use of assessment as a means of policy reform, were suspect and simply part of the broader pattern of which Jeffrey Williams warned.

Even more troubling, Williams found few critics of these trends who offer effective strategies for resistance or alternative approaches to reform. He noted that “by and large, the current body of commentary has mounted a powerful rebuke of academic capitalism as well as a defense of the better lights of the university. However, one limitation is a paucity of practical solutions” (p. 208). Some of the reason for this inability of academic commentators to offer viable plans of action Williams linked to the intellectual training and mindset that these commentators bring to their critiques. He has observed:

> Part of the problem might be the protocols of criticism. We are trained, when we look at poems or cultural phenomena, to "read" them, spotting unities or unpacking inconsistencies. We do not expect to fix them or to offer prescriptions for poets to follow. We tend to take a similar stance toward the university: we read and interpret the events and ideas they suggest, spotting inconsistencies or showing how ideas deconstruct. We need to switch stances, I believe, to a more pragmatic, prescriptive mode. (p. 208)

Williams writes here out of the traditions of literary criticism and cultural studies, and his diagnosis is telling. If as literacy educators we hope to influence current debates over how American higher education is conceived and administrated in coming decades—debates that, for instance, P-16 reform initiatives represent but one part—we will need to

rethink our stance as academics and the methods of analysis through which we pursue our critiques of current reform trends.

My goal in the present chapter and throughout this study involves offering the beginnings of such an alternative approach to interpreting, and potentially influencing, the large-scale trends in higher education policy reform to which Jeffrey Williams alluded. In contrast, however, to the intellectual traditions out of which Williams writes, I believe that the study of rhetoric offers the possibility for achieving the "more pragmatic, prescriptive mode" of analysis that Williams sought. Such a rhetorical approach entails the capacity to link large-scale political and institutional change to specific instances of debate, discourse, and persuasion out of which such changes arise and exert influence. "Fundamental to the rhetorical project," argued rhetorician Marice Charland (1999), is an assumption that "even 'irrational' cultures and orders of power have their reasons" (p. 467). More specifically, he claimed, "[r]hetorical theory directs the cultural critic to the study of publicly articulated motivations and reasons for actions, institutionalized practices, and relations of power" (p. 467). These "publicly articulated motivations and reasons" appear in specific instances of policy debate that have occurred in the history of public institutions such as American higher education. By adopting a rhetorical approach to analyzing the sorts of large-scale change in higher education that we are currently experiencing, I hope to show that such changes represent not inevitable, unavoidable outcomes of broad cultural forces alone but the accumulated influence of specific instances of deliberation, debate, and persuasion. The contrast I am drawing here might be characterized as one between the notions of an "argument of power" versus "the power of argument." The danger of intellectual critiques that ignore the role of rhetorical

discourse and debate in shaping policy-level change lies in reducing the possibility of viable political agency, with the result, as Jeffrey Williams observed, that it becomes difficult to discern how interested parties, for instance, college literacy educators, might go about effecting, or even participating in, such policy-level change. Consequently, historical changes appear as "arguments of power" orchestrated by forces that can be neither addressed nor resisted.

Acknowledging, instead, the "power of argument" represented by a rhetorical perspective such as the one I propose here can alter the sense of political agency that the field of composition studies might bring to current education policy reform debates. That the circumstances Jeffrey Williams and other commentators on contemporary American higher education describe may in fact be otherwise—that policy initiatives such as the early Spellings' Commission's move toward a national graduation exam for college students *can* be resisted —requires changes in our thinking as a profession. First, as I argued in the preceding chapter, we need to recognize the complexities of meaning that accompany appeals to charismatic terms (Weaver, 1965) such as *accountability* and other values orientations "available" (Halloran, 2005) in American public discourse. Likewise, we need to explore the relation between such broad values orientations and specific instances of rhetorical agency and debate that give rise to actual policy decisions. Following from the model of the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment that I introduced in Chapter Two of this study, I raise the first of two main research questions to be explored in this chapter:

> How do previous policies function as *constraints* on the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment?

In response this question, I argue that *previous policies function as rhetorical constraints through a model that I describe as the policy cycle, which posits a reciprocal relationship of influence between specific policy decisions and the broader values orientations of a society*. That is, specific policy proposals initially gain justification from appealing to the existing values orientations present within a given culture and historical era. Once in effect, however, successful policies work to reinforce or weaken these existing values orientations. As a result of this policy cycle, then, the influence of a given policy on institutions and the broader culture may long outlast the duration of its existence as actual law.

To illustrate the workings of the policy cycle and its role in explaining the potential course of debates around issues of writing assessment such as the initiatives of the Spellings' Commission mentioned earlier, I likewise address in this chapter an additional main question:

> What specific example of the policy cycle may influence the possibility of current P-16 reform proposals involving assessment such as calls for a national college graduation examination?

In response to this question, I argue that *policy debates originating some sixty years ago around the allocation of government financial aid for higher education to returning veterans of World War II—what is commonly known today as the "G.I. Bill"—set a precedent for the possible uses of assessment in the American system of higher education that will constrain current reform proposals advocating a national college graduation examination.* That is, during the policy debates that led to passage of the G.I. Bill, competing versions of financial aid allocation arose, some of which depended on the use

of large-scale national testing to determine eligibility for government support. Despite the backing of the Roosevelt Administration, the U.S. Congress in 1944 rejected this option, ultimately approving a version of government financial aid to higher education that allocated funding to students based on their successful enrollment in an accredited college or university rather than via the passing of government-mandated national examinations. With this precedent for financial aid policy established by deliberations surrounding the G. I. Bill, American higher education over the subsequent decades of the twentieth century moved toward a consumerist mindset, characterized by a values orientation associated with the ultimate term *access*. The result of this policy-level decision has been to reinforce the values orientation surrounding access over competing values orientations, such as those related to accountability. Thus, despite the calls for "greater accountability" made by some contemporary advocates of higher education reform, my analysis of the policy cycle argues that the deliberations around government financial aid allocation in the 1940s have reinforced the competing values orientation of access within the American system of higher education. As a result of this earlier policy deliberation, the present rhetorical situation to which advocates of national standardized testing, such as earlier versions of the Spellings Commission, must respond is rhetorically *constrained* in such a manner that such proposals are unlikely to be persuasive.

With these claims in mind, the remaining parts of this chapter take on the following order. Responding to the first main research question, Section Two begins by providing a general explanation of the policy cycle and its major components. Next, Section Two illustrates the operation of the policy cycle through the specific example of the values orientation that I associate with the ultimate term *access* in education policy

reform discourse, first by discussing some of the key assumptions and expectations that this worldview implies, then by describing a well-known instance of public policy deliberation through which this values orientation came to prominence in American society, the Congressional debates of 1943 and 1944 that led to passage of a "G.I. Bill of Rights," the first federal program that offered financial aid to college students. Section Two concludes by presenting a version of these events that has been popularized in public memory through the concerted efforts of one particular advocacy group which participated in those deliberations, the American Legion.

To address the second main question of this chapter, Section Three offers an extended reinterpretation of the events portrayed in the mythology of the American Legion's narrative concerning the G.I. Bill's origins. Following the implications of the policy cycle model, Section Three explains several alternative values orientations that were also in fact "available" as potential justifications for education policy reform during the war years in America. Each of these alternative values orientations influenced proposals made by other policy agents besides the American Legion who also participated at some stage in the deliberations that led eventually to what became known as the G.I. Bill. Section Three documents the efforts of Roosevelt Administration's New-Deal influenced National Resources Management Board (N.R.P.B), whose early proposals first justified government financial support to college students through a values orientation related to the needs of the greater public good. Then, this section turns to another group in the Roosevelt Administration, known as the "Osborn Committee," that proposed policies regarding financial aid for higher education which emphasized the values orientation I explored in Chapter Three of this study around the ultimate term

accountability. In both cases, these alternative values orientations gave rise to different approaches toward the issue of educational assessment generally and national standardized testing of college students in particular. Finally, Section Three recounts a moment of Congressional debate in which the issue of educational testing itself helped persuade lawmakers to support a specific version of reform that would ultimately become the G.I. Bill we know today. The chapter as a whole then concludes by considering the implications that this early instance of policy cycle has for contemporary P-16 reform debates involving educational assessment.

The Policy Cycle as a Rhetorical Constraint

To begin my discussion, this section presents an overview of a model of education policy development that I call the *policy cycle* then illustrates the two key components of the model, values orientations and specific policy decisions.

The Model Itself: A Reciprocal Relation between Broader Values Orientations and Specific Policy Decisions

The policy cycle represents a model for describing the process of policy development, one that simultaneously acknowledges the influence of broader social forces and cultural assumptions as well as calls attention to the role of individual agency and actual deliberations upon the shaping of those broader cultural assumptions. The essential components of this model appear in Figure 6:

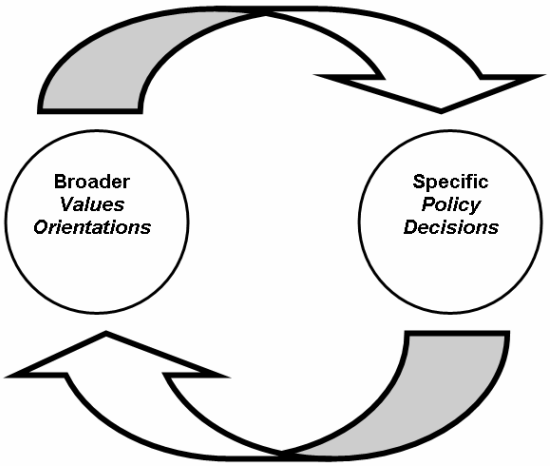


Figure 6. The policy cycle as rhetorical constraint—specific policies both draw upon and reinforce broader values orientations.

The model portrays a reciprocal relation between the broader values orientations that circulate within a given society as a whole and the specific policy decisions made by individuals within a particular institution, system, or other organization belonging to that society. Most obviously, as postmodern theorists emphasize, decisions by governments or other official bodies never occur in a vacuum nor are they the result of only individual motivations, desires, or goals. In that sense, the model qualifies naïve versions of individual agency that focus on the efforts of so-called "great men" or designated cultural "heroes," who purportedly act alone to influence the course of historical events.

Breaking with postmodern emphases, however, the policy cycle also highlights the potential for specific policy decisions—particular instances of debate, discourse, and persuasion—to influence, and subsequently reshape, the values orientations surrounding them and to which they initially responded. That is, particular policy decisions prompt new forms of behavior among those citizens under their influence, and these new activities have the potential to alter the expectations, aspirations, and priorities—the *constraints* on the rhetorical situations (Bitzer, 1968; 1980) those citizens perceive as

they attempt to address subsequent problems of public policy. Rhetorical discourse thus functions in at least two ways during public policy deliberations: Most obviously, processes of debate, reasoning, and persuasion lead to specific policy decisions, or collective actions in the short term. Equally important, however, rhetorical discourse mobilizes particular values orientations to serve as means of persuasion in support of specific proposals. Once embodied in rhetorical discourse, these values orientations gain strength and acceptance as the policies that represent them are collectively enacted. The perceived success of specific policy proposals serves to persuade wider audiences than those immediately influenced by a specific policy to adopt the values orientation embodied by that policy.

My argument, then, is that specific policy decisions originally made at a moment when other possible choices (representing different values orientations) were actively considered eventually rearranged our society's hierarchy of values orientations so as to reframe issues in such a way that later policy initiatives must assume those dominant values orientations as constraints on the rhetorical situation to which they respond. While subsequent advocates may through their discourse attempt to alter, or rearrange, the existing axiology of values orientations (Baker & Eubanks, 1971) surrounding an issue, these attempts must work against the "common sense" understandings already established by previous policy decisions. Such a process of interplay between values orientations and policy decisions in the policy cycle means that predicting the success of current policy proposals, such as those of the P-16 movement, calls for describing the previous rearrangements of values orientations that presently frame the rhetorical situations in which deliberations will occur.

Illustrating the Policy Cycle: The Values Orientation Surrounding the Ultimate Term Access

As an example of the process that the policy cycle attempts to describe, this chapter considers the second of two key values orientations that advocates in the P-16 movement, such as Kati Haycock (Field, 2005), often draw upon in their attempts to persuade lawmakers and other administrative audiences to support reform proposals. In Chapter Three, I noted that appeals to the ultimate term accountability provide one means of persuasion (Aristotle, 1954) to justify proposals related to P-16 reform. Moreover, as Jeffrey Williams argued, this values orientation appears to be growing in influence within contemporary American higher education. Here, I take up a second ultimate term associated with P-16 reform: *access*. While accountability often seems to function as a sort of "devil term" (Weaver, 1965) with negative associations for many educators today, I attempted to demonstrate in the preceding chapter that its history of potential meanings is in fact more complex. In contrast, for many faculty in the fields of composition studies and basic writing, access holds mainly positive associations, allowing it to function as a god term in some examples of our professional discourse (Fox, 1993; 1999). As with accountability, however, I hope to suggest in this chapter that the potential meanings associated with the history of access make it a more complex term than we might presently assume, and therefore a values orientation that offers various potentials as a means of persuasion in contemporary education policy debates. Likewise, the place of access in the policy cycle, I argue, makes it ultimately an even more powerful values orientation than accountability in the future of American higher education.

That access appears as a god term not only in the discourse of composition studies but in the broader public sphere (Goodnight, 1982) of our society today owes to its association with a series of historical events. Among these include the open-admissions policies on American campuses that arose in conjunction with the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Bruch & Marback, 2005; Fox, 1993; 1999; Shaughnessy, 1977). Such policies emphasized the need to help students of diverse racial, ethnic, and other non-mainstream backgrounds attend college. Even earlier, however, we can see the influence of access as a means of persuasion to justify education policy reforms. While the open-admissions era stressed access to college for non-mainstream students, the more basic association of college attendance with greater economic opportunity and social mobility dates back to an earlier period of reform. In the aftermath of World War II, the so-called "G.I. Bill" succeeded in altering the political symbolism associated with attending college. Recent commentaries (Bennett, 1996; Brokaw, 1998; Halberstam, 1993; Humes, 2006) on the post-World War II decades of the twentieth-century in America have reinforced the popular perception that the economic success of many returning war veterans resulted from the greater access to college education purportedly offered by the G.I. Bill. Moreover, for the generation of World War II veterans who made use of the G.I. Bill's provision of financial aid for college, higher education became a means by which to access, or attain, the middle-class lifestyle of mainstream success that today is associated with the decades of the 1950s and 1960s in America (Cohen, 2003).

Such a link between higher education and social mobility began to appear in popular media coverage soon after the G.I. Bill's initial implementation during the late 1940s. For example, the representation of college education offered in the magazine

article excerpted in Figure 7 shows a set of associations already becoming familiar to readers by the late 1940s:

Figure 7. An example of public discourse from 1944 associating college attendance with middle-class achievement in the post-war decade (reproduced from Loss [2005]: p. 18).

Here, the efforts of the war veteran as a college student promise to offer a way by which he can acquire knowledge and expertise that will allow him to better support the needs of his young family. As this imagery implies, such effort deserves the admiration of his immediate family and, by implication, readers of the publication and American society as a whole. Rather than valuing knowledge for its own sake, the version of college education that emerged in the aftermath of the G.I. Bill associated college with individual social mobility, the chance to better one's own opportunities and those of one's family through the credentials and prestige associated with attending college. As a result, "college" became associated more closely than in any previous era with mainstream-notions of obtaining "the American Dream" of middle-class prosperity (Cohen, 2003; Mettler, 2005a; 2005b). The cultural meaning of attending college now depended at least in part upon the access that this socially sanctioned institution offered to the middle class.

The values orientation underlying this political symbolism emanates, I claim, from the ultimate term *access*: college attendance provides "access" to the middle-class American Dream; thus, public policies toward higher education could be justified on the grounds that they promoted access to ever-widening populations in contemporary society.

Illustrating the Policy Cycle: The Reciprocal Policy Decisions that Gave Rise to the Ultimate Term Access in American Higher Education Policy

As I noted above, my model of the policy cycle attempts to describe the link between broader values orientations and specific policy decisions in the development of public policy on matters such higher education reform. In the case of the values orientation surrounding access, the second component of the policy cycle, specific policy decisions, can also be identified easily within the popular memory of American society. That is, the access to higher education and middle-class status afforded to Americans in the post-war generation traces its origins back to federal legislation commonly referred to as the "G.I. Bill." Indeed, the political symbolism associated with the origins of the G.I. Bill legislation itself may be almost as well known as that of the broader values orientation it helped influence. Such popular understandings of the G.I. Bill's origins and legislative development have arisen, not by accident, but through an overt media campaign orchestrated both during the process of deliberation over government compensation for returning veterans of World War II in late 1943 and early 1944, and in the decades that followed legislative approval, by one advocacy group in particular of the many who participated in the original policy development process.

When Americans today reflect on the deliberation side, so to speak, of the policy cycle concerning the G.I. Bill, the advocacy group most likely to come to mind is the

American Legion. While a wide range of organizations advocated for government assistance to returning veterans of World War II, among them the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled Americans Veterans, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, and the Regular Veterans Association (Mettler, 2005a; 2005b; Mosch, 1975; Olson, 1973; 1974; Skocpol, 1997), the American Legion succeeded in associating its name most closely with the package of benefits that ultimately became known as the "G.I. Bill." Indeed, rhetors of the American Legion coined that popular moniker—"The G.I. Bill of Rights"—during the Congressional debates for what had been known in early 1944 as simply Senate Bill #1617. That the American Legion managed to associate its name, above those of other policy agents and advocates, with the G.I. Bill required both an active public relations initiative and the conscious invention of a mythology around the origins of the Senate Bill #1617. On the first matter, the American Legion orchestrated one of the earliest coordinated, nationwide, grassroots advocacy initiatives in order to garner Congressional support for a piece of federal legislation (Skocpol, 1997). Using its network of local Legion Posts, the organization as a whole coordinated a national letter-writing campaign in which Legion members pressured their Congressional representatives to support Bill #1617. The ultimate success of this campaign was demonstrated by the unanimous approval Congress voted for the G.I. Bill in the spring of 1944.

On the second matter, the American Legion produced a series of articles in its own publication, *The American Legion Magazine*, during 1949 under the title "I Saw the G.I. Bill Written" (Camelon, 1949a; 1949b; 1949c) that were widely referenced by

subsequent commentators on the origins of the G.I. Bill. The common themes in the Legion's version of legislative history appear in Figure 8:

Figure 8. Symbols from the American Legion's version of the legislative process resulting in the G.I. Bill (Images adapted from Loss [2005]: pp. 15-16).

In the Legion's mythology, the G.I. Bill's aid package, which included a broad range of benefits beyond support for college students, came about from the benign leadership of the American Legion's founder and Commander, Warren Atherton (Figure 8, left), who saw the needs of war veterans clearly based on his own experience as a soldier and veterans' rights activist during World War I. Moreover, the actual drafting of the legislation took on a mythic quality in the American Legion's narrative of policy development, with Legion executive Harry Colmery (Figure 8, right) composing the substance of the G.I. Bill's benefits package on the back of letterhead from Washington, D.C.'s Mayflower Hotel (Figure 8, center) in a brief fit of inspiration during the Christmas holiday of 1944. Like all mythologies, the American Legion's narrative of policy development surrounding the G.I. Bill constructs a set of compelling characters,

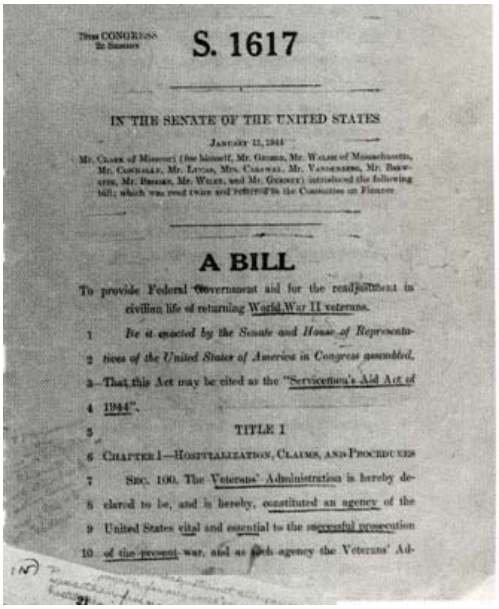
assigns plausible motives for their actions, and connects a particular web of meanings in such a way that a certain version of history appears obvious, inevitable, and natural.

Taking Rhetoric Seriously in the Policy Development Process: The Complexity of Policy Deliberations Surrounding the "G.I. Bill"

Bringing the Possibility of Political Agency Back into Education Policy Development

Additionally, as with all successful myths, the political symbolism that through its media campaign the American Legion was able to associate with the legislative origins of the G.I. Bill manages to draw upon certain elements of fact surrounding events in late 1943 and early 1944. At the same time, as I argued in the introduction to this chapter, taking seriously the role of rhetoric in the development education policy means going beyond the sense that the education policies which affect our work as college faculty come about inevitably, unavoidably, or arise from acts of individual will alone. Instead, I want to consider in the remainder of this chapter an alternative version of the deliberation side of the policy cycle concerning the values orientation of *access*. Rather, that is, than the symbolism depicted in Figure 8 as a way of explaining the origins of the G.I. Bill, I want to consider rhetorical discourse, the "publicly articulated motivations and reasons" to which Maurice Charland referred, that surrounded the actual debates and deliberations which ultimately resulted in the legislation of the G.I. Bill.

Such rhetorical discourse took the form, for instance, of the actual legislation, Senate Bill #1617, that soon became known as the "G.I. Bill of Rights" (see Figure 9, below):



78TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 1617

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JANUARY 11, 1944

Mr. CLARK of Missouri (for himself, Mr. GEORGE, Mr. WALSH of Massachusetts, Mr. CORDILL, Mr. LUCAS, Mrs. CARAWAY, Mr. VANDENBERG, Mr. BALDWIN, Mr. BARKLEY, Mr. WILEY, and Mr. GURNEY) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Finance

A BILL

To provide Federal Government aid for the readjustment in civilian life of returning World War II veterans.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the "Servicemen's Aid Act of 1944".

TITLE I

CHAPTER I—HOSPITALIZATION, CLAIMS, AND PROCEDURES

SEC. 100. The Veterans' Administration is hereby declared to be, and is hereby, constituted an agency of the United States vital and essential to the successful prosecution of the present war, and as such agency the Veterans' Ad-

Figure 9. Text from Senate Bill #1617, "The Veterans' Omnibus Bill," United States Congress, 1944 (Image adapted from Loss [2005]: p. 17).

To the extent that the American Legion was successful in advocating for its version of government aid to war veterans, that success resulted from a complex process of deliberation which included a variety of advocates and participants, not only the American Legion and other veterans' groups, but the media, lawmakers in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, as well as the administration of President Franklin Roosevelt. In contrast to the seamless narrative that the American Legion attempted to construct, I explore in subsequent sections of this chapter some of the complexity that accompanied the actual deliberations leading eventually to the approval of Senate Bill #1617. By doing so, I want to point out the variety of competing influences, agendas, and circumstances that affected this deliberation, and in particular, I want to call attention to how the issue of educational assessment—specifically, government-mandated national examinations for college students—played a decisive role in shaping the G.I. Bill's mechanism for allocating government financial aid to college students, a precedent that remains foundational to the operation of American colleges and universities to this day.

Distinguishing (and Qualifying) the Influence of Education Policy as Policy

While I argue that the political debates of the 1940s surrounding "The G.I. Bill of Rights" enacted a set of priorities or values orientations that continue to influence American higher education to this day—and will likely affect future reform initiatives such as those advocated by the P-16 movement—it is important to acknowledge a distinction between the influence of actual policies versus the underlying values orientations that specific policies embody and enact. That is, as an actual piece of government policy, the G.I. Bill's influence ended in 1956 (Mosch, 1975). After that year, its role was superseded by aide bills for veterans of the Korean and then Vietnam conflicts as well as finally by the Veterans' Reform Bill of 1984 (Kane, 1999). As a result, the policies governing student financial aid availability in contemporary American higher education operate quite differently than in the era of the G.I. Bill's existence as an actual federal policy. Today, the system of financial aid available to American college students consists of four main elements, including means-tested government grant and loan programs, such as Pell Grants, federal work study, and federal loan programs; aid provided by colleges and universities themselves based on a student's academic or athletic talent, or financial need; as well as private funding obtained by individual students or their families from a variety of sources.

In addition, educational historians have subsequently qualified as well the influence that the actual legislation of the G.I. Bill had on college students and colleges alike in the decades after World War II. Perhaps the best-known expert on the G.I. Bill, Keith Olson (1973; 1974), claimed that the image of the G.I. Bill as primarily directed toward higher education ignores the fact that under one-third of World-War II veterans

(29%) opted to use their G.I. Bill benefits to attend college, while the majority applied them to on-the-job training program (18%) and pre-college-level education (44%). Likewise, composition historians (Crowley, 1998; Trimbur & George, 1999) have described the war years as a period of great, but largely un-sustained innovation. During the war years, responding to the communication needs of soldiers, writing and speech teachers collaborated to develop pedagogies that sought to combine instruction in writing, reading, speaking, and listening—an approach responsible for the inclusion of "communication" as the "fourth C" in the name of the new professional organization of college composition teachers (the Conference on College Composition and Communication) that emerged during this period. Despite such innovations, Trimbur & George noted that the post-war decades saw a general return to the current-traditional pedagogies that had dominated composition studies during most of the twentieth-century previously. These complexities of influence, then, represent some of the challenges in the study of how education policy reform, and public policy generally, affect the work of students and teachers.

American Society Prior to World War II

Before turning to the policy deliberations surrounding what became the G.I. Bill, it's useful to recall the scale of the United States' military commitment in World War II and the scope of change brought about by demobilization, especially in the context of education. As a result of military commitments, the federal government's expenditures increased ten-fold between 1939 and 1945 (from $9,000,000,000 to $95,000,000,000), and the amount spent during the war years was twice that of the previous one-hundred-and-fifty-year history of the U.S. government (Patterson, 1996). While the country's

population in the 1945 (at 139.9 million citizens) was less than half of today's 300-million estimate, some 16.4 million soldiers, mostly young men, participated in World War II, and just over 12 million were still on duty by August, 1945, a figure that represented almost two-thirds of the *entire* population of 18-34 year-old males in the country (Patterson, 1996). Less than a year later, by June, 1946, only three million soldiers were still in uniform, and in 1947 the U.S. Army consisted of only a million soldiers (Patterson, 1996). At the outset of the war, America's educational attainment was strikingly different than what we take for granted today. In 1940, the U.S. Census found that of the 74.8 million Americans over the age of 25, only one-third had completed the eighth grade, only one-quarter had graduated from high school, and only one-twentieth were college graduates (Patterson, 1996). While the expansion of truancy laws and of public education generally during the early twentieth century led to more students staying longer in formal education than ever before, only 49 percent of seventeen-year-olds had graduated high school in 1940. Perhaps because mainstream attitudes still tended to discount the importance of formal education, state support for education generally remained low during the war years, as it had in the preceding decades, to the extent that by 1945 the morale of public school teachers was at an historic low, and in the following year teachers' strikes occurred more frequently than any time previously (Patterson, 1996).

Meanings of Access to Higher Education Before World War II

For education policy analyst Martin Trow (2005), the war years marked a break between what he distinguishes as the *elite* and *mass* phases of higher education development in America. Even though aspects of mass higher education, such as the

elective system, academic majors, and a greater concern with scholarship and academic research, began appearing as early as the 1870s with the reforms initiated at Harvard College by its president, Charles W. Eliot, only the post-war decades of the 1940s and 50s saw attendance rates for the traditional college-aged population in America rise above 15% and eventually reach the 30% range, Trow's measures for distinguishing an era of mass higher education. With attendance rates remaining at only approximately 12% up through the 1930s (Rudolph, 1977), American higher education stayed in an elite phase well into the first terms of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency. Most characteristic of an elite phase, according to Trow, college attendance is construed as a *privilege* appropriate only for the children of the ruling classes (see also Halloran, 1982). Such a sentiment appears overtly in a quotation attributed to President Franklin Roosevelt from the diary of his Secretary of State, Henry Morgenthau. According to Morgenthau, in July, 1939, Roosevelt expressed privately his frustration with the cadre of interests groups that had grown out of his own New Deal reforms: "I am sick and tired of having a lot of long-haired people around here who want a billion dollars for schools, a billion dollars for public health" (quoted in Polenberg, 1980: p. 21). He added: "Just because a boy wants to go to college is no reason we [the federal government] should finance it." (p. 21). It's striking to note that the same President who spoke these words privately in 1939 would only four years later position himself publicly as an advocate for greater access to education and initiate the legislative process that brought about radical reform in the funding of American higher education, reforms that in fact led to the federal government paying for thousands of young people to attend college. The crucial factor that changed Roosevelt's outlook during the intervening years was, of course, World War II.

An Overview of the Policy Development Process Leading to the G.I. Bill

Before I point out some of the key rhetorical appeals that helped lead to what we now know as the "G.I. Bill," and from there to the rhetorical situation in which, I argue, current proposals for education policy reform involving college writing assessment must now operate, let me summarize briefly the timeline of events that transpired some sixty years ago leading to the birth of large-scale government aid to American college students.

In 1941, before the United States' entry into World War II, discussion began about the possibility of implementing the nation's first military draft, and in particular about the need to conscript eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds. With the inclusion of this traditional school-aged population in war planning, the issue of government support for the education of soldiers came to be recognized more fully than ever before. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, in December, 1941, would make the draft an eventual reality, and soon after America's entry into the war, the Roosevelt Administration began covert planning for demobilization. In July, 1942 President Roosevelt gave his National Resources Planning Board (N.R.P.B.) the task of analyzing the needs for post-war demobilization, including education for veterans. Congressional resistance to the Roosevelt Administration and its New Deal policies generally led to the demise of the N.R.P.B. before it could carry through with its recommendations, forcing the President to adopt other governmental means to continue the planning effort. As part of signing the Selective Service Act in November, 1942, Roosevelt then asked the Armed Forces Committee on Post-War Educational Opportunities for Service Personnel (commonly known as the "Osborn Committee," after its chairperson) to formulate its own recommendations concerning the role of education in post-war planning. On July 30,

1943 the Osborn Committee presented a report to Roosevelt that included proposals for government support of education, including higher education, for returning veterans.

Roosevelt subsequently endorsed the committee's report on October 27, 1943, sending a version of the Osborn Committee's recommendation's to Congress. That legislation, Senate Bill #1509, proposed a broad range of government benefits for returning veterans besides aid for higher education, including subsidized housing and small-business loans (Olson, 1973; 1974; Mosch, 1975; Mettler, 2005a; 2005b; Ross, 1969). Most importantly, and a point to which I'll return below, this bill is *not* the one that went on receive Congressional approval under the moniker of the "G.I. Bill." Rather, Senate Bill #1509 was soon joined in Congress by a competing piece of legislation, Senate Bill #1617, which was backed by the American Legion. Drafted by Legion executive Harry Colmery in a brief period during the Christmas holiday of 1944, this legislation, known as the Veterans' Omnibus Bill, shared much in substance with Senate Bill #1509. Indeed, one reason that, as American Legion mythology portrayed, Colmery was able to compose his proposal so quickly on the back of stationary from the Mayflower Hotel during late 1943, was that Senate Bill #1617 borrowed so heavily from the earlier, competing legislation already introduced by the Roosevelt Administration, but with several crucial differences, of which the relevant one for my purposes involved the role of nationwide, government-mandated standardized assessment as a policy mechanism by which to allocate financial aid to those veterans wishing to attend college. Following Congressional debate and the American Legion's nationwide letter-writing campaign, what is now known as the "G.I. Bill of Rights," that is, Senate Bill #1617, became Public Law 346 with President Roosevelt's signature on June 22, 1944.

Higher Education in Support of the Public Good: The Rhetoric of the National Resources Planning Board

On the deliberation side of the policy cycle, the movement toward change in American society's assumptions about access to higher education began with President Roosevelt's signing of the Selective Training and Service Act (Public Law 783 of the 76th Congress) on September 16, 1940. This statute allowing for military conscription during peacetime was a first in U.S. history. With the outbreak of war, several revisions to the law occurred, the most relevant being to widen the draft-eligible population to include eighteen and nineteen year-olds. That decision led to closer consideration of the effect that military service to one's country might have on a student's educational prospects, as suggested by the images reproduced in Figure 10 which show the government's rhetorical campaign to help soldiers make sense of the potential relations between military service and the educational options available to them after returning to civilian life:

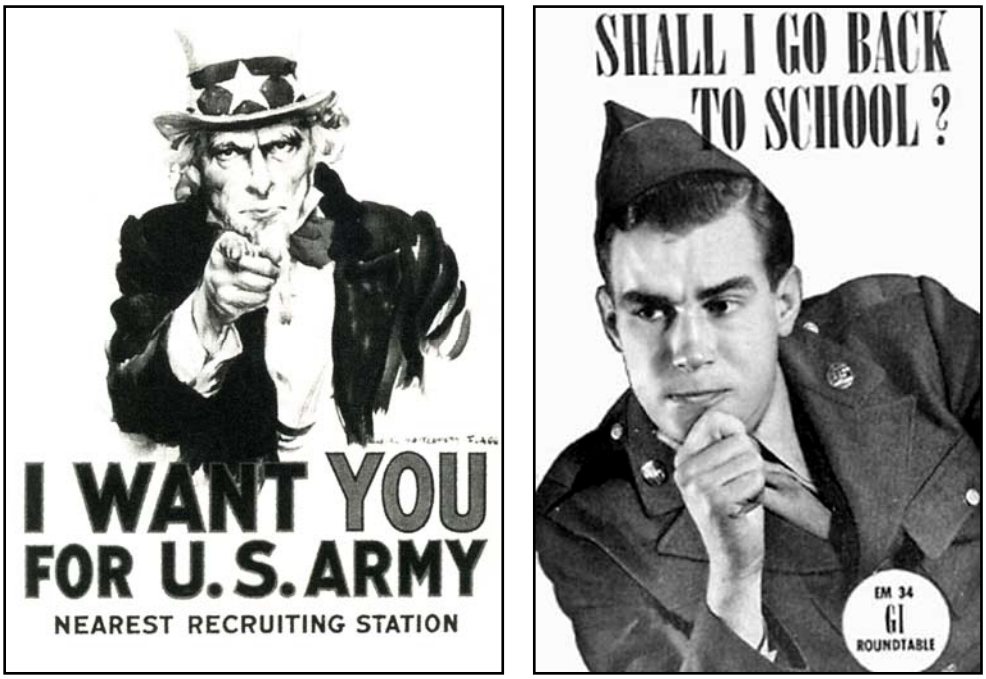


Figure 10. Examples of imagery associated with the Selected Training and Service Act of 1940—An iconic military recruiting poster (left) and a government flyer explaining options for education funding available under the G.I. Bill (right; image adapted from Loss, 2005)

President Roosevelt announced upon signing the Selective Service Act on November 13, 1942 that he had appointed a committee "for the purpose of taking steps to enable the young men whose education has been interrupted to resume their schooling and afford equal opportunity for the training and education of other young men of ability after their service in the armed forces has come to an end" (quoted in Mosch, 1975: p. 28). In offering this rationale for what was known as the Armed Forces Committee on Post-War Educational Opportunities for Service Personnel, Roosevelt brought together concerns for the educational needs of veterans along with the broader issue of the government's role in supporting access to education beyond the immediate circumstances of wartime. Roosevelt's rhetoric here continued a process begun with the efforts of the National Resources Planning Board to make educational opportunity a matter of public welfare rather than solely a response to the specific circumstances of war veterans.

The entity in President Roosevelt's Administration that originally explored the issue of demobilization planning—and the group who offered an initial vision of what post-war society, including higher education might look like—was the National Resources Planning Board. Formed in January, 1940 as an executive agency to assist the President with coordinating government efforts in areas such as the economy, natural resources, and public works, the N.R.P.B. had in its early projects analyzed, among other matters, the United States' transportation system as well as options for applying the model of the Tennessee Valley Authority to the management of the nation's other river basins (Olson, 1974). In early July, 1942 its chair, Roosevelt's uncle, Frederick A. Delano, approached the President about the topic of post-war planning. Roosevelt, concerned that publicity about post-war planning might distract the public from the immediate task of winning the war, rejected officially assigning the N.R.P.B. the task of post-war planning but did agree that the Board might informally study the matter and report back to him. By late July, Delano had gathered a smaller group, known as the Conference on Post-war Readjustment of Civilian and Military Personnel, or informally as the Post-war Manpower Conference (the P.M.C.), whose twelve participants included N.R.P.B. members as well as representatives from the War Department, the Veterans' Administration, the Labor Department, the Education Department, and several university administrators (Olson, 1974).

What is most interesting about the proposals of the N.R.P.B. is that they begin to position higher education as something other than a marginal concern to mainstream American society. That is, education policy analyst Martin Trow (2005) has distinguished between an elite phase of higher education which characterizes attending college as

privilege reserved only for a nation's elite and a mass phase that makes higher education an option open to students from a wider range of backgrounds. In the case of the N.R.P.B., the assumptions of Trow's mass phase of higher education begin to appear in actual policy deliberations. According to public policy theorist Susan Mettler (2005a), the proposals of the N.R.P.B. "articulated the needs for young people to receive additional education and training beyond compulsory school attendance age" (p. 352). This move to re-imagine the scale and scope of American higher education has obvious parallels with the concerns voiced widely by advocacy groups of the P-16 movement today. Moreover, the policy development efforts of the N.R.P.B. can also be understood as another, separate example of the policy cycle model that I have sought to elaborate throughout this chapter. That is, while the comments of Franklin Roosevelt cited earlier from the diary of Henry Morgenthau suggest that New-Deal policymakers initially considered the funding of higher education as beyond their reform concerns, the overall momentum generated by the success of New-Deal initiatives on a variety of public policy matters served to accentuate and expand a general values orientation that would come to make higher education support appear an issue deserving action from the federal government. In this way, the N.R.P.B.'s efforts represent what I've termed the deliberation side of a specific policy cycle associated with a values orientation arising from the overall mentality of New-Deal era reforms generally.

The justification for such policy reform Mettler has associated with the general orientation of the New Deal era and a values orientation that placed a high priority on developing an active, informed citizenry. She cited an N.R.P.B. report on post-war planning that claimed, "the school has much to contribute in imparting attitudes that

make for successful association with other persons. […] Citizenship in the broadest sense should be cultivated in the schools" (p. 351). From the perspective of scholarship on writing assessment, it's fascinating to speculate on how the N.R.P.B.'s values orientation might have played out on matters such as educational testing. There are in fact implications that I believe this values orientation can have for contemporary reform efforts such as those of the P-16 movement. If nothing else, this orientation toward inclusion and citizenship downplayed the gate-keeping function of formal assessment within the education process. Rather than the sort of accountability model implemented at West Point, the N.R.P.B.'s proposals argued for the broader availability of education to a wider range of students ever before. Unfortunately for the N.R.P.B.'s efforts, however, this values orientation also marked it as a symbol of Roosevelt's New Deal agenda, and thus made it an easy target for political opponents who managed to eliminate N.R.P.B. before it could elaborate its proposals on matters such as educational assessment.

Political Circumstances as an Immediate Influence on Policy Development: Roosevelt's Popularity

Throughout the legislative process that led to the creation of the G.I. Bill, factors in the larger political environment of 1940s America affected the decision-making of the advocates involved, not least of whom was President Franklin Roosevelt. While Roosevelt is remembered today as a generally popular president, his public approval fluctuated considerably over the four terms of his administration. During the depression years of the mid-1930s, Roosevelt's New Deal policies were widely perceived to have helped large numbers of citizens avoid abject poverty, and Roosevelt went on to win an overwhelming re-election victory in 1936. With the expansion of government power

under an array of New Deal programs, however, political conservatives quickly began to resist Roosevelt's agenda, and a growing backlash emerged as the decade of the 1930s concluded. Although Roosevelt himself won an unprecedented four terms as President, conservative forces were able to fragment the political coalition that had fostered the New Deal itself, and steadily take aim at specific government programs and policies it represented. So it was that in the midterm election of 1942, which saw just 28 million citizens cast ballots (compared to 35 million in the previous off-year election, and 22 million below the 1940 figure), the Democrat party lost some 47 seats in the House of Representatives and seven in the Senate as well as several state governorships (Kennedy, 1999). As a result of these Republican gains and growing unrest among Southern Democrats, Roosevelt faced additional challenges in maintaining the programs of the New Deal against a Congress now stacked with an opposition committed to ending them. In the aftermath of this election, the new 78th Congress quickly did away with well-known New Deal programs including the Civilian Conservation Corps, the National Youth Administration, and the Works Progress Administration (Kennedy, 1999: p. 783). Yet another important casualty of the Congress' New Deal purge in 1943 was the National Resources Planning Board. Conservative lawmakers rightly saw the N.R.P.B. as a hold-over of the New Deal, both in its membership and, more importantly for my purposes, in the rhetorical appeals it drew upon to justify its reform proposals on matters such as education.

Higher Education in Service of the National Economy: The Rhetoric of the Osborn Committee

With the demise of the N.R.P.B., Roosevelt looked to another government entity, what became known as the "Osborn Committee," take over the post-war planning process involving education, and with this change in deliberative forum came a shift in the rhetorical appeals employed to justify the policy reforms that would become the G.I. Bill. While the Osborn Committee retained the crucial assumption of the N.R.P.B./P.M.C. that the government should provide funding for more students than ever before to attend higher education, its justifications evolved away from references to a values orientation related to the public good to emphasize instead an orientation that I associate with the ultimate term *accountability*. Given the shift in political power marked by the election of 1942, this change of rhetorical appeals can be understood, among other things, as an instance of audience adaptation in which rhetors of the Roosevelt Administration and its representatives attempted to rhetorically invent the means of persuasion most appropriate to the values orientations of a new audience of lawmakers now increasingly hostile to rhetorical appeals associated with the New Deal era.

Led by Brigadier General Frederick H. Osborn, director of the Special Service Forces of the U.S. Army, and commonly referred to as "the Osborn Committee," this group of Army, Navy, and Education Department officials as well as academics worked between July 6, 1942 and July 30, 1943, submitting to Roosevelt a report of recommendations that drew upon the demobilization plan of the British following World War I. Most relevant to the study of rhetorical appeals for government support of education are the justifications that the Osborn Committee offered for its proposals. Early

in the report, the Osborn Committee announced: “All our work has been based on one fundamental proposition, namely that the primary purpose of any educational arrangements which we may recommend should be to meet a national need growing out of the aggregate educational shortages which are being created by the war” (quoted in Mosch, 1975: pp. 28-29). The “educational shortages” that concern the Osborn Committee here are economic; that is, as a result of war activity, the argument is that the United States will be left without an adequate number of trained specialists to assist in the post-war economic recovery.

Rather than justifying greater government support of education on the grounds of rewarding the sacrifice and service that soldiers provided to the greater public good of the nation’s defense, the Osborn Committee’s rhetoric shifts to an economic justification: Supporting education for veterans will strengthen the national economy, thus avoiding the risk of a return to the widespread economic depression that gripped America in the decade prior to the war. Just to clarify that their economic concerns centered on the competitiveness of the nation as a whole, not the potential monetary benefits available to individual students attending college, the Osborn Committee quickly added:

> Our efforts have been centered upon the problem of reversing that trend [in the national economy] just as quickly as possible after the war; and *we have regarded any benefits which may be extended to individuals in the process as incidental*. We can hardly overstress the fact that this has been our fundamental conception of the educational problem you wanted us to explore” (quoted in Mosch, 1975: p. 29; emphasis added).

Particularly noteworthy in this passage is the awareness that the Osborn Committee authors project about the implications that educational priorities, or justifications, can have for the policy development process. While many policymakers today conflate or intermix educational justifications often without acknowledging the consequences of doing so, as in the example of Richard Katz's P-16 reform rhetoric discussed in Chapter Three, the Osborn Committee chose to foreground in its rhetoric the justifications for the policy choice it had made. In doing so, there is an unusually clear connection between its goal, and the values orientation such a goal represents, and the actual policy changes the Osborn Committee recommended. The version of education policy reform advocated by Osborn Committee implied a vision of higher education much different from that which later emerged from the policy cycle surrounding the G.I. Bill, one that would have called for uses of educational assessment much closer to those implemented by Sylvanus Thayer at United States Military Academy in the early nineteenth century (see Chapter Three), and a vision radically different from those eventually sanctioned by the education policy reforms ultimately implemented.

Higher Education as an Individual's Access to the Middle Class: Legislation for Veterans' Benefits Moves from the Roosevelt Administration to Congress

Policy reforms, I have argued, always depend on a combination of circumstances—for instance, the outbreak of war and the actual physical suffering often brought about as a result—combined with the influence of rhetorical discourse that gives meaning to these events for citizens and persuades political leaders to take action. Successful reform rhetoric works to define a rhetorical situation (Bitzer, 1968; 1980) that makes certain actions or policy reforms appear possible, appropriate, and necessary. As

Bitzer and other rhetoricians have stressed, circumstances alone, in the absence of rhetorical discourse, rarely bring about change. Likewise, as I have suggested, defining a rhetorical situation involves selecting a set of values that function as constraints in Bitzer's sense through choices of language that serve to heighten or filter aspects of the existing circumstances (Burke, 1950; Weaver; 1965). While any number of values orientations might be available hypothetically, nation states and historical eras may be distinguished by those values orientations that tend to dominate discussions of political and social issues such as education (Labaree, 1997). Although his earlier comments, both private and public, suggest that access to higher education represented a marginal concern to the federal government, and to mainstream American society as well, Franklin Roosevelt's rhetoric by late 1943 showed the growing influence of an alternative values orientation, one resembling the notion of access I described earlier. What would have been unimaginable by and large in the history of American public policy toward education, now entered the mainstream of presidential rhetoric: "Lack of money should not prevent any veteran of this war from equipping himself for the most useful employment which his aptitudes and willingness qualify him" (quoted in Mosch, 1975: p. 28). At the same time that the United States was poised to begin moving from Martin Trow's (2005) elite phase to a mass phase of higher education, Roosevelt's comment endorsing this new level of government commitment to education reinforced a continuing shift in the rhetorical appeals that justified this support.

The Role of Educational Assessment in the Precedent Established by Congressional Debate on Veterans' Benefits

After this somewhat strange excursion into the history of debate concerning veterans' benefits in the years before and during World War II, literacy educators and writing assessment specialists will perhaps find most striking the turn of events that accompanied the Roosevelt Administration's submission of its package of veterans' aid legislation to Congress during the late autumn and winter of 1943. For at this point in these policy debates, the issue of educational assessment and national testing arose in a decisive manner. Although I have focused my discussion thus far primarily upon the efforts of the Roosevelt Administration and the American Legion, the full-scale of debate in Congress on veterans' benefits featured some twenty-six pieces of legislation (Meddler, 2005a; 2005b), offering a range of plans and emphases. Into this complex array of policy options, on November 3, 1943 Utah Senator Elbert D. Thomas sponsored Roosevelt's proposal as Senate Bill #1509. Many prominent scholars in the fields of history (Kennedy, 1999; Mosch, 1975; Olson, 1973; 1974; Patterson, 1996; Ross, 1969) and policy studies (Meddler, 2005a; 2005b; Skocpol, 1997), as well as journalists (Brokaw, 1998; Halberstam, 1993) and popular authors (Bennett, 1996; Camelon, 1949a; 1949b; 1949c; Humes, 2006; Kiester, 1994), have documented various aspects of the proposals made during this period to assist veterans on a range of the issues they faced in their return to civilian society. Greater access to higher education, what would later become a prominent outcome of these Congressional debates, was but one matter taken up, and certainly not the most vital one in the eyes of the many advocates and other participants in these debates. Aid to former soldiers who wished to attend college joined

other policy matters under debate, such loans for housing purchases and small-business start-ups, in the different attempts to provide government support for veterans. My description of these events, then, focused solely on the issue of government financial aid for college students, will be necessarily, and purposely, limited.

With my model of the policy cycle in mind, what I wish to emphasize here are two points: first, that the legislation we know today as the "G.I. Bill" represented neither the only, nor the most prominent policy option available during the Congressional debates of 1943 and 1944, and, second, that a key difference between the two main options under consideration hinged upon the role of educational assessment in the allocation of federal aid to college students. Senate Bill #1509 would be joined several months later in Congress by an alternative, Senate Bill #1617. This legislation, known as the Veterans' Omnibus Bill, was sponsored by six senators and, more importantly, endorsed by the American Legion. Figure 11 highlights what I consider to be the crucial differences between these policy options with regard to assessment in American higher education:

Policy Option:	**Senate Bill #1509**	**Senate Bill #1617**
Known as:	"The Thomas Bill" (for its sponsor, Senator Elbert Thomas, D-UT)	"The G.I. Bill of Rights" / "The Veterans' Omnibus Bill"
Key Supporters:	The Roosevelt Administration	The American Legion
Origins:	The NRPB & the Osborn Committee	Dec, 1943/Jan, 1944 in response to #1509
Introduced:	3 November 1943	6 January 1944
Education Benefits:	1 Year of Support	Up to 4 Years
Role of Assessment:	*Competitive Exams to Determine Eligibility for Additional Years of Funding*	*No Exams for Students; Funding Available for Use at Any Accredited Institution*

Figure 11. Key policy alternatives considered in deliberations leading to the G.I. Bill

Drawing upon the efforts of the National Resources Planning Board, but more directly those of the Osborn Committee, the Roosevelt Administration's proposal in Senate Bill

#1509 emphasized the needs of the nation's economy (Olson, 1973; 1974; Meddler, 2005a; 2005b; Mosch, 1975; Skocpol, 1997), with educational assessment to be used as a means of identifying only those students whose knowledge and expertise could fill specific occupational gaps, an approach that aligns most closely to the values orientation I have described related to the ultimate term *accountability*. Echoing the language of these earlier recommendations, then, the Administration called for government aid to be focused upon specific fields of study that would benefit the nation's post-war economic expansion.

What became the main rival to the Administration's proposal, Senate Bill #1617, in fact shared most of the same features as its competitor. Indeed, the American Legion itself would admit that much of this legislation borrowed from the original Roosevelt Administration proposals. Although both Senate Bill #1509, "The Thomas Bill," and Senate Bill #1617, "The Veterans' Omnibus Bill," provided support for veterans who wished to attend college, they differed crucially in the mechanism through which they proposed to allocate those resources. Following upon the work of the Osborn Committee, the Thomas Bill limited funding to college training that would prepare returning soldiers for specific occupations designated as serving the needs of the nation's economy. Moreover, such careers were to be identified by the federal government. Likewise, because these occupations were vital to the nation's welfare, the veterans who would receive government support needed to be judged as the best and most well qualified. Hence, as Figure 11 points out, the Thomas Bill recommended a system of national testing which would have determined the small number of veterans who qualified for additional college funding beyond the first year. Such a system of national testing would

likely have functioned in a manner similar to that implied more recently by the tentative suggestions of the Spellings Commission in the summer of 2006. That is, under the policy option of the Thomas Bill, assessment would have reinforced the values orientation that I have associated with the ultimate term of *accountability*. Rather than emphasizing the aspirations of individual students to access a lifestyle associated with the American middle class, the assessment policies proposed in the Thomas Bill would have made those individual aspirations subservient to the needs designated as vital to the nation's economy. Had Congress agreed to the Thomas Bill, the system of mass higher education that emerged rapidly after World War II would have functioned quite differently than the one with which most Americans today are familiar, and perhaps closer to the system based on assessment and accountability implemented at West Point under Sylvanus Thayer in the early nineteenth century.

To understand why this policy option and the values orientation it represented failed to gain favor among the lawmakers some sixty years ago requires attending to their assumptions about the function of assessment in the education process. Such assumptions appear most strikingly in the remarks of Senator Claude Pepper, a Democrat from Florida, who gave the following reaction to Senate Bill #1509 before the Committee on Education and Labor in mid-December, 1943:

> While I understand thoroughly what the Germans have always done about segregating those who are qualified for higher education from the masses who are destined for manual work and that sort of thing, at the same time it looks to me like any boy or girl who wants to go to college and who is able to make creditable grades, if they go there, should be entitled to go without some board somewhere

> getting this fellow into a laboratory, as it were, and deciding what potentialities are within him. (quoted in Mettler, 2005a: p. 364)

Among the many fascinating aspects of Senator Pepper's remarks is the link that this policymaker draws between educational assessment and the broader goals, assumptions, and values that a system of education might support. Here, using language that reflected the European struggle the nation faced at that moment, Pepper foregrounded the way that testing and assessment function to allocate power relations, in this case power relations between the individual aspirations of students and the collective priorities of the larger society represented by the government. Assessment and educational testing experts in their "laboratory" become directly implicated in this power dynamic and are positioned in such a way that wide-scale testing appears as decisively un-American. With that sentiment in mind, Congress eventually rejected Senate Bill #1509, despite its backing by the Roosevelt Administration (Mettler, 2005a; 2005b).

While the alternative to the Thomas Bill, the Veterans' Omnibus contained little which was substantially new or different from its competitor, its main advocate, the American Legion, did demonstrate the ability to rhetorically adapt its proposals to the expectations of the Congressional audience it faced for approval. After observing the debates that accompanied the Thomas Bill in Congress, policymakers with the American Legion were able to rapidly craft their own version of veterans' aid legislation. Indeed, soon after the committee meeting in mid-December, 1943 during which Senator Claude Pepper made his attacks on the Thomas Bill, the American Legion's Harry Colmery famously sat down in Washington's Mayflower Hotel and drafted an early version of the Veterans' Omnibus Bill on the back of the hotel's stationary (Camelon, 1949a; 1949b;

1949c). That Colmery and the American Legion's policymakers were consciously seeking to adapt their proposals to the expectations of their Congressional audience is revealed in remarks Colmery himself made only a few months later, in early 1944, when he addressed the House of Representatives' Committee on World War Veterans' Legislation. Harry Colmery told the Committee:

> The [Veterans' Omnibus] bill has some things in it, of course, that have been taken from the Thomas bill. But […] we did not go along with the idea of putting an additional 3 years [of funding] on a competitive basis and apportioning it […] on some basis of mathematical calculation or on any basis of selection. On the contrary, we wrote in [Senate Bill #1617 …] to remove any doubt that if the [student's academic] work was satisfactory there is no limitation [.…] [T]he veteran shall be eligible and entitled to continue his course of education or training until he has completed the same. (quoted in Mettler, 2005a: p. 364)

Colmery's observations document a careful process of rhetorical adaptation that advocates for the American Legion employed to win approval for their version of student financial aid to higher education, a rhetorical adaptation that hinged decisively upon using education assessment to support the values orientation I have associated with the ultimate term access rather than a viable policy alternative that instead would have emphasized a values orientation related to accountability. The success of this rhetorical adaptation was ultimately confirmed when the American Legion's version of reform went on to overwhelming approval in Congress, and as subsequent commentators have noted, in the court of public opinion throughout the late twentieth century (Bennett, 1996; Brokaw, 1998; Halberstam, 1993; Humes, 2006).

Immediate Influences of the G.I. Bill on American Higher Education

The immediate influence of the G.I. Bill on U.S. higher education appeared in the graduation figures for the period just after its implementation. While a little over 216,000 American students graduated college in 1940, that figure more than doubled (to 497,000 graduates) by 1949-50 (with over three-fifths of these students being male) (Patterson, 1996). Likewise, the percentage of students graduating from high school also rose during this period, to over 58% by 1950. Although the formal legislation of the G.I. Bill ended in 1956, these enrollment trends continued in succeeding decades, so that by 1970 three-quarters of students graduated from high school and almost half (48%) of eighteen-year olds were enrolled in some form of higher education (Patterson, 1996). Moreover, while some contemporary advocates of P-16 reform (Kazis, 2004; Ruppert, 2003; Van de Water & Rainwater, 2001) raise concerns that in the aftermath of the open-admissions period of the 1960s (Shaughnessy, 1977), too few students who enroll in college today complete their degrees, the college graduation rates in this country for the year 1960 were actually *lower* than today. In 1960 only 55% of the nation's 2.26 million male students graduated college combined with 37% of the 1.3 million female students (Patterson, 1996).

Summary and Implications

To summarize my argument in this chapter, the rhetorical situations in which contemporary education policy reform advocates, such as those of the P-16 movement, find themselves today, while allowing for a greater degree of rhetorical invention than perhaps Lloyd Bitzer himself acknowledged in his original formulation of the rhetorical situation (1968), nonetheless contain already established and powerful elements to which these rhetors must adapt as they formulate their proposals and invent persuasive appeals

in support of such reforms. Specifically, the *constraints* on the rhetorical situations surrounding current higher education reform debates involving writing assessment must include the system of student financial-aid allocation established by the legislation of the G.I. Bill in the 1940s. While the policies themselves have long since been superseded, the precedent of the G.I. Bill remains a powerful enactment of the values orientation that I have associated with the ultimate term access. The policy decision under the original G.I. Bill to allocate financial aid directly to individual college students, bypassing institutions of higher education, in fact marked a radical departure from the funding model still favored today in most nations of the world (Trow, 2005).

With that policy decision, congressional lawmakers rebuffed the policy proposals of Roosevelt Administration, and specifically those arising from the Osborn Committee, in favor of the American Legion's version of financial aid allocation that emphasized the values orientation of access, and in the ensuing decades policies based on an array of related analogies, such as "the student as consumer," "education as a commodity," and "a college degree as access to the American Dream," have increasingly gained favor among college administrators and the general public. The implication of this values orientation, and its potential function as a constraint on policy initiatives such as a national graduation exam for college students, is captured in an observation by education historian David Labaree (1997):

> In a setting where the educational consumer is highly influential, educational leaders are compelled to respond in a thoroughly entrepreneurial fashion if they wish to thrive or even survive. If they fail to meet consumer demand, students

> will vote with their feet by enrolling elsewhere in a school that is all too eager to give them what they want. (p. 233)

My analysis in this chapter supports Labaree's characterization of contemporary education and offers a policy based explanation for the current dominance of the consumerist mentality he describes. As long as policies regarding government financial aid to college students follow the precedent established by the G.I. Bill, that is, as long American college students can obtain government aid based solely upon their enrollment at an accredited institution, then the possibility of national standardized testing of college graduates will remain severely constrained, in so far as students under the American system will adopt the consumerist strategy Labaree outlined. Alternatively, in order for reform advocates such as rhetors of the Spellings Commission to establish a national graduation exam of college students within the current rhetorical situations of college writing assessment I have described, their proposals will need to include a radical revision not only of testing and assessment policies but of the entire system of financial aid allocation in American higher education. During an era dominated by a values orientation around the ultimate term access, I believe reforms on such a scale lie beyond the means of persuasion currently available, or at the very least face a daunting burden of proof in the present rhetorical climate.

In this way, the example of the G.I. Bill illustrates what I described as the policy cycle, with its interplay between specific policy decisions and broad values orientations. The policy decisions of the original G.I. Bill not only established specific rules and procedures for the government to follow but, more importantly, worked to favor one particular values orientation, that surrounding the ultimate term access, while the rhetoric

of the N.R.P.B., the Osborn Committee, and Franklin Roosevelt himself suggests that other competing values orientations were also available. As David Labaree (1997) pointed out, while no single values orientation has ever entirely dominated American education to the absolute exclusion of all others, certain ones tend gain favor in given historical eras, overshadowing their competitors. Despite calls from some P-16 advocates for "greater accountability" in American higher education, my research in this chapter convinces me that in fact American higher education remains firmly in an age of access now dating back over sixty years.

As I developed the main arguments of this chapter, I found myself returning again and again to the observation of historian A.O. Lovejoy quoted in the head note. Lovejoy's remark captures for me the challenge posed both by the policy cycle and the rhetorical approach to education policy that I propose throughout this study. While as literacy educators we may wish to stay comfortably within the areas of our official expertise—literacy pedagogy, student learning, writing assessment theory—engaging constructively in policy debates on these topics will likewise require that we tease out the assumptions which influence the persuasiveness of such policy arguments, assumptions arising frequently, I believe, "beyond the bounds," in Lovejoy's words, of such traditional definitions of our work as well as professional identity. Following these assumptions to their sources in education reform debates will likely lead us to the study of areas of society that seem at first distant from our immediate concerns.

Recognizing that matters such as policies concerning financial aid allocation may ultimately be central to the success of our work as literacy educators is the first step toward achieving the sort of political agency higher education critics such as Jeffrey

Williams rightly claim that as faculty we need in this era of ongoing reform and change. Ultimately, my argument in this chapter represents a paradox of sorts around the possibility for the field of composition studies to exercise constructive political agency in education policy debates concerning matters like P-16 reform. On the one hand, in contrast to the position of Jeffrey Williams and some of the commentators he reviewed, I claim that as literacy educators we *do* in fact have the potential to influence the course of debates arising from current policy initiatives such as those of the P-16 movement. On the other hand, I also argue that the possible options for policy reform are themselves limited, in fact, rhetorically *constrained* (Bitzer, 1968; 1980), by precedents established in earlier, often distant, moments of policy debate on issues that appear far removed from literacy education or writing assessment. Some additional implications of constraints on the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment I'll return to in Chapter Six, the conclusion, of this study.

CHAPTER V

AUDIENCE IN THE RHETORICAL SITUATIONS OF COLLEGE WRITING ASSESSMENT: THE GENRE OF THE EDUCATION POLICY REPORT ARISING FROM THE P-16 MOVEMENT

> "Speech genres, like speeches, are good places to look for values." - Judy Z. Segal (2005: p. 16).

Introduction

In Chapter Two of this study, I proposed a model for what I termed *the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment* in an attempt to explain the role of assessment data and interpretation in shaping contemporary education policy reform argument as well as to describe other key factors that influence such discourse. Individual chapters of this study, then, sought to elaborate specific components of the model, with Chapter Two describing how assessment data helps invent rhetorical *exigences*, or problems needing policy action, while Chapters Three and Four explained several varieties of rhetorical *constraints* on education policy argument, including values orientations in Chapter Three and the policy cycle in Chapter Four. Finally, this chapter takes up the last component of the model, *audience* in the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment. To begin exploring the role of audience in education policy reform discourse, consider the following excerpt from a recent episode of national dialogue on education reform (Dobbs, 2007). For the sake of rhetorical effect, I'll refrain from providing any background on this exchange right now, although I have highlighted certain parts of the

dialogue, hoping that these contextual cues will instead provide a sense of where we are and what is transpiring:

> DOBBS: "This is Lou Dobbs Tonight, news, debate, and opinion for Monday, February 5th [2007]."
>
> […]
>
> DOBBS: "The title of this disturbing report is *America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future*. Joining me now is Kurt Landgraf. He is president and CEO of the Educational Testing Service. Good to have you with us."
>
> LANDGRAF: "Thank you, Lou, it's a pleasure."
>
> DOBBS: "This—this a disaster. We have been reporting on this broadcast, I think as you know, about the failing public education system in this country, but to see to see it quantified in terms of—and if we could, go to the illiteracy graphic that shows the way the population breaks down by literacy. If we can have that. […] Adult literacy levels. The fact that we have—just the two lowest levels. We're talking about over half the population of the country. What in the world can we do about that?"
>
> LANDGRAF: We have 100 million people who don't have the skills, the literacy skills or the mathematical skills for the economy of the 21st century, and that's going to get worse, Lou."

Like the pop-quiz that opened Chapter Two of this study, I leave my readers to consider whether they were aware of this exchange on education policy reform that aired nationally during primetime on the Cable News Network (C.N.N.) in early 2007.

As the context indicates, the occasion for this exchange arose from the release of an example of education policy reform discourse, specifically the Educational Testing Service's (2007) recent policy report, *America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future*. That most literacy educators were likely unaware of this occasion, or of the policy report that led to it suggests, I believe, a crucial distinction concerning audience in the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment. In particular, as literacy educators we typically depend as our prime sources of information about trends in education, learning, and teaching upon the scholarly journals, books, and professional conferences that make up our academic discourse community in the field of composition studies. Such academic discourse communities inhabit what rhetorician G. Thomas Goodnight (1982) termed the *technical sphere* of argument, one populated by experts in specialized areas of knowledge who communicate primarily with other experts. In contrast, advocates of P-16 reform operate in what Goodnight describes as the *public sphere*, where non-specialist citizens and policymakers interact with each other and with experts in order to address issues requiring collective action through regulation, policy proposals, or other sorts of institutional deliberation. Besides the influence that forms of academic discourse may have upon such deliberations, debates on education policy reform, such as those initiated by advocates of the P-16 movement, depend heavily upon a variety of other rhetorical genres, the most important of which may be the education policy report (Kirst, 2000).

Moreover, this distinction between audiences, discourse communities, and genres has vital political implications for the work of literacy educators today. For instance,

based on results from their national survey of college writing teachers at non-elite campuses, Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Jeff Sommers (1999) found:

> Respondents described again and again how public pressures work against good teaching practices. When headlines trumpet the deficiencies of students entering college, states react by eliminating funding and credit for basic writing courses, or by mandating a single curriculum, entrance testing, or gateway exams. In such a climate, compositionists at open access institutions often feel a sense of schizophrenia, torn between their knowledge that teaching writing is important and challenging and the harsh voices attacking their enterprise. (p. 442)

Lewiecki-Wilson & Sommers' results demonstrate the potential influence that moments of dialogue on education policy, taken together, can have upon the work of literacy educators. The sorts of "public pressures" they described develop in part through the rhetorical activity of genres such as the education policy report and the associated instances of communication, such as the prime-time television exchange quoted earlier, that they generate. Thus, despite the traditional separation between the technical and public spheres of argument, between the discourse communities of literacy educators and those of education policy reform initiatives such as the P-16 movement, we have good reason for "paying attention" (Selfe, 1999) to matters of audience in genres such as the education policy report.

Another way of describing this distinction relates to the different orientations of the *classroom* and *policy perspectives* that I brought up in Chapters One and Two. Within each perspective, differing assumptions, purposes, and overall worldviews influence how rhetors make arguments about learning, teaching, and literacy, as well as education

reform proposals. Such differences between the classroom and policy perspectives can be understood as matters of audience adaptation. As I suggested in Chapter Two, education policy reform initiatives, such as the P-16 movement, promise to influence the work of literacy teaching and learning, both in classrooms and elsewhere, during this era of change and transition in American society. My concern in this chapter, then, is less with the merits of a classroom perspective in itself than with the need for literacy educators in the field of composition studies to look beyond this perspective exclusively when we conceive of literacy learning, public education, and the social consequences of our work. For this reason, recognizing the contrasts between a classroom perspective and the worldview represented by a policy perspective on education becomes, I believe, increasingly vital.

With this goal in mind, applying basic strategies of rhetorical analysis to the genre of the education policy report can help us derive a picture of the worldview associated with what I term a policy perspective on higher education. From such a rationale, then, this chapter addresses several main research questions, the first of which being:

> What are some characteristics of the genre of education reform policy reports represented by the example of *America's Perfect Storm*?

In response to this question, I argue, using the framework suggested by Aristotle's (1954) theory of persuasion, that *the genre characteristics of this E.T.S. policy report include 1) the use of some conventions associated with academic discourse, especially techniques of attribution, such as quotation, citation, and extensive footnoting, through which the authors seek to gain credibility, or* ethos, *to support their arguments; 2) the use of figurative language, especially the overarching analogy of a "perfect storm" and the*

narrative frame that analogy provides, in order to generate presence (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) for certain elements of education policy so as to elicit an emotional response, or pathos*, from readers; and 3) the use of evidence derived from data gathered through large-scale studies of educational assessment in order to make appeals based upon* logos*, or chains of reasoning in the argument itself.* These observations must of course be regarded as highly tentative, since they arise from the analysis of single education policy report, which by itself cannot represent the entirety of such discourse produced by the P-16 movement, let alone policy reports authored by advocates of different reform initiatives. At the same time, I believe the analysis offered here can serve as the basis for subsequent research.

Following from the analysis made in response to the first question, this chapter also addresses a second main research question:

> What can these characteristics suggest about the assumptions concerning education favored by audiences holding a policy perspective on education?

In response to this question, I argue, using rhetorician Edwin Black's (1970) theory of a "second persona" in discourse which represents an author's sense of an ideal audience for her text, that *the genre characteristics described above imply an audience holding a policy perspective on higher education maintains the following assumptions: 1) trust in the authority offered by specialized expertise, as represented through the conventions of academic discourse for understanding matters of education and education policy, but an authority based not upon the findings of academic discourse communities such as the fields of composition studies or educational assessment but instead a discourse community consisting of previous education policy reports; 2) a desire to relate matters*

of education policy, pedagogy, and learning to broader considerations in our society through techniques such as figurative language and narrative, but narratives based less upon the everyday experiences of classroom teaching than more emotionally charged stories tied to symbols drawn from the wider culture; and 3) an expectation for justifications grounded in empirical evidence, such as that potentially available from assessment research, but a version of empirical evidence often lacking descriptions of the contexts and immediate environments surrounding the processes of teaching and learning that assessment scholars (Huot, 2002) have argued must be considered in order help assure valid interpretations. My goal, then, in proposing the rhetorical analysis of education policy discourse centers on its potential to help literacy educators better imagine the characteristics of the audience implied by that discourse. Based on the insights derived from such rhetorical analysis, we may eventually, I hope, be able to address audiences holding a policy perspective more persuasively in our own arguments and reform proposals.

To address these main research questions, the remaining parts of this chapter take the following form. Section Two discusses some of the complexities involved with the rhetorical analysis of genres such as the education policy report. In particular, it surveys recent developments in the understanding of audience, beginning with Lloyd Bitzer's early description of the rhetorical situation, and incorporating revisions to his theory in the work of Carolyn Miller, Amy Devitt, and other theorists that seeks a broader awareness of the social context in which rhetorical transactions occur. This line of research leads to considerations currently explored in scholarship on genre systems and literate activity theory. To illustrate some of the complexities for rhetorical analysis of

these developments, this section concludes by describing a selection of the genre systems and literate activity through which the E.T.S. policy report *America's Perfect Storm* circulated immediately after its release. Section Three then offers a rhetorical analysis of this report that incorporates the insights of current genre theory with the canons of rhetorical analysis suggested by neo-Aristotelian criticism. Based on this rhetorical analysis, the assumptions implied by this discourse about its "second persona," or ideal audience, emerge. The observations available through rhetorical analysis of genres such as the education policy report provide a starting point, I argue, from which the field of composition studies can begin learning about issues of audience in the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment.

The Study of *Audience* in Bitzer's Rhetorical Situation and Beyond

Lloyd Bitzer's (1968) earliest model of the rhetorical situation gave careful consideration to the qualities that distinguish audiences—listeners, readers, or auditors—as specifically *rhetorical,* and this description provided the makings for a theory of genre that later critics would subsequently develop. In his original formulation Bitzer argued that "a rhetorical audience must be distinguished from a body of mere hearers or readers; properly speaking, a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (p. 8). Such a characterization separates observers or bystanders of rhetorical action from those parties whose efforts the rhetor needs in order to resolve her exigence, or the problem calling for a response, which, Bitzer believed, motivates the rhetor to attempt her persuasion in the first place. Likewise, such a description of the rhetorical audience establishes a strong linkage between audience and the other major components in Bitzer's model, with the

rhetor's definition of a problem leading to the choice of an appropriate audience capable of helping resolve it, and the characteristics of that audience affecting the constraints under which the rhetor must adapt her discourse in order to persuade. Additionally, Bitzer began to establish a connection between recurring rhetorical situations and notions of genre. He observed that "from day to day, year to year, comparable situations occur, prompting comparable responses; hence, rhetorical forms are born and a special vocabulary, grammar, and style are established" (p. 13). Here, repeated acts of persuasion lead to consistent forms or linguistic features in discourses that over time attempt to address similar exigences. Like the traditional view concerning genre in literary studies (see Devitt, 2004), Bitzer, however, focused his description upon textual characteristics that appear consistent across various instances of discourse. Such a traditional, form-based concept of genre received critique and subsequent revision in the responses that Bitzer's early theory provoked among subsequent critics.

From Rhetorical Situations to Rhetorical Genres

Bitzer's original explanations of audience and form in rhetorical situations led early commentators (Jamieson, 1973; 1975; Jamieson & Campbell, 1982; Larson, 1970) as well as later theorists (Devitt, 2004; Miller, 1984) to infer more direct connections between textual and linguistic forms and the rhetorical actions with which they appeared to co-occur. Rather than using formal features to identify particular genres, these critics emphasized the types of social action that different texts, or collections of texts in various media, allowed rhetors to accomplish within particular social environments. Most famously perhaps, Carolyn Miller (1984) reformulated traditional definitions of genre to argue that "genres [are] typified rhetorical situations based in recurrent situations" (p.

159). While going beyond Bitzer's original conception of form, Miller's view more directly aligned textual and linguistic features with rhetorical action, and in this manner followed Bitzer's overall characterization of rhetorical discourse as an attempt to address a situation. Miller's reformation also helped usher in a period of wider revision in genre theory which shifted attention away from traditional concerns with textual forms and conventions alone towards the varieties of social interaction that categories of discourse facilitated and in which they participated (Devitt, 2004). Among these revisions to Bitzer's model included greater concern for the influence of discourse upon larger social environments extending beyond the immediate circumstances of particular rhetorical situations in isolation. As genre theorist Amy Devitt (2004) characterized this recent approach, "genres, which reflect and construct recurring rhetorical situations, also reflect and construct a group of people" (p. 36). Thus, rhetorical analysis of genre provides insights not merely about textual form or the immediate circumstances leading to a piece of discourse, but the assumptions, priorities, and worldview that characterize the social group from which given examples of a genre originate. For the purposes of this chapter, the relevant group of people consists of P-16 reform advocates holding what I have termed a policy perspective on American higher education, and the relevant genre of analysis involves education policy reports.

From Rhetorical Genres to the Literate Activity of Genre Systems

Increased concern among theorists and critics with how discourse genres can foster networks of meaning and social relations that extend beyond the immediate circumstances of a given rhetorical transaction has shifted the emphasis of genre theory from a description and categorization of textual conventions to the study of how different

kinds of texts interact with each other and with various agents, both individual and collective, in order to accomplish culturally meaningful purposes. In the field of composition studies, this scholarly attention has occurred, among other things, under the heading of activity theory (Bazerman & Russell, 2003; Prior, 1998; Russell, 1997). Summing up key features of a socially situated theory of composing, writing studies scholar Paul Prior (1998) described reading and writing as "literate activities," which are "cultural forms of life saturated with textuality, that is strongly motivated and mediated by texts" (p. 138). Literacy, from this perspective, arises out of the exchanges and interactions through which everyday social life transpires, gives meaning to those activities, and through its use over time by participants may potentially transform the character of those interactions and their meanings. As an example of how such a process operates in the genres of education policy reform discourse, consider again an excerpt from the televised dialogue (Dobbs, 2007) I quoted earlier (again with my own emphases added) surrounding the release of the Education Testing Service's policy report *America's Perfect Storm*:

> DOBBS: "OK. Kurt Landgraf, we thank you for being here. Education Testing Service. We thank you. <u>It's an alarming report</u>. <u>People want to see it online</u>. <u>They can go to where</u>?"
>
> LANDGRAF: "<u>www.ets.org</u>"
>
> DOBBS: "ets.org. Throw those W's in front of it."
>
> "All right. Thank you very much."

In this age of widely available internet access, such an exchange may appear mundane beyond notice. However, the capacity which technologies like the internet provide to

increasingly saturate us with textuality, as Prior described, makes this exchange one where literate activity is "mediated" between a complex array of genres, including, for example, the paper text of the policy report itself, an electronic version available through the E.T.S. website, other texts and multimedia support materials also included there, as well as this video-taped dialogue itself, which helps frame the expectations that viewers will bring to those other genres.

An Example of Literate Activity Surrounding the Genre of P-16 Education Policy Reports: Early Reactions to the Release of America's Perfect Storm

Locating genres within a larger set of activity systems influences how we might understand the notion of audience in the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment. At the very least, we will need to acknowledge the complexity that underlies even basic rhetorical analysis (such as I will undertake in the next section). On this point, technical communication scholar Carolyn Rude (2004) found, based on her analysis of several recent environmental policy reports, that "[n]o single rhetorical act persuaded legislators to take the necessary action. […] More influential than a single report was the cumulative effect of multiple reports and other initiatives over time" (p. 272). My own analysis of the early circulation of *America's Perfect Storm* within an activity system of education policy reform discourse parallels Rude's observations. For instance, just within the first week of its release, in early February, 2007, this single E.T.S. report circulated across a number of distinct but interrelated rhetorical genres, as Figure 12 depicts:

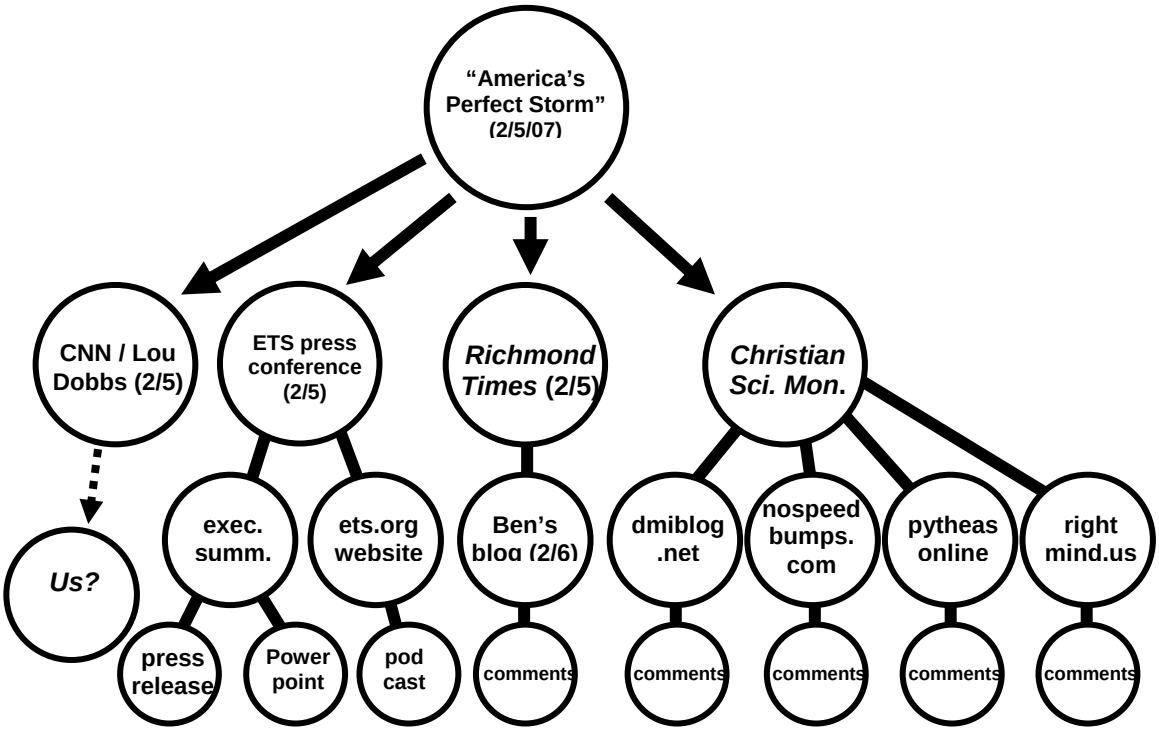


Figure 12. Literate activity surrounding the release of a P-16 education policy report.

Beginning with the paper text of *America's Perfect Storm* (although it can be argued that several of the other genres identified here might themselves serve as equally appropriate starting points), Figure 12 shows at least ten related genres through which literate activities around this E.T.S. policy report were mediated following its release. Besides the televised interview between C.N.N. journalist Lou Dobb and E.T.S. President Kurt Landgraf with which I began this chapter, and which appears at the far left of the diagram, Figure 12 includes in the second strand from the left the live news conference held at the National Press Club earlier the same day as the interview and also hosted by Landgraf. Participants in that press conference likewise referred to the full-length paper version of the report as well as to a brief executive summary of its contents, and the activities of the participants were supported by genres such as a press release announcing the news conference itself as well as a collection of Microsoft Powerpoint slides which supplemented the oral presentations. Adding to the complex, mediated nature of this

activity system, as with the C.N.N. interview, news conference participants also made reference to the E.T.S. website, which by the next day contained, not only copies of the policy report, executive summary, press release, and presentation slides, but a video podcast of the news conference itself.

Additionally, the strands on the right side of Figure 12 depict the circulation of *America's Perfect Storm* within traditional and nontraditional outlets of the nation's print media. Both the Richmond, Virginia *Times-Dispatch* and the *Christian Science Monitor* newspapers produced feature articles announcing the release of the report and drawing upon its contents to describe particular facets of education reform most relevant to their readers, as in the case of the *Times-Dispatch*'s analysis of changing demographics among students in the state of Virginia. Here, the processes of mediation and circulation occurred most obviously through the selection of, and interpretations given to, the content in the original E.T.S. materials by the staff writers of these newspapers. Also of interest in both these strands, however, is the continued circulation of the report's arguments from traditional press coverage to the commentaries posted on a variety of weblogs. While at least a dozen blogs mentioned the E.T.S. report in some form during the first week of its release, Figure 12 presents a sample of these reactions according to a basic spectrum of American political ideologies. For instance, the report generated reaction from commentators on liberal or left-leaning blogs such as dmiblog.net and nospeedbumps.com as well as self-professed conservative or right-wing sites including pytheasonline and rightmind.us. Adding further to the mediation and complexity of meanings involved, some bloggers referred directly to the original E.T.S. report as the basis for their commentaries while others referenced coverage in the traditional media,

and still others failed to indicate the genre(s) to which they reacted. As a final aspect of the capacity for technology to allow mediation between genres in an activity system, many of the blogs also included comments and responses from site visitors. Such a capacity of blogs itself raises intriguing questions about the nature of genres that theorists (Miller & Shepherd, 2004) have only recently begun to explore.

Some Implications for the Understanding Audience in the Rhetorical Situations of College Writing Assessment

The goal of this brief analysis concerns less the actual substance of meanings that circulated through the related genres of this activity system during a brief period following the release of *America's Perfect Storm,* a topic that itself could serve as the basis for a full-length study. Instead, I want merely to dramatize some of the complexities involved when attempting to interpret issues of audience and genre in public policy discourse. The implications of this complexity have in fact received attention from scholars both in rhetoric and composition and in the field of education policy studies. Most obviously, the analysis suggested by Figure 12 relates to my earlier discussion of the importance of circulations of meaning in understanding the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment. That is, my analysis helps illustrate composition scholar John Trimbur's (2000) contention regarding the process of circulation that "what gets distributed by these quite different types of reading matter is the productive means to name the world, to give it shape and coherent meaning" (p. 209). An implication for the rhetorical analysis of genres such as education policy reports follows from giving greater attention to circulation, one that technical communication scholar Carolyn Rude (2004) summed up this way:

> The concept of rhetoric itself may [need to] expand beyond the usual classroom focus on individual instances (the document, the speech) to accommodate persuasion over time: delivering a message repeatedly and in different media, actively seeking out audiences, and promoting action in response to the message. The publication is not an end in itself but a means to an end of change in policy and behavior. (p. 272)

Rude's observations here guide my own analysis in several ways. First, while I will focus on aspects of language and presentation in a single instance of education policy discourse in a single, rather traditional medium (paper), the foregoing discussion highlights multiple levels of additional meaning that such a focus will undoubtedly fail to capture. This reality necessarily makes me cautious about the findings I will offer.

On a related point, Rude's summary of recent trends in rhetorical and genre theory also guides my choice of the particular education policy report analyzed later in this chapter, E.T.S.'s *America's Perfect Storm*. Specifically, when understood as components within a larger system of genres and activity, even policy related texts which alone would appear to have negligible influence on readers can provide insights about the systems to which they belong. However, despite Rude's proposal, scholarly attention to education policy discourse has tended to focus instead upon well-known examples of apparently "influential" education reports. Perhaps the best known example, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983), authored during the Reagan Administration by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, has prompted an array of commentary and analysis by scholars in disciplines such as education (Caboni & Adisu, 2004), communication studies (Hunt & Staton, 1996), and history (Kimball,

1988), among others. As these scholars argue, that report led to a number of reforms in the nation's public schools and itself helped generate an activity system of discourse concerning education reform much more elaborate than the one sketched in Figure 12. At the same time, construing the process of public policy reform as a direct, one-way transaction from a single instance of "influential" discourse through actual policy change ignores the insights of recent genre theory as well as the policy cycle model developed in Chapter Four of this study. Hence, I choose instead to call attention to what might otherwise be considered a mundane instance of policy reform discourse that, taken in isolation, may not in fact lead to any tangible changes in American education policy. If viewed in the framework of genre theory and a broader activity system, however, discourses such as *America's Perfect Storm* can be seen as contributing collectively to an ongoing process of shaping the assumptions and attitudes of policy makers such that large-scale reforms may materialize some time in the future. Such discourses, then, can help reveal aspects of the worldview associated with a policy perspective on American higher education.

While scholars in rhetoric and composition studies have approached these issues of genre and mediation from the perspective of analysis, education policy advocates have likewise discussed some of the dynamics outlined so far, but with a focus on producing more persuasion policy reform discourse. For instance, education policy analyst and P-16 advocate Michael Kirst (2000) summarized his experience gained from work with the education policy think-tank Policy Analysis for California Education (P.A.C.E.), based jointly at Stanford University and the University of California at Berkeley, as well as with Stanford's *Bridge Project* (Kirst & Venezia, 2004), a P-16 reform initiative that has

received considerable attention during the first decade of the new millennium. His advice to educators who wish to influence policy reform debates fits within the framework emerging from current revisions of genre theory. Among other things, Kirst argued that when conceiving of education policy discourse, "an effective dissemination strategy must incorporate multiple formats to transfer information" (p. 385). As Figure 12 depicts, the strategy employed by the Educational Test Service for *America's Perfect Storm* follows this principle closely, with the traditional paper text of the report itself mediated by multimodal genres such as websites, internet podcasts, and television interviews.

The rationale Kirst offered for this strategy also echoes the findings of genre theory discussed previously. Besides the observation that "single […] sources prove ineffective," Kirst argued that an appropriate system of genres can help orchestrate not merely a collection of texts with various characteristics but what he calls an "issue network" composed of the social relations formed by key participants in specific reform debates (p. 384). For Kirst, an "issue network is a specific configuration of individuals encompassing researchers, academic intermediaries, research brokers and policy makers" (p. 384). Kirst's description of an issue network resembles the emergent notions of activity systems based upon rhetorical genres that writing scholars have discussed in recent years. Moreover, the importance that Kirst placed in issue networks goes beyond matters of language, text, or discourse alone. That is, Kirst suggested "issue networks can reduce the costs of difficult access and uncertain value because the common mission of network members reinforces potential relevance [of information]" (p. 384). Here, genres of discourse and activity serve to promote social relations through which political power can be enacted for the purpose of education policy reform. For this reason, likewise,

issues of genre and audience in the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment deserve the careful attention of literacy educators, because, as I quoted Edward White noting in Chapter Two, at present we are often assumed not to be “players” in the issue networks through which policy reforms involving writing assessment currently develop.

Some Genre Characteristics of *America’s Perfect Storm*

Rhetorical Analysis as a Means of Describing Audience and Genre

In suggesting the concept of rhetorical genre as a means of studying education policy discourse, my goal, then, is to help literacy educators in the field of composition studies begin to understand the world view represented by what I have termed a policy perspective on higher education and, specifically, the assumptions of the P-16 movement. Among the potential insights it may provide, rhetorician Charles Bazerman (1988) argued that "understanding the genre one is working in is understanding decorum in the most fundamental sense—what stance and attitude is appropriate given the world one is engaged in at that moment" (p. 320). Bazerman’s sense of decorum helps explain the way in which discourse signals to its readers not only how it should be understood but ideally who should understand it. To explore this process further, techniques of rhetorical analysis can prove helpful. In particular, the rhetorical tradition has developed a wide array of strategies through which critics may analyze the persuasive effects of discourse. Most prominent, perhaps, has been the collection of interpretative strategies, based loosely upon the observations of Aristotle (1954) in the *Rhetoric* concerning rhetorical invention, and subsequently applied to the process of interpretation by successive generations of critics under the label of *neo-Aristotelian criticism* (Fahnestock & Secor, 1997; 2002; Medhurst, 1993; Selzer, 2004; Wichelns, 1980).

Before describing such a neo-Aristotelian approach further, I want to acknowledge a key limitation to this school of rhetorical criticism, one that I hope my earlier discussion of genre theory may help to alleviate. Specifically, in 1925 perhaps the most well-known early proponent of what became known as modern neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism, Herbert Wichelns (1980), claimed that this approach "is concerned with effect. It regards a speech as a communication to a *specific* audience, and holds its business to be the analysis and appreciation of the orator's method of imparting his ideas to his *hearers*" (p. 67; italics added). Given the conditions at work in public speaking during the early twentieth century, before the wide availability of technologies such as sound amplification and recording, let alone distribution and circulation options like broadcasting and the internet, Wichelns's description of rhetorical criticism understandably focused upon the immediate circumstances of a single rhetor addressing a specific, easily identifiable audience of listeners on a particular occasion, as my highlights in the above quotation seek to emphasize. While I will argue momentarily that some elements of neo-Aristotelian criticism can help us understand aspects of audience in the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment, by itself the general orientation that Wichelns advocated cannot account in a satisfactory manner for the complexity of communication and circulation occurring in the highly mediated environment of contemporary education policy discourse; therefore, I have sought to augment the basic approach of neo-Aristotelian criticism through theories of genre and literate activity.

Identifying the "Persona" and the "Second Persona" in Discourse

With this qualification in mind, the approach of neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism, generally speaking, features attention to the canons of the composing process identified by Aristotle—invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery—as well as analysis of how three modes of proof, or means of persuasion, help the rhetor to persuade her audience.[3] As Aristotle (1954) noted in the first book of his *Rhetoric* regarding these three means of persuasion: "the first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker [*ethos*]; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind [*pathos*]; and the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself [*logos*]" (p. 1356a). Perhaps most familiar to composition teachers, Aristotle's framework underlies rhetorician Wayne Booth's (1963) well-known concept of the *rhetorical stance*. For Booth, the language of a discourse, whether in "fiction" or "nonfiction" texts, created a quasi-fictional character that helps convey the views of its author and attempts to guide the response of readers to that discourse. The success of such a character calls for an appropriate balance among the aspects of Booth's rhetorical stance, which include considerations of the rhetor's sense of self, the discourse's audience of readers, and its subject matter. Too much emphasis on any of these components, Booth believed, causes unpersuasive or otherwise ineffective discourse. In a similar vein, composition theorist Walker Gibson (1966; 1969) identified three typical versions of rhetorical stance, what he termed *persona*, in contemporary American prose,

[3] Fahnestock & Secor (1997) list a total of seven components that they associate with "classical rhetoric" as a system for teaching argumentation to contemporary college students. Among these elements include exigence, stasis theory, the three means of persuasion, the rhetorical topics of invention, and the distinction between questions calling for hypotheses versus those requiring theses, as well as the role of narrative and the figures of speech in persuasive discourse. My own analysis draws on selected components in their synthesis.

each of which implied a particular sort of character associated with different rhetorical genres. Gibson's (1966) classification distinguished between such personae as "tough," "sweet," or "stuffy" to describe the general impression of each upon readers. Like Booth, Gibson used this scheme to consider the ethics of different choices authors made in presenting themselves and as an aid to composition pedagogy.

Most relevant to my own efforts in this chapter has been an elaboration upon this early work originating in communication studies and focused not only upon the persona of the author implied by the language of a discourse but on an implied version of audience in discourse as well. According to rhetorician Edwin Black (1970), "there is a second persona also implied by a discourse, and that persona is its implied auditor" (p. 111). Black's second persona described the quasi-fictional version of an ideal audience of readers that an author's choices of language helped create in a text. Like the theories of Booth and Gibson regarding a "first persona" associated with authors, this second persona originated not primarily in any actual group of readers who interact with a text but in the language choices occurring within the text itself. Hence, Black believed that "the best evidence [of this implied auditor] will be the substantive claims that are made, but the most likely evidence available will be in the form of stylistic tokens" (p. 112). Attention in a discourse to aspects of language such as style as well as forms of reasoning can help describe its second persona. By doing so, then, the rhetorical critic may develop an interpretation of the audience broadly conceived by its author. Based on this analysis, Black believes that "the critic can see in the auditor implied by a discourse a model of what the rhetor would have his real auditor become" (p. 113). Concerning education policy discourse, I believe Black's observations about the second persona have

significance for the literacy educators in the field of composition studies, and especially for what we might learn about actual policymakers and reform advocates from the second persona implied by the discourses they read and compose.

In particular, my analysis attempts to enact the theory of rhetorical audience developed by Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford over several decades. Ede & Lunsford (1984; Lunsford & Ede, 1996) conceive of writers' relations with their audiences along a continuum of engagement, ranging from what they term an "audience addressed" relation to an "audience invoked" relation. At the first end of the continuum, some writers deal with actual, concrete, already existing readers who are real individuals capable of responding directly to the writer's discourse. The writer-audience relation of many e-mail messages and business letters represents the audience-addressed end of Ede & Lunsford's continuum. At the other end, writers face the challenge of imagining a vision of their potential readers who may otherwise be distant, vague, or in many cases non-existent, at least initially. Under such circumstances, Ede & Lunsford believed writers must "invoke," or invent, their audiences using the resources available through the textual conventions of rhetorical genres. The examples of novelists and some essayists fall towards the audience-invoked end of Ede & Lunsford's continuum. By developing a deeper knowledge of the rhetorical conventions associated with the genre of the education policy report, literacy educators may be able to better invoke a vision of the world view represented by a policy perspective on higher education. Such a capacity to invoke, or invent, the audiences for education policy reform discourse may allow us as literacy educators to better address real audiences of administrators and policy makers

who have the institutional authority to approve proposals that affect how literacy is taught, learned, and assessed in our schools and colleges.

Some Qualifications on Describing "the" Audience in Discourse

Finally, since my analysis foregrounds the notion of audience, I want to acknowledge several qualifications to attempts at describing *the* audience for any discourse. First, as my earlier discussion of the mediation of genres and activity in the discourse surrounding a single, modest policy report should indicate, the notion of a single audience for any text is itself questionable. Indeed, as the influential twentieth-century Belgian philosophers Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) observed: "It often happens that an orator must persuade a composite audience, embracing people differing in character, loyalties, and functions" (p. 21). Such is the case with *America's Perfect Storm*, as the media campaign of E.T.S. consciously sought to make this text available to potential readers as diverse as C.N.N.'s Lou Dobbs, print-media journalists, and internet bloggers, as well as officials and policymakers in various branches of government, all of whom may or may not belong to the "issue network" (Kirst, 2000) around which education policy reform might ultimately occur. The second qualification involves a basic premise that the study of rhetoric, whatever its precise theoretical orientation, must assume. That is, if the possibility of persuasion through discourse exists, then it must be assumed that the audiences for such discourse have the capacity to change, at least in small ways, what they believe and perhaps who they are as a result of persuasion. "A speech," remarked Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, "does not leave the hearer the same as he was at the beginning" (p. 491). So, despite my observations about audiences holding a policy perspective, I want my analysis to avoid

reifying a version of those audiences, since my understanding of rhetoric assumes the impossibility of such static characterizations.

The Example of a Recent Policy Report: E.T.S.'s America's Perfect Storm

The text of this E.T.S. "policy information report," released in early February, 2007, consists of a preface, an executive summary, and an extended argument spanning twenty six pages along with a six-page appendix of tables presenting statistical data referenced therein. In line with the assumptions underlying the P-16 movement generally that I described in Chapter Two, *America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future* argues that "substantial disparities in the distribution of [academic] skills" along with "economic restructuring, and demographic trends" (p. 4) will hinder the economic competitiveness of the United States as well as the future prosperity of individual students because our current system of public education fails to address these trends and their consequences. Based on Black's notion of the second persona, I frame the rhetorical analysis offered here around the traditional categories of interpretation associated with Aristotle because these categories of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* can provide, I believe, not only a theory of how persuasion operates in discourse but also a description of the audience of policy makers implied by P-16 advocacy discourse.

Appeals to credibility and authority in America's Perfect Storm. While I have thus far distinguished broadly between a classroom and a policy perspective on education, with literacy educators included in the former and P16 advocates in the latter categories, *America's Perfect Storm*, intended for an audience of policymakers, nonetheless employs genre conventions that typically work to build credibility in academic discourse as well. To illustrate some of these conventions, I have reproduced

(in Figures 13 and 14) several pages of text from the report. In Figure 13, some basic genre conventions of academic discourse broadly defined readily appear:

A Look Backward

Historically, the United States has provided economic opportunity for most of those willing to work hard, invest in themselves, and act responsibly. For the most part, we still subscribe to that promise, and both the civil rights and women's rights movements have extended this promise to groups often neglected in previous decades. As the nation changed from a predominantly agrarian society to an industrial one in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, labor-market success increasingly depended on attaining at least a modest level of formal education, along with a willingness to "do a day's work for a day's pay." Over time, as the structure of jobs and the economy changed, occupational and basic literacy skills became more essential for obtaining a decent job and advancing in the workforce. Eventually, a high school diploma emerged as a key credential for economic success. Through much of the 20th century, the proportion of high school graduates,[10] as well as the proportion of adults who graduated from college, increased with each successive age cohort — although those proportions differed substantially by race/ethnicity and, in some cases (e.g., college education), by gender.

After World War II, the GI Bill of Rights provided the initial impetus for a rapid expansion in college attendance and, eventually, the number of college graduates. Although this policy was motivated by domestic policy considerations, it was certainly consistent with the American ethos and led to the development of a stronger human capital base that helped to drive productivity and economic growth. Not only did the education and skill levels of U.S. workers increase during this period, so did the number of individuals who were entering the workforce. Thus, businesses had a growing base of both men and women who were better-educated and better-skilled than those they replaced. This unprecedented fund of human capital, together with the fact that the United States (unlike Europe and Japan) had escaped the worst ravages of World War II, enabled this country to achieve a pre-eminent position in the global economy. The United States led most of the industrialized world in the percentage of adults with a high school and college education and accounted for a disproportionate share of world gross domestic product.

Several other post-World War II events are worthy of note. The launch of Sputnik in 1957, as well as the apparent growing economic power of the Soviet Union in the 1950s and early 1960s, alerted the nation to the need for strengthening mathematics and science education. The "War on Poverty," initially declared by President Johnson in 1964, committed the federal government to reducing poverty partly by improving education investments in the poor from pre-school (Head Start) through adulthood. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 represented an attempt to use federal legislation to spur greater equality in U.S. society — in part through providing more equitable access to educational opportunity.[11]

Over the past two decades, a series of reports have been published that focus on the links between educational performance, literacy skills, and the U.S. economy. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (sometimes referred to as the Bell Commission) issued a report on the state of the nation's educational system. In that report, the commission made the following widely cited statement about the quality of our school system:

> The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur — others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments ... we have allowed this to happen to ourselves.[12]

Shortly following the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the Committee for Economic Development issued its own report, *Strategy for U.S. Industrial Competitiveness*, which called for a variety of economic,

[10] See Paul Barton, *One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities*, Policy Information Report, Policy Information Center, ETS, February 2005. In this report, Barton notes that the percentage of high school graduates as a percentage of our nation's 17-year-olds peaked at 77 percent in 1969, dropped to 70 percent in 1995, and has stayed close to that level at least through 2001.
[11] Unlike previous initiatives, the Civil Rights Act was an explicit attempt to address the social and economic inequalities that continue to exist in our country.
[12] National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1983.

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Figure 13. A page of text from the E.T.S. policy report America's Perfect Storm (2007) showing genre conventions typical of academic discourse.

For example, the report breaks down into sections which contain headings that indicate parts of the overall argument. Likewise, the text carefully documents the sources it draws upon to support its arguments, using genre conventions such as block quotations and footnotes referencing the sources cited. Figure 14, moreover, shows the incorporation of quantitative data through visual formats such as tables and charts:

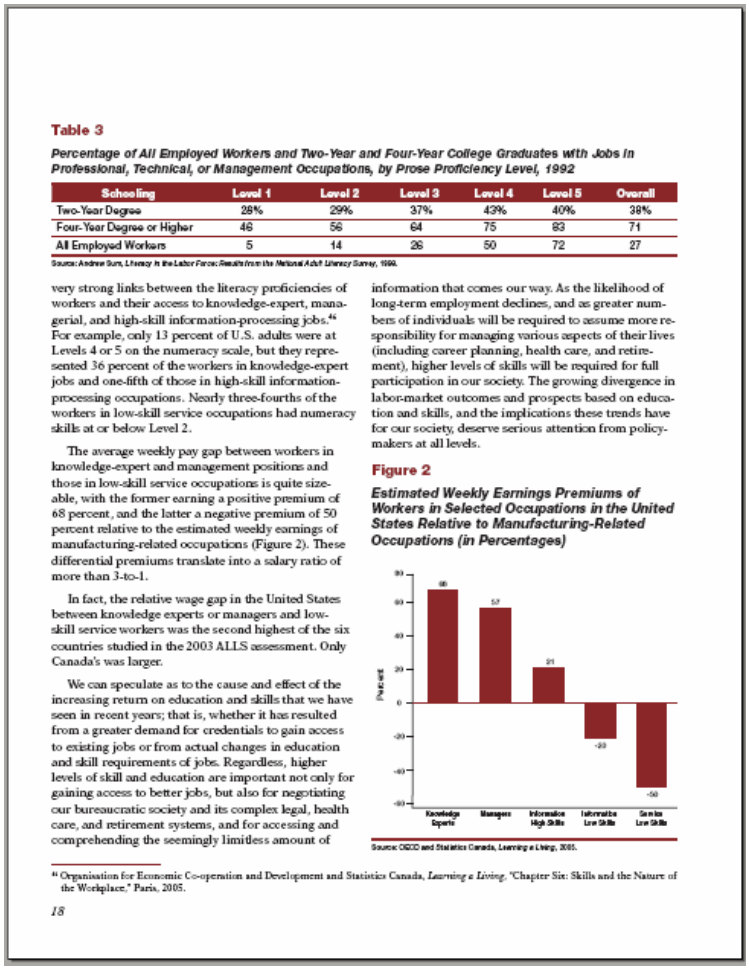

Table 3

Percentage of All Employed Workers and Two-Year and Four-Year College Graduates with Jobs in Professional, Technical, or Management Occupations, by Prose Proficiency Level, 1992

Schooling	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Overall
Two-Year Degree	28%	29%	37%	43%	40%	38%
Four-Year Degree or Higher	46	56	64	75	83	71
All Employed Workers	5	14	26	50	72	27

Source: Andrew Sum, Literacy in the Labor Force: Results from the National Adult Literacy Survey, 1999.

very strong links between the literacy proficiencies of workers and their access to knowledge-expert, managerial, and high-skill information-processing jobs.[44] For example, only 13 percent of U.S. adults were at Levels 4 or 5 on the numeracy scale, but they represented 36 percent of the workers in knowledge-expert jobs and one-fifth of those in high-skill information-processing occupations. Nearly three-fourths of the workers in low-skill service occupations had numeracy skills at or below Level 2.

The average weekly pay gap between workers in knowledge-expert and management positions and those in low-skill service occupations is quite sizeable, with the former earning a positive premium of 68 percent, and the latter a negative premium of 50 percent relative to the estimated weekly earnings of manufacturing-related occupations (Figure 2). These differential premiums translate into a salary ratio of more than 3-to-1.

In fact, the relative wage gap in the United States between knowledge experts or managers and low-skill service workers was the second highest of the six countries studied in the 2003 ALLS assessment. Only Canada's was larger.

We can speculate as to the cause and effect of the increasing return on education and skills that we have seen in recent years; that is, whether it has resulted from a greater demand for credentials to gain access to existing jobs or from actual changes in education and skill requirements of jobs. Regardless, higher levels of skill and education are important not only for gaining access to better jobs, but also for negotiating our bureaucratic society and its complex legal, health care, and retirement systems, and for accessing and comprehending the seemingly limitless amount of information that comes our way. As the likelihood of long-term employment declines, and as greater numbers of individuals will be required to assume more responsibility for managing various aspects of their lives (including career planning, health care, and retirement), higher levels of skills will be required for full participation in our society. The growing divergence in labor-market outcomes and prospects based on education and skills, and the implications these trends have for our society, deserve serious attention from policymakers at all levels.

Figure 2

Estimated Weekly Earnings Premiums of Workers in Selected Occupations in the United States Relative to Manufacturing-Related Occupations (in Percentages)

Source: OECD and Statistics Canada, Learning a Living, 2005.

[44] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and Statistics Canada, *Learning a Living*, "Chapter Six: Skills and the Nature of the Workplace," Paris, 2005.

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Figure 14. A second page of text from the E.T.S. policy report America's Perfect Storm (2007) showing genre conventions typical of academic discourse, including the use of graphics and other visual aids.

These genre conventions, easily recognizable at a glance by academic readers, function in several ways to build credibility, or *ethos*, in *America's Perfect Storm*. First, adopting basic academic conventions can help associate the views of this policy report with the general credibility that academic expertise commonly holds in our society (Goodnight, 1982). That is, for some readers, simply seeing academic genre conventions such as copious footnoting of sources and an appendix of tables may lend credibility to the arguments presented, even, or especially, if those readers fail to reflect upon the relevance or truthfulness of the information presented through such conventions. Second, genre conventions involving attribution, such as quotation, citation of sources, and

footnoting, help locate a particular text in relation to other texts, and by doing so, allow the author to draw upon the authority of those other texts to enhance the credibility of her own. Scholars of writing across the curriculum (Bazerman, 1988; Swales, 1990) have argued that such genre conventions helped bring together the early discourse communities of scholars that eventually led to the formal academic disciplines commonly found in the modern university, a process which required, among other things, distinguishing credible from non-credible views on a wide range of issues. That is, the genre conventions of attribution signal to readers not merely what sources an author drew upon to support her argument but more powerfully what sources of knowledge on a given issue deserve the attention of readers. For this reason, the use of citation in *America's Perfect Storm* is particularly telling. Of the sixty-six footnotes in the text, at least sixty provide citations or the attribution of knowledge to particular sources (the other footnotes clarify technical points about the presentations of statistical data). Despite an extended discussion of the literacy abilities of American students (pp. 12-16; 21-23), the report fails to cite a single work of scholarship (academic book, journal article, or conference presentation) originating in the field of composition studies. Nor, for that matter, does *America's Perfect Storm* draw upon scholarship from any academic discipline related to literacy development, such as reading theory, education studies, or learning theory.

Instead, with the exception of several citations from national newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal*, and book-length studies originating in the academic field of economics, *America's Perfect Storm* gains its credibility through attributions to other policy reports on education reform. Prominent among these include the aforementioned *A Nation at Risk* as well as recent reports produced by the Committee for Economic

Development, the Carnegie Corporation's Forum on Education and the Economy, the Ford Foundation's Project on Social Welfare and the American Future, and the National Center on Education and the Economy. Especially noteworthy for scholars of writing assessment, *America's Perfect Storm* attributes claims for the effectiveness, or lack of effectiveness, of pedagogy to the same types of sources. For instance, the report claims that "the value added by instruction through age 15 for many students seems to be considerably lower than in many other industrial countries" (p. 14). Such a claim clearly has implications for arguments over education policy reform, but the language of the claim itself masks a wide array of complexities that many U.S. educators encounter on daily basis in teaching students from diverse backgrounds. Given the scope of this claim based on data gathered from educational assessment, it is troubling to find that the only sources of authority the report offers its readers as support for the claim consist of education policy reports authored by conservative or right-leaning think-tanks, in this case, Stanford University's Hoover Institute (Evers & Walberg, 2004) and the Thomas Fordham Foundation (Walberg, 1998).

On this point, the issue of establishing credibility, or *ethos*, in the genre of the education policy report touches upon the sorts of appeals to differing values orientations that I explored in Chapters Three and Four of this study as constraints on the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment. As I described then, arguments for education policy reform frequently appeal to specific values orientations—that is, priorities or goals to which a system of education and society as a whole might aspire—as justifications for change. Such values orientations, I argued, function as rhetorical constraints that guide the sorts of reform proposals which will seem viable within a given society and historical

period. In the case of the P-16 movement, I described two such values orientations that figure prominently in contemporary education policy reform discourse. One values orientation, dating from the reforms introduced at the United States Military Academy during the early nineteenth century, allows appeals to the ultimate term *accountability*, with its emphasis upon standards of judgment, the role of testing in assuring that students meet common outcomes, and a rationale for instruction based on the need for trained workers to assure the competitiveness of the national economy. A second values orientation, which gained prominence with the reforms of the G.I. Bill in the aftermath of World War II concerning the allocation of government financial aid to college students, emphasizes the ultimate term *access* and appeals to the benefits that college education can provide individual students, that is, to upward mobility and "access" to the "American Dream" of middle class social-economic status.

In the case of *America's Perfect Storm* appeals to both these values orientations help enhance the credibility of its argument. Concerning accountability, after reviewing a series of other education policy reports claiming weak performance by American students in comparison with students from other nations on academic subjects such as literacy, math, and science, the report finds that "the combination of our [nation's] relative (mediocre) position with respect to average performance and our leading position with respect to inequality in performance leads to concern about the growing danger to the well-being of our nation" (p. 15). Here, evidence from assessment data serves as a means by which to argue that current education practices place our nation in a vulnerable position compared to the economies of other countries. Such an argument, however, implies that the priority of public education should be preparing future workers for the

needs of the nation's economy, a position associated with the values orientation of accountability. In contrast, elsewhere in the report, *America's Perfect Storm* shows the influence of the contrasting values orientation I have associated with the ultimate term *access*. In the context of an extended discussion of how well students from different backgrounds fare in our nation's schools, a discussion that uses assessment data to argue that performance levels in subjects areas such as literacy have declined during the past several decades, the report concludes that "unless we are willing to make substantial changes, the next generation of Americans, on average, will be less literate and have a harder time sustaining existing standards of living" (p. 10). Unlike the previous appeal, this claim foregrounds the relation between education and the opportunities for economic prosperity available to individual students. Rather than the status quo in American education hurting the nation's overall economic performance compared with other countries, the above claim emphasizes the possibility that current practices will lead to the decreasing capacity of education to provide access the social-economic rewards associated with middle-class status. In both instances these appeals help build the credibility of *America's Perfect Storm* by conveying that its authors share several prominent values orientations that help justify why America's system of education matters. To the extent that readers also share these values orientations, they are likely to find the arguments made more persuasive because their source, this report and its author, the Educational Testing Service, will be perceived as more trustworthy.[4]

[4] At the same time, nowhere does the report address the differences between these two values orientations or their potential conflicts when used as justifications for specific reform proposals. That is, at a high level of abstraction, such as that necessary to compose education policy reports, it is possible to hold *both* these values orientations as priorities for education. At a more concrete level, however, such as that of actual deliberation over policy reform, each of these values orientations will lead to quite different proposals. For instance, the values orientation surrounding accountability might best be satisfied by reforms that lead to

Emotional Appeals in America's Perfect Storm. Given developments in American public education at both the K12 and college levels during the past 150 years, the possibility of making emotional appeals, or appeals to *pathos*, in arguments over education policy reform might appear difficult. That is, today few parts of American culture seem as commonplace, if not mundane, as attending school, and more recently, perhaps, attending college. As I indicated in the preceding chapters of this study, reforms during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, such as more stringent truancy laws, brought increasing numbers of children to public schools for longer durations. Moreover, reforms including those associated with the G.I. Bill following World War II made government financial aid available to American students of the late-twentieth century as never before. Finally, reform initiatives such as the P-16 movement argue that more students from increasingly diverse backgrounds should consider attending college. Beyond the philosophical and practical justifications offered for these reforms, one result has been that the notion of formal education has become accepted as a basic part of everyday life for ever larger segments of our country's population. Against this backdrop of increasing availability, then, advocates of education policy reform face a tactical challenge in presenting their proposals, whatever the actual merits of those proposals might be. This challenge involves how to make issues such as reforming educational assessment, pedagogy, or curriculum appear worthy of attention when most citizen encounter these matters as obligatory and regular parts of everyday life. Historians of education reform (Applebee, 1974; Labaree, 1997) have described the slow pace of

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the production of more trained computer software engineers or biomedical researchers, while the values orientation related to access might favor reforms leading to the production of more lawyers and M.B.A's.

change and the persistence of traditional approaches, even in the face of research-based evidence to the contrary and ongoing, if low-level, public complaint.

One way to explain this challenge from the perspective of rhetoric appeared in the work of Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) around the concept of *presence*. In *The New Rhetoric*, they noted that "one preoccupation of a speaker is to make present, by verbal magic alone, what is actually absent but what he considers important to his argument" (p. 117). The result of such "verbal magic" generates presence, or greater attention by the audience to certain aspects of the subject that the rhetor wishes them to notice. Based on this more vivid awareness of the subject, the audience becomes open to persuasion, to adopting the specific arguments the rhetor makes regarding the subject. In the case of education policy reform argument, rhetors of the P-16 movement must find a means of generating presence in a subject, the current American system of formal education, which because of its familiarity to most citizens may seem unworthy of extended attention. Among the techniques Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca catalogued for generating presence, a number involve the use of figurative language. Of particular interest for my purposes is the use of analogy. In Chapter Two of this study, I analyzed the role of a common analogy in P-16 reform discourse by which advocates characterize the function and operation of our country's public education system. That analogy claimed American schools function, or should function, like an educational "pipeline," with each grade level and institution in the system representing pieces of "pipe" through which students should flow efficiently as move from preschool toward college graduation. Framing American education with this pipeline analogy allows P-16 advocates to argue that phenomena such as student attrition constitute "leaks" in the

sections of curricular pipe, rather than any number of other possible explanations that might also explain what happens when students of different backgrounds struggle to accomplish the variety of tasks which the everyday of experience of formal education asks them to accomplish.

While this pipeline analogy helps frame conceptually the proposals of P-16 reform, another function of analogy in education policy discourse can be to achieve presence for otherwise seemingly obscure facets of our nation's education system. Most obviously, a key analogy offered by the policy report under discussion occurs in its title: *America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future*. Here, the immediate comparison is to a recent best-selling book with a similar title: *The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men against the Sea*, by contemporary nonfiction author Sebastian Junger (1997). Junger's book documented the ordeal suffered by a group of fishermen who perished in the midst of a colossal hurricane that meteorologists ultimately described as "the perfect storm," or a disturbance that resulted from the combined force of multiple weather systems converging to form an even larger, and more destructive storm. Junger's work not only achieved popularity as a book but served as the basis for a successful film of the same name, making the term "perfect storm" likely familiar within American popular culture of the new millennium. Indeed, the notion of a "perfect storm" came to be used generally as a label designating any phenomenon or problem that resulted from a convergence of forces acting together with intensified results.

When used to characterize the effects of large-scale economic and demographic trends acting upon American education, the perfect storm analogy provides a means by

which to give presence to the topic of education policy reform as well as introduce the possibility for an emotional appeal based upon readers' fears for the future not just of American education but of our nation's prosperity and success. As E.T.S. Vice President Michael Nettles noted in his preface to *America's Perfect Storm*:

> The authors offer the image of our nation as a nautical convoy. Some boats are large, well built, and able to ride out the heaviest of turbulent seas. Others are smaller, but still quite sturdy, and able to survive. But, many are fragile, meagerly equipped, and easily capsized in rough waters. This convoy is in the midst of a perfect storm that is the result of a confluence of three powerful forces […]. (p. 2)

While the everyday experience of formal education may seem mundane to many of its participants, the figurative language which Nettles catalogued helps re-invent that experience so the process of education now takes on the plot of an epic narrative, one that functions to increase the presence of topics related to education reform. As the above passage dramatized, the presence generated by the perfect-storm analogy and its related narrative frame appeals less to the rational means of persuasion than to the emotional, to *pathos* rather than *logos*. That is, much of the actual evidence presented in this report consists of statistical information describing the experiences of large numbers of students over long periods of time. By its nature such data attempts to go beyond individual experience to explain large-scale patterns of change. As a result, an interpretation emerging from such data alone might prove accurate but would not likely evoke an emotional response in readers. Yet when presented within the narrative frame provided by the perfect storm analogy, an audience holding a policy perspective might "see," rather than a collection of statistical data alone, a drama of students struggling against

large-scale social forces in a manner closer to that of fishermen battling against a dangerous ocean storm. Using this means of generating *pathos*, the authors throughout *America's Perfect Storm* intersperse their analyses of statistical data with references to the narrative frame based on the perfect storm analogy. By doing so, these emotional appeals help associate presence with educational trends that would otherwise appear abstract and distant from the concerns of readers.

The authors of *America's Perfect Storm* consciously deploy their figurative language to generate emotional appeals, and the range of such appeals to *pathos* encompasses both positive emotions associated with qualities like hope and optimism as well as negative emotions related to fear and danger. The opening paragraph of the report begins with references to the place of figurative language in their argument and the emotional associations the authors see their argument making:

> On a continent bounded by two oceans, our society has often employed nautical metaphors to generate evocative images. National political leaders used to speak, for example, of the "ship of state," and President John F. Kennedy, in arguing the case for economic growth in the early 1960s, claimed that "a rising tide lifts all boats." Given our country's growing demographic diversity, however, perhaps it would be more appropriate now to imagine our nation as a convoy. […] [M]any [boats in the convoy today] are fragile, meagerly equipped, and easily swamped in rough waters. That convoy—the individuals, families, and communities that make up our nation—is in the midst of a "perfect storm." (p. 6)

Readers of this passage will likely find themselves drawn into the narrative frame it provides. The essential components of a plot line occur in the brief space of a single

paragraph. That is, the passage begins by offering a set of aspirations that the public discourse of our political leaders affirms and about which our socialization as citizens typically leads us to feel positively. Then, the narrative frame introduces complications to the achievement of this aspiration. The risk entailed by certain members of our society, those inhabiting the boats that are "fragile, meagerly equipped, and easily swamped," provokes negative feelings of worry and dread, as in the conventional narrative plot when it appears the main characters will fail to achieve the goal that motivates them. Moreover, the perfect storm analogy and its narrative frame may heighten a sense of foreboding and fear in readers. As the authors write, "the forces behind this storm continue to gain strength, and calm seas are nowhere in sight. We can't hope to ride this one out. If we continue on our present heading and fail to take effective action, the storm will have a number of predictable and dire implications" (p. 7). Drawing upon the plot line established by Sebastian Junger's book, this passage, and similar ones throughout the report, appeals to the emotions of fear and concern, with readers placed in the role of knowing awareness, even as the characters in the plot—students in the nation's schools and colleges—move towards disaster. Such emotional appeals can thus help motivate readers to consider taking action, in this case to support education reform proposals.

Appeals to Logos in America's Perfect Storm. So far, I have considered two of the three basic means of persuasion identified in neo-Aristotelian criticism. I chose to begin with discussions of appeals to character and emotion rather than the category I now take up, *logos*, because I hope to alert literacy educators of need to give careful attention to these aspects of the second persona implied by the genre of the education policy report. Because the conventions of academic discourse favor in theory, if not practice, logical

appeals, and because much of our experience as rhetors likely entails persuading audiences within the technical sphere (Goodnight, 1982) of specialized academic discourse communities, we need to recognize a more balanced view of persuasion when dealing with genres such as the education policy report.

As an example of how appeals to *logos* operate in education policy discourse, let me return for a moment to the exchange between C.N.N. journalist Lou Dobbs and E.T.S. President Kurt Landgraf with which I began this chapter. Again, Dobbs opens the discussion of *America's Perfect Storm* by voicing his reactions and by calling the attention of viewers to specific parts of the report's argument. Focusing this time upon the way Dobbs interprets empirical data from the report, I have again highlighted a selection of his comments:

> DOBBS: "The title of this disturbing report is *America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future*. Joining me now is Kurt Landgraf. He is president and CEO of the Educational Testing Service. Good to have you with us."
>
> LANDGRAF: "Thank you, Lou, it's a pleasure."
>
> DOBBS: "This—this a disaster. We have been reporting on this broadcast, I think as you know, about the failing public education system in this country, but to see to see it quantified in terms of—and if we could, go to the illiteracy graphic that shows the way the population breaks down by literacy. If we can have that […] Adult literacy levels. The fact that we have—just the two lowest levels. We're talking about over half the population of the country. What in the world can we do about that?"

While academic critics often complain that debates over matters of public policy in this country lack substance, the above passage illustrates that even when discussions of education reform take place on commercial television, appeals to *logos* do in fact play a part. That is, Dobbs reacts to a logical appeal in the report, basing a claim, or interpretation, upon a collection of evidence. Indeed, despite the other types of rhetorical appeals at work in *America's Perfect Storm*, its authors foreground the rational appeals they hope to make. In the introduction they write: "This report uses data from recent national and international surveys to report on the skills distributions of our school-age and adult populations" (p. 7). Such logical appeals to empirical data like survey results work in tandem with the appeals to *ethos* the authors attempt to establish by adopting many of the basic genre conventions of academic discourse described earlier. With this combination of appeals, the genre conventions of the education policy report can appear to provide readers with a vision directly into the "reality" of the topic presented. Particularly when the audience of readers for this genre may not typically have access to direct experience of the phenomenon described—the processes of teaching and learning which take place in actual classrooms and campuses—these genre conventions can make the arguments they embody seem strongly persuasive, as the reaction, for instance, of Lou Dobbs above indicates.

At the same time, it's important to look closely at what happens to assessment data when it circulates from specialized academic discourse communities in the technical sphere and into the activity systems of education policy debates within the public sphere. Despite the implication that reports such as *America's Perfect Storm* provide readers access to what goes in the nation's schools and colleges and how well this process works,

when assessment data circulates between different spheres of argument, from genres such as the scholarly journal article and research monograph in the technical sphere through the education policy report in the public sphere, the meanings of that data change in ways that the genres of conventions of the education policy report fail to acknowledge. For example, in their discussion of literacy skills among American students, the authors cite an array of scholarly studies attempting to measure various aspects of student and adult performance. Among these sources include the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, the International Adult Literacy Survey, the National Adult Literacy Survey, and the National Assessment of Adult Literacy. From this research, they present a bar graph drawn from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, which I have reproduced as Figure 15:

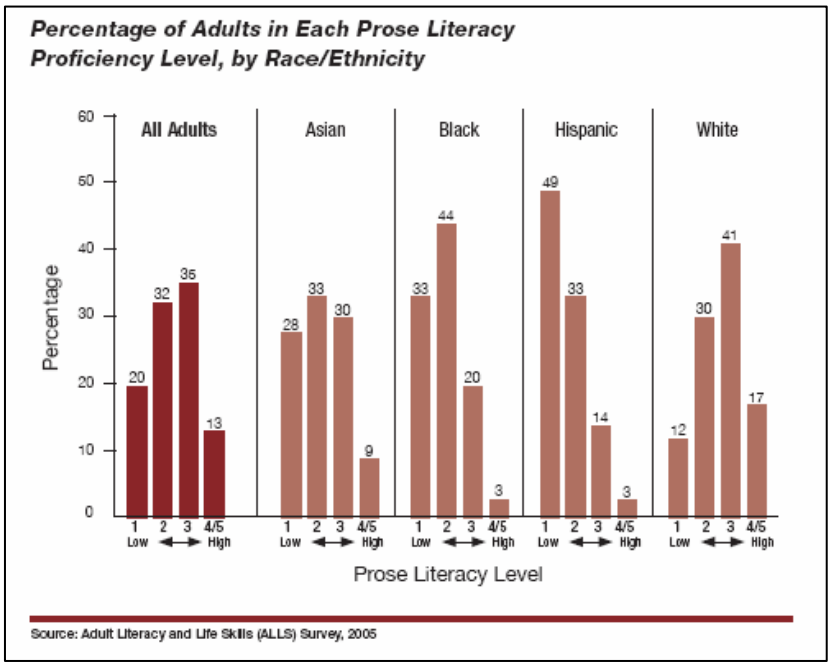

Figure 15. Bar graph showing adult literacy levels according to ethnicity (reproduced from Educational Testing Service, 2007: p. 12).

There are several aspects of this logical appeal that I consider noteworthy. First, the bar graph in Figure 15 formed the basis for "the illiteracy graphic" to which Lou Dobbs

refers in his comments quoted above and which C.N.N. viewers saw as “evidence” for Dobbs’ claim that the current state of adult literacy “is a disaster.” That is, technologies of assessment, which allowed the data reported here to be gathered and categorized, initially performed their work under the guidance of trained specialists within a technical sphere of argument that calls for elaborate and detailed explanations of the procedures followed and the results reported. Not surprisingly, then, such reports of large-scale research projects typically run to many pages and provide detailed accounts of the meanings assigned to the different scoring levels employed.

In contrast to the conventions followed by academic discourse communities in the technical sphere, the genre conventions of the education policy report found in *America’s Perfect Storm* and associated with the public sphere of contemporary education reform debates favor immediate audience affect over precise description of the subject reported. That is, consider again Figure 15. Without knowing anything of the methodologies followed by the researchers who produced the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, readers can simply glance at the bar graph in Figure 15 and notice a seeming pattern in the data represented, one that Lou Dobbs expresses. Although all visual representations of data risk misleading their readers by over-simplifying the complex phenomena upon which they are based (Kostelnick & Hassett, 2003), conventions of communication among experts followed within the technical sphere help ensure at least that the patterns offered receive careful qualification and elaboration. While the authors of *America’s Perfect Storm* attempt to explain how their readers should make sense of the ratings given in Figure 15, this explanation may leave some literacy educators unsatisfied:

> Adults in Levels 1 and 2 are characterized as possessing, at best, basic- or intermediate-level skills, respectively. Although few of these adults would be considered illiterate in the historical meaning of the term, only a small percentage were judged to have the skills needed to fully participate in an increasingly complex society. Performance in Levels 3 and higher is considered to be a minimum standard for success in the labor market. (p. 12)

My concern here centers upon neither the validity or reliability of the original research that led to the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey nor the accuracy of the pattern implied by Figure 15 about levels of adult literacy in this country, at least as originally reported. Instead, I wish to point out that the transition from the technical sphere of educational assessment and measurement to the public sphere of education policy reform debate has altered the meaning assigned to the assessment data presented in *America's Perfect Storm*, with the result that readers holding a policy perspective may receive an incomplete picture of how effectively our nation's schools and colleges prepare students.

This point leads to a second consideration relating to the use of logical appeals in the genre of the education policy report associated with the P-16 movement. In Chapters One and Two of this study, I described some of the concerns that have gained prominence in recent versions of validity theory developed through the study of college writing assessment. Among the proponents (Huot, 1990; 2002; Huot & Williamson, 1998; Williamson & Huot, 1993; 2000) of these trends, Brian Huot has argued that literacy educators must give careful attention to the role of context as it affects the interpretations they make of test scores and other forms of assessment data. The importance of acknowledging social context and the conditions under which teachers and

testing professionals gather and interpret assessment data marks a break with earlier theories of validity and of assessment generally which sought to eliminate or downplay the influence of context upon claims derived from test results (see Williamson, 2004). The work of assessment scholars applying current notions of validity theory (Broad, 2003; O'Neill, Schendel, & Huot. 2002) has begun to influence the thinking of literacy educators in the field of composition studies. Among the benefits gained include not only better quality judgments of students' writing abilities but also a depth and sophistication of understanding that faculty can now bring to the process of interpreting student writing through richer, more nuanced theories of literacy and literacy learning. Such trends in the theory and practice of writing assessment hold great promise for the activities of teaching and learning. With greater attention to context, literacy educators can make judgments about students' writing and writing abilities that better serve the needs of teaching and learning as well as support the development of students throughout the stages of formal education.

At the same time, my analysis of the second persona implied by *America's Perfect Storm* suggests that audiences holding a policy perspective may not currently possess such awareness of context and the social environment under which teaching, learning, and testing occur in our nation's schools and colleges. Perhaps, as I noted above, because in contemporary American society almost all of us—educators, administrators, policymakers, and citizens generally—now experience formal education as a constant and obligatory part of life from childhood through early adulthood, if not beyond, the process of education can be seen as a "given" to many advocates in education policy reform debates. Unless these complexities are endowed with presence, as

Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca describe, topics related to education and assessment may seem adequately represented by the sorts of graphics exemplified in Figure 15. Changing public perceptions of literacy learning, pedagogy, and assessment in fact represents one key implication of this study that I'll return to in the next chapter. Unfortunately, current notions of validity theory imply that such de-contextualized perspectives alone cannot provide the basis for valid interpretations. For this reason, current arguments of education reform risk drawing upon faulty, or at least incomplete, evidence to support their reform proposals.

Paying Attention to *Audience* in the Rhetorical Situations of College Writing Assessment

The preceding rhetorical analysis, and especially the discussion of appeals to *logos*, brings up what I consider to be a fundamental tension at work between recent notions of best practice in college writing assessment, based in validity theory, which focus on the need for careful attention to specific contexts and local environments in which teaching and learning occur, and the trend in education policy reform to conceive of public education as a single system uniting individual institutions, grade levels, and other specific units. For instance, one policy option at the college level that addresses the P-16 movement's goal of easing the transition of students between grade levels and institutions centers on more extensive use of transfer and articulation agreements. In many states students who complete designated courses at a community college can automatically transfer those credits towards bachelor's level degree programs on four-year public campuses. Among the courses students often choose to transfer from two-year to four-year programs include first-year composition and other required writing classes. While such policies may ease the flow of students through the higher education

"pipeline," transfer and articulation agreements downplay the role of context in the learning process since they assume that the same subjects studied on different campuses and under different circumstances will result in the same quality of learning. Even if it applies to some academic subjects, this assumption goes against current theories of literacy learning, composition pedagogy, and writing assessment. The goal of having students move more easily between units within a system or between different education systems can only be resolved with context-based theories of literacy learning and assessment if literacy educators more persuasively dramatize to policymakers the vital role of context in the process of education, a task that will ultimately depend upon how we choose to represent ourselves and our work to audiences outside our professional discourse communities.

My analysis in this chapter of a single education policy report originating from the P-16 movement, the Educational Testing Service's recent *America's Perfect Storm,* offers a starting point for literacy educators to begin studying this genre of discourse. More importantly, I believe that understanding the genre conventions and characteristics of education policy reports can help us learn about the audience implied by those conventions, what rhetorician Edwin Black termed the second persona of a text. This second persona in the discourse of education policy reports helps reveal assumptions I have referred to generally as a policy perspective on higher education. As I have indicated, such a perspective, favored by the P-16 movement, contrasts in key ways with assumptions typically favored by literacy educators in the field of composition studies. Thus, by studying the discourse of education policy reform initiatives like the P-16 movement, we may learn the sources of disagreement between policy and classroom

perspectives on education. That knowledge might then allow us to compose our discourse in genres such as education policy reports so as to influence decision making on matters of literacy pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment. As I noted at the outset, my analysis here is limited and so necessarily tentative in the observations it makes. At the same time, I hope the approach I have offered will help literacy educators in the field of composition studies become better at "paying attention" (Selfe, 1999) to the discourse of education policy reform and its typical audiences.

There are a number of implications that I draw from the rhetorical analysis presented here, some of which I'll explore in the next chapter. For now, however, I'll close by quoting the sentiments of Ben Lee (2007), one of the bloggers listed in Figure 15, who expressed his own reaction to the release of the policy report I discussed. Given the project I've proposed for literacy educators concerning the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment, I believe we might benefit from taking his observations to heart:

> Anyway, I haven't yet had a chance to look at the new ETS report—the confidently titled *America's Perfect Storm*—but I am having trouble restraining myself from wondering if [instead] we shouldn't be directing our educational efforts toward producing students capable of critically analyzing the endless series of conflicting reports about the failings of American education! (n.p.)

CHAPTER VI

THE RHETORICAL SITUATIONS OF COLLEGE WRITING ASSESSMENT AND BEYOND—INVENTING "A CULTURE OF DELIBERATION"

> "Nobody becomes an English professor in order to grade papers, write committee meeting minutes … or argue with the dean…." - Evan Watkins (1989: p. 1)

Introduction

At a recent academic conference, one of the presenters (Johnson, 2007), a scholar with contacts at the Educational Testing Service, mentioned what she was told would be the likely slogan in an upcoming E.T.S. promotional campaign: "A Culture of Evidence." Given the analysis I've developed in this study of the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment, a number of observations occur to me about the assumptions implied by that slogan. First, the choice of the term "evidence" in one sense fits quite appropriately with the sorts of "products" that E.T.S. sells: Standardized tests such as the S.A.T., the G.R.E., and the T.O.E.F.L. all generate substantial quantities of data related to students and their capacities, if nothing else, to perform on these exams. This type of evidence Aristotle (1954) discussed in his *Rhetoric* under the category of *inartistic proofs* that can support arguments. Among the types of inartistic proof that concerned Aristotle included physical artifacts, sworn testimony, and confessions elicited from torture. Today, it might be said that we already live in "a culture of evidence," at least as far as matters of writing assessment and the rhetoric of education policy reform. That is, the desire to document with increasing frequency and detail the school experiences of American students from their entry into formal education through, in some cases, the

college years marks the agenda of the Bush Administration's "No Child Left Behind" policies as well as some initiatives associated with the P-16 reform movement. Moreover, the status of such assessment data, at least for some policymakers, appears to be that of inartistic proof in Aristotle's sense; that is, requiring no further explanation from the rhetor in order to be persuasive.

At the same time, my analysis in this study leads me to prefer Aristotle's alternative category of evidence as the better description of how the status of assessment data should be understood. That is, while he discusses inartistic proof and its place in argumentation, Aristotle gives much greater attention to a second category of support, *artistic proof*. Here, Aristotle distinguished the three basic means of persuasion I applied in Chapter Five of this study—*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. In contrast to inartistic proofs, these means of persuasion call for processes of rhetoric, or "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (p. 1355b). Through the notion of artistic proof, I want to argue that assessment data should be understood not as a given set of facts whose meanings are obvious but instead as the result of a process that requires conscious and artful invention on the part of all parties who participate in making judgments. Moreover, Aristotle's theory of argument raises a further concern for me about E.T.S.'s slogan. Just as Aristotle associated artistic proof with the three means of persuasion, he links the process of constructing arguments with the particular circumstances and audiences to whom those arguments must appeal. In Aristotle's time, the major divisions of circumstances and audiences for argument centered upon differences between the law courts, the legislature, and ceremonial occasions. Today, many additional forums exists where rhetoric occurs involving matters of education

policy reform, but attention to a culture of evidence alone suggests little about what forums, circumstances, and audiences must be addressed using assessment. Without specifying these factors, constructing persuasive arguments becomes impossible. That is, simply accumulating piles of test scores, stacks of pass rates, or other sorts of inartistic proof such as the products of E.T.S. can readily provide offers no guidance to literacy educators about what to do with that data, how to use it in order to support persuasive arguments that can influence relevant audiences.

If there are limitations to the notion of "a culture of evidence" that underlies E.T.S.'s promotional campaign and its dependence upon inartistic proofs, let me conclude this study by proposing an alternative approach for how we might understand the process through which assessment data gains meaning and persuasiveness, what I term *a culture of deliberation*. Rather than emphasizing data gathered from assessment technologies as the essential component in the theory and practice of writing assessment, a culture of deliberation focuses attention upon the possible occasions, purposes, and situations when decisions based upon assessment can and must be made within institutions, systems of education, or the broader public sphere. In the same way that noticing the E.T.S. slogan might prompt some literacy educators to consider *whether* or *how* they collect assessment data about their students, I intend my notion of a culture of deliberation to prompt us to consider *why* we collect assessment data, for what purposes, to persuade what audiences, and under what circumstances. Answers to this "why" question will likely depend upon factors particular to the local culture of each campus or institution. Here, a culture of deliberation foregrounds the importance of context in making interpretations and judgments around assessment data and in this way builds

upon the recent arguments of validity theory. These instances of deliberation, as I have argued in this study, should be understood as rhetorical situations, as instances when persuasion leads to decisions about what to do on matters affecting pedagogy, curriculum, and learning. More precisely, I hope my model of the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment can provide a heuristic through which to begin thinking about these occasions and opportunities when deliberations involving assessment might occur.

The Rhetorical Situations of College Writing Assessment: A Heuristic

As I described in Chapter Two, this study elaborates a model of what I termed the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment. Based upon Lloyd Bitzer's (1968; 1980) earlier theory of the rhetorical situation, my model seeks to identify the key influences upon the deliberative processes out of which education policy reforms arise. By discussing the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment in this study, then, I hope to begin exploring some of the resources for persuasion available through artistic proof. Figure 16 reproduces the model I proposed in Chapter Two:

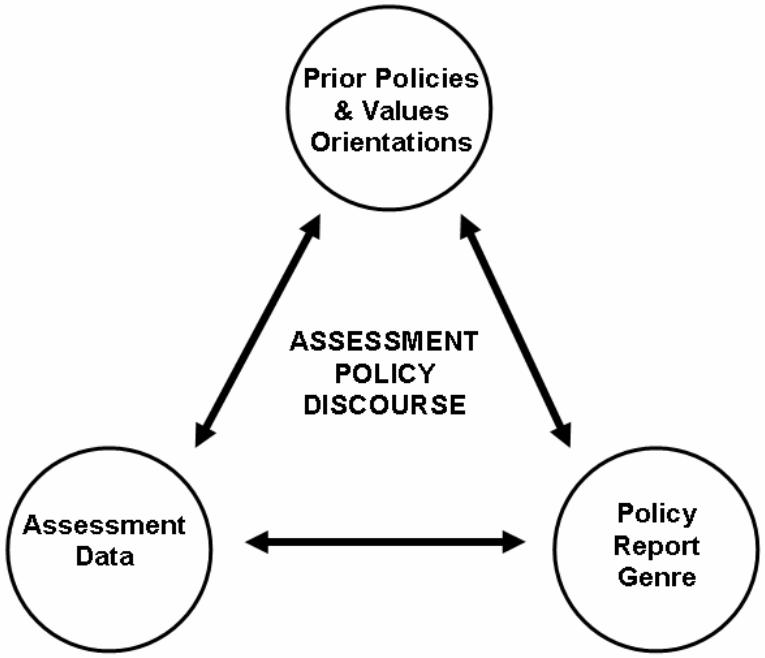

Figure 16. The rhetorical situations of college writing assessment—an adaptation of Bitzer's original theory consisting of exigence, constraints, and audience.

Like Bitzer's original formulation, my model contains three main components, and the components in my version attempt to build upon the parts of Bitzer's framework. So, for instance, in Figure 16 I associate assessment data with Bitzer's concept of rhetorical *exigence*, because assessment data allows education reform advocates to make interpretations which define problems with the status quo of education practice that appear to call for solutions contained in their specific reform proposals. Likewise, where Bitzer identifies a broad array of *constraints* which can guide, or constrain, the sorts of arguments rhetors might make in a given rhetorical situation, my model focuses on several types of constraints that figure prominently in education policy arguments, in particular already existing, or prior, policies as well as values orientations. Finally, where Bitzer posited an *audience* for the rhetorical situation capable of bringing about the rhetor's proposed change, my model foregrounds the genre of the education policy report, a medium through which reform advocates attempt to persuade education

policymakers—audiences with the institutional authority to implement large-scale policy changes. By studying the genre conventions and characteristics of education policy reports, as I suggested in Chapter Five, we might better understand the assumptions such audience hold, what I call a policy perspective on higher education.

The heuristic that results from my model emphasizes for literacy educators "the importance of paying attention" (Selfe, 1999) to specific aspects of education policy reform discourse and the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment through which such discourse circulates. Following an outline of the chapters in this study, my heuristic raises a series of questions for contemplation:

- *Paying Attention to Exigences (Chapters One and Two)*: Because education policy reform initiatives such as the P-16 movement focus on the transitions that students make, or fail to make, between different levels or institutions within an overall "system" of public education, and because writing assessment data of various forms helps define what happens at these "crunch points" (Elbow, 2003) in curricula or between curricula, literacy educators should pay attention to exigences in the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment by responding to the following questions: Where are the crunch points in the literacy curriculum on my campus? How do these crunch points affect students' progress toward graduation? What exactly happens at these crunch points? What data from various forms of assessment can provide evidence for these explanations? What institutional forums (committees, working groups, etc.) officially exist to deliberate over the meanings, implications, and possible options for addressing concerns about these crunch points? What administrative authority do these

assessment forums have to change current practices (on pedagogy, curriculum, or assessment) based upon deliberations resulting from the interpretation of assessment data? So far, what actual changes have such assessment forums made on my campus? To what other institutional forums beyond my immediate program or department might assessment data gathered at these crunch points possibly circulate (such as administrative committees elsewhere on my campus or beyond)?

- *Paying Attention to Constraints (Chapters Three and Four)*: Because data gathered through writing assessment technologies should be understood as forms of artistic, rather then inartistic, proof, and because the meanings that can be assigned to assessment data will be constrained according to both the values orientations favored by educational institutions and the broader society as well as the precedents established by prior policy decisions, literacy educators should pay attention to constraints on the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment by responding to the following questions: Concerning values orientations, what goals, outcomes, or priorities for literacy do the uses of assessment on my campus support (both explicitly and implicitly)? What broader values orientations (such as those related to ultimate terms like *accountability*, *access*, or others) does the discourse of my institution seem to support? In what other aspects of institutional operation (besides assessment) do these values orientations get expressed? How do these different values orientations support each other? In what ways do they conflict? When audiences beyond campus look at my institution, what values orientations do they see? Are these the same ones constituencies on campus seek

to uphold? What values orientations motivate my own work as a literacy educator? In what ways are my own values orientations compatible, or not, with those of my institution and those of the larger community? Concerning prior policies, what current policies or existing precedents establish jurisdiction over, or ownership of, issues related to writing assessment on my campus? (That is, who officially is in charge of assessment, and how do I know?) When issues of change around assessment practice arise on my campus, what existing or previously existing policies, regulations, or precedents might influence the changes under discussion? To what extent are those participants involved with this decision-making aware of such prior policies or their potential influence? By what means can those parties be made aware?

- *Paying Attention to Audience (Chapter Five)*: Because the increasing circulation of writing assessment data made possible by the growth of technologies (on-line databases, digital portfolios, etc.) and by public policy initiatives such as the P-16 movement that seek to foster greater coordination between units (individual campuses, institutions, etc.) within a larger system of education leads to the probability that assessment data will find its way to constituencies beyond the classroom, literacy educators should pay attention to audiences in the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment by responding to the following questions: What potential audiences (besides literacy educators or others holding a classroom perspective) might encounter writing assessment data that I have collected? What combinations of media (print, video, computer, etc.) might best reach the issue networks relevant to my concerns? When addressing audiences

holding a policy perspective, how can I use the conventions of academic discourse to enhance my credibility, or *ethos*? More specifically, what sources outside the field of composition studies (such as current education policy reports) discuss issues of reform related to my topic? What sorts of figurative language (analogies, narrative frames, etc.) available from the broader culture might generate *presence* (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) and an appropriate emotional reaction (*pathos*) for readers less familiar with the everyday experience of a classroom perspective on education? How can I help educate audiences holding a policy perspective about the processes through which interpretations of assessment data arise and the influence of local contexts and environments upon the meanings attributed through those interpretations? That is, how can I help dramatize the complexity of reasoning (*logos*) involved with making judgments about the performance and ability of specific groups of students under the conditions found at my institution to audience residing elsewhere?

Ultimately, I believe this study should be judged in part by how well it prompts literacy educators to "pay attention" to education policy reform and address questions such as those mentioned above.

A Culture of Deliberation and the Professional Identity of Literacy Educators

At the same time that I see practical benefits to my model and the heuristic it generates, I want to avoid the implication that applying this heuristic, that is, seeking to participate more actively in debates over education policy reform, can be done mechanically. Instead, as I've suggested throughout this study, if we choose to participate more actively in education policy reform debates, such rhetorical action will surely alter

in some ways our professional identities both as individual literacy educators and as members of a field called composition studies. What I'm calling for resembles more closely the process rhetorician Charles Willard (1989) described when he contended that "entry into the public sphere [of reform debates] entails adoption of a new persona; one transforms one's professional identity into one's model of citizenship. Such a face shift is a rhetorical accomplishment" (pp. 50-51). Expanding the areas of professional activity we consider "our business" as literacy educators to know about and exercise authority over—in the case of this study, education policy reform and writing assessment—promises to alter who we are as much as what we do. There are at least three implications for our professional identities as literacy educators that I see this study raising, and I'll conclude by discussing each one briefly.

Redefining What We Do

At the most obvious level, my argument in this study has implications for what we actually do as literacy educators. Instead of using a classroom perspective primarily, or exclusively, to define our work as literacy educators, a first implication relates to the need for us to become more adept at describing ourselves and our work to audiences further removed from the process of education than at present we may typically be accustomed. Although as academic professionals we usually expect to address audiences of colleagues and peers in genres such as scholarly journal articles and monographs, less often do we anticipate the need to reach discourse communities or issues networks extending beyond the boundaries of our own field. Such a capacity to shift back and forth between a classroom and a policy perspective on higher education will become increasingly vital for educators in a range of academic fields, but none more so than

literacy educators concerned with issues of writing assessment. Indeed, I hope we might become able to adopt the professional role that education policy scholar Michael Kirst (2000) described as the *policy broker*. In this role, Kirst argued, "policy brokers […] bridge the gap between research and policy communities. […] They are skilled at translating technical reports into 'plain English.' They are accessible. […] [T]hey can synthesise several research reports into short, policy-oriented commentary. […]" (p. 387). Even as such a role may at first seem foreign, it in fact draws upon basic principles of rhetoric and audience adaptation that many literacy educators already accept and seek to teach students. Thus, Kirst's role of the policy broker may share more in common with our professional identity than we might initially imagine.

Redefining What We Expect of Students, Society, and Ourselves

A further set of implications from this study concerns the influence that the discourse of education policy reform, such as that represented by the P-16 movement, may have upon our society's assumptions for judging the success of formal education. Among the things he notes about the public sphere of argument, rhetorician G. Thomas Goodnight (1982) has described how cultures in different historical eras distinguished between subjects that belonged to the public sphere and those that did not and likewise how in American culture certain issues have over time moved between different spheres of argument. The example Goodnight offered concerns the topic of poverty:

> In 19th Century America, the poor were generally considered to be poor because of character flaws. […] With the advent of the Progressive movement, however, the grounding of arguments about poverty gradually shifted from the private to the public sphere. […] Progressives gradually transformed the issue of poverty to

> a public concern, one that was a shared rather than an individual responsibility. (p. 221)

Goodnight explained further that by the early to mid-twentieth century, the topic of poverty had shifted yet again, this time from the public to the technical sphere of argument, where it became the basis for new academic fields of study in the modern university such as social work, public health, and sociology. Most important to Goodnight's theory, these shifts between spheres of argument result largely from matters of discourse, from the language which people in different times choose to talk about a given subject.

When seen through Goodnight's theory of argument spheres, the subject of education demonstrates intriguing historical transformations as well. For instance, some observers across of the decades of American history have considered education, in particular academic success and failure, to be a matter of individual initiative alone, so that students who fail in school can be assumed to have exhibited the same sorts of "character flaws" that the nineteenth century associated with the condition of poverty. As with the Progressive movement and its capacity to shift the issue of poverty into the public sphere during the nineteenth century, so my analysis in this study indicates a similar process at work with the discourse of P-16 movement around the issue of education, particularly higher education, during the new millennium. Consider, for example, the remarks of P-16 advocate Kevin Carey (2004): "Once, those who tried and failed to get a college degree still had the opportunity to find a solid middle-management job and move up a career ladder. Lack of success in college was seen as an individual disappointment, not a national dilemma. The world has changed since then" (n.p.). The

discourse of P-16 reform advocates like Kevin Carey attempts in part to shift explanations of success and failure in American higher education away from issues of individual character or ability and toward assumptions based in collective social responsibility and the public sphere of argument. Even if the P-16 movement, like the Progressive movement before it, eventually ceases to exist as a formal entity, it may share a legacy similar to the one Thomas Goodnight described for nineteenth-century poverty reforms: Just as the Progressive movement made our society less tolerant of poverty than it had been, so it may be the case that the rhetoric of the P-16 movement might eventually make the American public less accepting of college failure and more open to potentially radical reforms around issues such as writing assessment.

Redefining How We Portray Our Subject, Our Work, and Ourselves

A final implication I see for this study builds upon the previous observations. That is, if the future of education policy reform asks us as literacy educators to assume new roles in order to do our jobs and to change some basic assumptions by which we judge the success of ourselves and our institutions, so too, I argue, will we need to change how we describe our work to the public audiences who will likely influence education policy reform debates. Composition scholar Linda Adler-Kassner (2002) has put the matter this way: “Is it possible to teach writing (or work with teachers teaching writing) so that public perceptions of students, and of writing, change? That is, is it possible to: 1) use writing as a way to eradicate deficit-based notions of students and their abilities, and 2) use writing to change public perceptions of the purpose of *writing* and of education more generally?” (p. 1; emphasis in original) The challenge Adler-Kassner has posed involves how we choose to portray literacy, pedagogy, and the contribution our work makes to the

larger society. Here, the challenge goes beyond the desire Edward White expressed in Chapter Two that as literacy educators we become "players" in education policy reform debates. Not only will we need to enter education policy reform debates where for much of our history we have been essentially absent, but once there we will need to redefine for the audiences we encounter the nature of our work. Doing so will likely call upon all the insights that the field of composition studies has discovered through its attention to research and scholarship over the past forty years or more. Equally important, however, will be our ability to reframe those insights and knowledge according to the changing conditions, needs, and aspirations of the broader society in which higher education exists. Such a process will itself undoubtedly require careful scholarly attention to understand fully. "The important thing," Charles Willard (1989) has argued, "is to study the myriad ways domain-specific knowledge is translated into policy influence" (p. 49). As I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this project, the knowledge and training of literacy educators may especially relevant to this task.

A Final Thought

Having come this far in my own writing and thinking about education policy reform and writing assessment, I'll close by offering several quotations that capture some of the issues I hope this study has helped literacy educators in the field of composition studies to consider. Replying to an on-line news article about policy reform, institutional assessment, and the efforts of the Spellings Commission in late 2006, Adler-Kassner posted the following response:

> One of my many concerns with the Spellings report and with actions stemming from it has to do with who is determining the standards for "comparability"

> [between different institutions]. What happens if those standards diverge from what educators think/know/understand (based on experience) are appropriate? This is an issue that we in composition face frequently (i.e., when one 'arm' of an institution determines that one kind of writing assessment is 'appropriate' for one purpose or another, but it doesn't reflect what compositionists shaping/teaching in the writing program believe about writing). The conceptualization issue seems to be absolutely essential here. I haven't seen/heard much about this—others? (2006: n.p.)

My own readings of assessment theory and education policy discourse in this study lead to me share many of Linda Adler-Kassner's concerns. Soon after her posting, however, came the following reply, and in tandem with Kassner's remarks, I find it captures many of the concerns that originally motivated me to undertake this study:

> The previous comment is right on target. Writing lies at the crux of the problem, because it is at once a basic skill we measure among elementary students, a higher-order skill we measure among college students, the primary means of assessing other higher-level skills such as critical thinking, and even the primary means of teaching those other higher-order skills, in all subjects. Linda, what a ripe time this is for writing professionals themselves to step up and control the process of developing standards! Who could do that better? What could be of more use to higher education in the quality/accountability debate? Writing professionals could provide the leadership on this issue: they need only a little less slant toward individual perspective and a little more slant toward common goals. (Griffin, 2006: n.p.)

While maintaining that “slant toward individual perspective” which as humanists we rightly value, I hope this study of the rhetorical situations of college writing assessment helps all of us as literacy educators develop “a little more slant toward common goals” so that we might eventually “provide the leadership” on matters of education policy reform.

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