

A New Rhetorical Topography: How the Composition Classroom Became the University Homeroom and Where to Draw the Line

K. J. Peters
Loyola Marymount
University

 [print version](#)

You may remember the homeroom class in junior high or high school. Homeroom began with school business, roll call, announcements, the pledge of allegiance, and summons of the sick and the mischievous to the office. School administration depends upon the ability to reach through classroom walls by way of an intercom. In all other classes, the squawk of the office intercom is a source of alarm if not annoyance. The homeroom teacher, however, is surprised when the intercom remains silent. There is a tacit understanding among students and teachers that the homeroom is open to administrative intrusions, whereas other classrooms are closed, protected by academic privacy.

First year composition, more than any other college or university course, serves as the de facto homeroom of higher education. At my own university, the "summer book program," initiated by student affairs, is a required part of the composition curriculum. The captive audience of freshman composition attracts presentations from the learning resource center and the library. In addition, there are unspoken expectations. Surveys and substance abuse screening somehow falls in the lap of most instructors. When high school seniors tour the campus, a sure stop is a composition class. A recent discussion among Writing Program Administrators, in the following section, suggests my experiences are not unique.

The composition classroom's function as homeroom raises issues that directly address Lisa Coleman and Lorien Goodman's question: "was rhetoric gone in name only" or "indeed missing in action?" The question, 'what happened to rhetoric' is embedded in another question posed by Sharon Crowley in 1988; 'who owns composition?'^[1] It is hard to imagine a history or chemistry professor posing similar questions of his or her discipline.

As many readers of this issue will know, Crowley proposed answers to both of these questions in *Enculturation* 5.1. She points out that in the late 19th century, the Arnoldian Humanists "invented the first-year requirement, and . . . went out of their way to kill off the vestiges of rhetorical study that remained in American colleges at the time" (Crowley, "Composition is Not"). Rather than prepare students to participate in social and civic discourse, the humanists pursued the refinement of student sentiment and character. ^[2] As Crowley argues in her book, *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*, in the humanist formulation "the ability to express oneself is not as important as intellectual cultivation; it is that fact of being well-read that counts" (84). Humanists were able to push their ideology because

. . . in the past no one with the requisite status or institutional power was able to protect its curricula from programs decreed for it by those who harbored educational or cultural agendas that had little to do with the study or practice of composing. (Crowley, *Composition In 7*)

Because no one in the past protected our curriculum, no place was secured for the full-throated expression of our discipline.

If antebellum rhetoricians had been left to tend to their study and students, and if strong voices had defended the curriculum of rhetoric from outside intrusions, what we teach and where we teach would be very different. We don't know what we have lost. As an example, think of all the introductory American literature courses taught in a single semester. No two are alike in terms of texts, critical perspective, or professorial disposition. Yet the messy amalgam that makes up the academy's representation of American literature serves the students, in part, because of the diversity of ideas and readings brought to the classroom. It is safe to say that a majority of tenured American literature scholars would no more tolerate administrative intrusions or efforts to normalize their courses than they would sanction professors of other disciplines to teach their courses. In contrast, dynamism and discord in the composition homeroom can be perceived as a threat to student advancement, and instructors who have little or no understanding of rhetoric and composition pedagogy routinely teach the course.

As it is, two very different manifestations of the homeroom exist. Where the argument for curricular coherence has won out, typically in larger institutions, composition courses look alike and share common course objectives. The WPA system of oversight assures as much. As a result, the *copia* of rhetorical history, theory, and composition studies is sacrificed in the name of a consistent student experience. Making the composition classroom permeable for what may be good reasons enables intrusions and encroachments upon these same classes for less than good reasons. On other campuses, where composition is shared among the tenured English faculty, the argument for professorial autonomy often carries the day and WPAs are rare. As a consequence, all manner of pedagogy (informed, outdated, and wacky) may find its way into the homeroom. The former manifestation of the homeroom represents an abrogation of academic freedom in the name of curricular coherence. It may not look like it, but the latter is also a manifestation of the homeroom where any professor can step in and take care of business—no special training necessary, and sound pedagogy is sacrificed on the altar of academic freedom.[3] This dichotomy pitting academic freedom against a diverse, dynamic, and informed curriculum plagues composition only because the homeroom is permeable. The ownership of composition is in question as long as anyone from a WPA, to an inept tenured professor, to a chair or dean can make the homeroom intercom squawk.

If the discipline of rhetoric and composition studies possessed the composition courses in which we teach, a full-throated expression of our work, thought, and pedagogy would be as diverse as the debates at our

conferences and as dynamic as the research in our journals. As it is, we find ourselves in the homeroom trying to incorporate administrative oversight and ideological intrusions. Or, we find professors teaching composition who simply are not prepared. In the composition homeroom, as in the high school homeroom, intrusions have been so common for so long that they are simply accepted as part of the course.

The easement, or administrative right of way, that makes intrusion possible also makes the composition homeroom valuable real estate. At a time when institutional health is pegged to the first-year experience and student retention, initiatives such as First-Year Experience (FYE) gravitate towards the composition homeroom and the access to the student body it provides. For now, composition remains within the homeroom, and rhetoric, as Susan Jarrett among others has said, "continues to thrive in several corners of academic public space" (Jarrett). However, rhetoric does not thrive in the composition homeroom, and soon we may ask what happened to composition.

It is commonly understood that oversight and intrusions are possible because, as Crowley argues above, composition instructors have always lacked power. Obviously, power, and the lack of it, explains a great deal. But power does not explain everything. Before research universities took root in America, no discipline or professor, other than theologians, could lay claim to the denominational colleges' classroom. The German university model privileged some disciplines and professors but not all. Privilege does not explain why professors of entrepreneurship, for example, can make a castle of their classroom while composition is the homeroom of the university. And power denied does not explain why rhetoric has been pushed out of composition. The issue at hand is not simply one of power, but also place.

The goal of this paper is to propose a new topography for the composition classroom and rhetoric's place in it. Instructors, WPAs, rhetoricians, composition specialists, labor organizers, and unions have been trying to redraft the space within the homeroom for years with limited effect. Moving out to form departments of our own, beating back the humanist pedagogy, joining unions, or filling composition homerooms with tenured professors will not change composition's topography. As long as we don't block the administrative easement, we can move the furniture inside the homeroom all we want. If we are going to put rhetoric back in composition pedagogy and secure a place for all aspects of our discipline, we must build new, resilient classroom walls that resist intrusions and incursions from administrators, unprepared instructors, and external ideologies.

This new topography of the composition classroom takes us back to the term's roots; a place (*topos*) for writing (*graphia*) that will also summon a place for rhetoric in the discipline's curriculum. Fortunately, we do not have to construct this space from scratch. Obviously, classrooms that are resilient to outside intrusions surround us. The first step is to reclaim and then build upon the foundations in place. These foundations date back to the nineteenth-century battle for privacy, the twentieth-century

codification of academic freedom, and the 1970 extension of privacy to contingent instructors by the AAUP. The existing foundations and protective structures can be used to build a place for writing.

We must address the two questions that occupy our discipline—what happened to rhetoric and who owns composition?[4] —by reclaiming and defending intellectual privacy. Anyone can assert a private place and claim academic freedom, but only the AAUP can defend such an assertion. So the battle for rhetoric, composition, and a place of our own will begin, as it did for professors at the end of the nineteenth century, with an assertion of private space and a summoning of the American professorate to defend our curriculum. Before stepping back to the nineteenth century, we must see the intrusions we have become inured to for what they are. Also we should recognize how problematic initiatives such as First-Year Experience (FYE) programs are moving into the composition homeroom and consider how to respond.

Occasional Intrusions and Organized Incursions

Recently, on the Writing Program Administration E-mail discussion list, WPAs and composition instructors shared examples of well-meaning administrative intrusions. David Roberts describes what appeared to be a helpful offer by his dean. "The dean arranged for representatives of a local civic organization to visit FYC [First Year Composition] classes to discuss job interview skills" (Roberts). However, as Roberts explains, the speakers "were accustomed to delivering their spiel at high schools and failed to consider the college audience." Roberts continues, the "FYC faculty is expected to give up class time for other nonsense as well, like customer satisfaction surveys" (Roberts).

Bonnie Kyburz tells of her "dean's insistence that we get 100% compliance regarding the posting of syllabi and all course materials on Web CT, learn to use Web CT, put up professional pages with pictures of ourselves; like it or not" (Kyburz). Kyburz does not like it, because "asking teachers to use the same delivery methods alters their pedagogy" (Kyburz). Though seemingly harmless, the requirement of Kyburz's dean is an example of how well-meaning initiatives can negatively impact pedagogy. Occasionally, such initiatives overwhelm pedagogy. During a visit for an on-campus interview, Chidsey Dickson found a first-year writing program themed around the college's "main attraction (they had some architecture and papers by [a nationally known author]).[5] This seemed quaint . . . , though Dickson felt the theme "was not premised on anything in comp. studies. Just a PR thing" (Dickson).

These anecdotes may be seen as the inevitable annoyances common to composition programs. Many instructors don't even see administrative suggestions, non-pedagogical expectations, or even WPA observations as intrusions. Most contingent instructors have never known a different kind of composition classroom. Whether by imposition or personal decision, composition instructors tolerate the intrusions made possible by the permeability of the composition homeroom. The ability to reach through homeroom walls and speak to the entire first-year class has not gone

unnoticed. Increasingly, FYE programs are making use of the same easement that allows the WPA or dean to poke their head in for just a moment. As is the case with the occasional homeroom intrusions, the FYE incursions are difficult to recognize and even more difficult for a contingent instructor to resist. After all, what kind of instructor would turn their back on potential dropouts?

The dropout/transfer rhetoric and funding of FYE programs has become one of the most seductive forms of homeroom incursion. Charles Schuster, a long time writing program director and advocate, has argued that FYE programs may be the salvation of composition. In a 2001 essay entitled, "Confessions of an Associate Dean," Schuster stated composition programs were

. . . in danger of being moved to the second or third tier of funding. We only have to look at those schools where one or even both semesters of first-year composition have been eliminated in favor of writing across the curriculum or freshman seminars to see this pattern in action. (91)

To keep from being steamrolled by more appealing initiatives and programs, Schuster offered a number of recommendations that boil down to, 'if you can't beat them, absorb their agenda.' If resources are heading towards recruitment, retention, and first-year seminars, WPAs must

. . . begin to think of first-year composition as more than just learning how to write academic analyses and arguments: it must become a comprehensive program wedded to recruitment and retention, goals that resonate with college and university officials. (92)

When Schuster wrote his article, few composition specialists had experience thinking in these terms. For guidance, Schuster pointed to FYE programs as the place to find innovations that will brighten composition's "lackluster" appearance.

Schuster's recommendations and the intrusions described above are symptoms of a recent shift in the thinking about dropouts and transfers. At one time, a dropout was seen as simply the loss of a student. Now, however, student retention is a matter of institutional fiscal health. The logic is simple. Dropouts incur both short- and long-term institutional costs. A student with a strong sense of belonging is less likely to drop out. A student retained will not need to be replaced by a transfer student bringing credits paid for and earned at another institution. Graduates who matriculate at a single institution are more likely to become loyal alumni concerned about the financial health and reputation of their Alma Mater. In this light, a dropout is bad news for the recruitment office, admissions, housing and food service, alumni relations, the registrar, and every university official who thinks in terms of reputation, image, and predictable funding streams. Bad student experiences are commonly thought to be the cause of student attrition. The solution of the moment appears to be FYE programs that are, more often than not, the

administrative responsibility of student affairs offices, according to a 2002 national survey by the Policy Center on the First Year of College (Barefoot & Siegel 2).

First Year Experience programs were born of alarming drop out rates at the University of Melbourne. In 1956, Melbourne began to study student transition problems and retention rates and respond programmatically.[6] In 1972 the University of South Carolina was the first US university to require a freshman seminar designed to enhance the campus experience.[7] By 2000, nearly 74% of US institutions surveyed reported offering freshman a first-year seminar or some other course designed to enhance student experience and retention (National). Interest in FYE programs continues to grow as the perceived link between student attrition and institutional health continues to strengthen.

FYE programs can be as minimal as a set of loosely connected policies or as complex as a broad based, highly structured coalition of admission officers, student life administrators, campus health professionals, advisors, and faculty. Typical FYE initiatives include freshman book programs designed to provide entering students with a common, bonding experience. To keep freshmen on campus, FYE programs may offer an array of athletic, cultural, and social activities and housing options. More developed FYE programs offer freshman seminars, some voluntary, some required, and most bearing credit (National).[8] FYE seminar topics typically address issues linked to student attrition. Study skills, time management, safe social skills (drinking and dating), and larger themes, such as the purpose of a university, are common seminar topics.[9]

FYE programs supplementing existing composition courses with FYE topics and credit bearing FYE seminars that stand in for traditional composition courses could not exist if not for the permeability of the composition homeroom.[10] Preparatory or supplemental support courses are nothing new. However, unlike a preparatory math course developed to help students master the fundamentals of math, FYE freshman seminars are driven by retention with an eye to the long-term health of an institution. It goes without saying that all good instructors want students to remain and succeed. However, the limited pedagogical space of the first year math or history course is not shared with admissions or the Student Affairs office. This blending of pedagogy and institutional financial health may be hard to see, but that is only because the composition classroom has never enjoyed the privacy of other courses.

Anyone who has taught composition as a teaching assistant or contingent instructor has learned that administrative initiatives are part of the job, part of the class, and therefore, part of the pedagogy. As a result, what a professor of any other discipline may see as an intrusion or distraction, composition instructors often see as their obligation.[11] It is important to know that Charles Schuster, who sees recruitment and retention as the salvation of composition, is not just another dean making pronouncements. He put his time in as a WPA, has taught more than his share of composition courses, and remains a strong voice in the WPA association. Schuster offers his recommendations out of the same sense of

concern as Crowley and everyone else who worries about composition in the university. And yet Schuster sees no conflict between FYE objectives and composition pedagogy.

In his essay, Schuster expressed confidence that WPAs could respond to the challenges facing them. In part he is buoyed by composition's history of experimentation and change.

If change is to occur—and it must—it may be that the best sites for exploring the new dimensions of higher education are within composition programs, which have recently been the site for much experimentation (Schuster 89).

Schuster's warning and recommendations lead to a number of questions. How has the humble composition course, which has suffered years of diminishment and disregard, become the portal by which higher education's new dimensions are to be discovered? Why does the future of composition and rhetoric programs depend upon the permeability of our classrooms? More importantly, how did we get to a place where the permeability of the homeroom, as opposed to the advancement of our discipline, is considered an asset? Forgive the repetition, but it is hard to imagine a history or chemistry professor relinquishing the privacy of their classroom in an attempt to bolster their discipline, research, or teaching.

Surrendering to FYE incursions makes sense only if you recognize that you couldn't stop them if you tried. Composition instructors can't say no to another survey, resist a dean's bright idea, or stem the FYE tide because we can't claim the classroom or defend the curriculum therein. Every other discipline's professors can and do. Crowley's suggestion that we abandon the required composition course is not that different than Schuster's gambit. Both are attempts to salvage some value and dignity as we are pushed out of the homeroom. As you can see, we can't begin to respond to the question 'what happened to rhetoric?' until we deal with the fact that the composition homeroom possesses our discipline.

Rather than adopting FYE agendas so that writing programs may remain relevant, or abandoning the required composition course, we should try to build a place for rhetoric and composition using the model of other disciplines. Yes, this struggle has occupied our best scholars for more than 40 years and it should continue.^[12] However, we must shift the way we think about status, power, and autonomy, because we exist in a different place than all other professors and instructors in the university. Rather than fighting for power, we must inscribe a topography that will accommodate the autonomy we seek. Drawing a line around a new pedagogical place within the university is not as overwhelming as it seems. It has been done before, and it is worth remembering the position of college professors of the nineteenth century was comparable to today's contingent instructors. The structure and apparatus that built the typical university classroom are still at hand. Understanding how the typical university classroom was constructed will assist us in building our own topography. We must begin with privacy.

Privacy, Academic Freedom, and then the AAUP

It would appear the American professorate has always enjoyed a fully formed concept of academic freedom. If not, then one might assume the American professorate imported the German concept of academic freedom along with the model of the research university. This is not the case. The American concept of academic freedom marked a significant departure from the freedoms of the German professors many expatriate scholars had come to admire while studying abroad. Academic freedom in Germany was defined by *Lehrfreiheit*, the professor's freedom of opinion and expression in the classroom, and *Lernfreiheit*, the freedom of students to pursue a curriculum of their choice. The academic freedom of the German professor was limited to the grounds of the university and to their own training. Scholars speaking their peace outside of the classroom were subject to sanctions (Hofstadter & Metzger 389-10). The nascent American professorate borrowed the principles of academic freedom from German research faculty. However, rather than basing academic freedom upon the classroom and student, American academic freedom was founded upon the personal privacy necessary for the professor to meet obligations both in and out of the classroom.

Scholars returning from Germany were inspired by the academic freedom they witnessed in the classrooms, but the American concept of academic freedom was shaped by American concerns. If it were not for the invention of portable cameras and the appetites and annoyances of New Yorkers, we might not have the right of privacy. If it were not for the battle for privacy, the distinctly American sense of academic freedom would not have emerged. The battle for privacy gave form and force to American academic freedom. And it is within a personal, private, and portable space that the autonomy to the American professorate is founded. More central to the argument of this paper, if we had adopted the German model of academic freedom that was based on and limited to the classroom, it is unlikely the university could claim a homeroom. Then again, the American professorate would not be as independent. As it is, the American professorate is autonomous and independent because their academic freedom is founded upon personal privacy, and not limited to the classroom. The American concept of academic freedom is limitless in space, but limited in terms of academic class. To understand how privacy shaped academic freedom, the American professorate, and the composition homeroom, it is necessary to look to the end of the nineteenth century when neither privacy nor academic freedom were recognized as principles of law or conventions of the academy.

As is often the case, change causes social disturbances that lead to more change. The change that led to the right of privacy was a growing sensationalism in the newspapers and developments in photographic technology. In the 1870's, a Victorian gentleman or lady could walk the avenues unmolested. By the 1880's the famous, infamous, and otherwise noteworthy citizens of New York were so besieged by amateur photographers and their portable cameras that they feared venturing out in public (Mensel 28-33). Privacy which once was protected by anonymity, social propriety, and etiquette was no longer assured.[13]

Bourgeois New Yorkers demanded legal relief, yet the general public continued to feed on candid, unauthorized pictures provided by sensationalist newspapers. In 1890, Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis, outraged by covertly photographed images of a young dancer peddled for profit, called for "The Right to Privacy" in the *Harvard Law Review*. Warren and Brandeis argued, "the common law secures to each individual the right of determining, ordinarily, to what extent his thoughts, sentiments, and emotions shall be communicated to others" (198). The Warren Brandeis article was referenced in nearly every court case, appeal, and legislative action that resulted in the right to privacy. Impelled by the Warren Brandeis article and after several high profile court battles, the New York state legislature adopted a civil rights act that established a limited right of privacy in 1903. In 1911, the US Supreme Court affirmed the New York law recognizing unlawful invasions of privacy.[14] In essence, the court affirmed that an invasion of privacy was comparable to breaking and entering and theft of personal property. The right of privacy was the wall that kept predators from the personal property of thoughts and sentiments.[15] Notable New York citizens had enjoyed their privacy without the need of a legal wall until portable cameras made it possible to intrude upon private space.

The antebellum professor would not think of throwing up a wall of privacy around the classroom. The classroom belonged to conservative, typically Christian, denominations or state university trustees (Hofstadter & Metzger 278-83, 293-302). Professors began to demand autonomy only after privacy was defined, first on the streets and then in the courts, in terms of portable personal space. It would be easy to assume that the German model of the research university is solely responsible for academic freedom and disengaging the classroom from external pressures and ideologies. In fact, the chronology, arguments, and framers of the American concept of academic freedom demonstrate the American professorate owes more to Warren, Brandeis, and the US Supreme Court than the German university system.

In terms of time, ten years after Warren and Brandeis' influential article appeared, the American Economic Association initiated the first investigation of public interference in the work of a professor. Despite their best efforts, the American Economic Association was unable to reverse the forced resignation of Professor Ross from Stanford at the hands of Mrs. Stanford. (See case discussion below.) In 1913, the American Economic Association, the American Political Science Association, and the American Sociological Society formulated a committee to write the basic rules of academic freedom. They failed because of thorny questions such as, whether academic freedom should shield professors who speak beyond their training or outside of the classroom (Hofstadter & Metzger 474). Four years after the Supreme Court recognized a right of privacy in 1911, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) was formed. The first public act of the AAUP was to claim intellectual and pedagogical privacy in the 1915 "General Report of the Committee on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure." The "General Report" defined for the first time American

academic freedom and laid the keel by which future discussions of this freedom would be framed.

Warren and Brandies and the 1915 AAUP committee on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure are also linked by common arguments. Both the article and the report cite common law and the 1825 *Abernethy v. Hutchinson* case.^[16] This landmark case established the classroom as the jurisdiction of the teacher. Classroom jurisdiction is not simply a matter of who possesses the room, but, as Warren and Brandeis interpreted the findings, classroom jurisdiction is held by a professor through "an implied contract or of a trust or of a confidence" between pupils and teacher (207). Significantly, a college or university was not found to share in this contract. A more direct connection between the right of privacy debate and the AAUP is Roscoe Pound.

Pound was a member of the AAUP committee that authored the "General Report." In 1901 at the University of Nebraska, Pound developed a close working relationship and friendship with Edward A. Ross who had just arrived in Nebraska from Stanford. Mrs. Stanford, the sole benefactor of the University, had just fired Ross. As will be discussed below, Ross's termination is significant as it was the first to be formally investigated by a professional academic organization. Pound was also the Dean of the Harvard law school and colleague of Louis D. Brandeis, who was an early, and often lonely, advocate of Pound's theory of "Sociological Jurisprudence."^[17] More significantly, Pound was an advocate of the right of privacy, and argued for an expansion of this right beyond the limited 1911 Supreme Court ruling.

One month after Pound was appointed to the AAUP authoring committee, he published the first installment of an influential essay detailing the social interests of individual privacy entitled "Interests of Personality." In this essay, Pound argued that privacy was not merely a personal concern. Society in general has an interest in the privacy of an individual, because individual privacy "is also closely connected with a social interest in free belief and free expression of opinion as guarantees of political efficiency and instruments of social progress" (Pound 453). In plain words, Pound argued that society benefits when privacy is respected. Both Pound's essay and the "General Report" argue for privacy, but not simply as an individual indulgence. Individual freedom to believe and express opinions is necessary to an individual's "full moral and social life." More profound is society's interest in free and efficient public debate and social progress that is made possible by the right to individual privacy (Pound 453).

The call for legal recognition of the right of privacy began as the complaints of noteworthy individuals hounded by amateur photographers. By the time the nascent AAUP took up the issue of academic freedom, the debate had matured beyond the interests of an individual to a discussion of the social benefits of the right of privacy. The AAUP took up the justification for individual privacy as a social benefit and argued that the professor, and not the university, was the agent ultimately responsible to students and society.

In the initial codification of American academic freedom, the AAUP emphasized professors had very public obligations; however, meeting these obligations required the security of seclusion, intimacy, and above all privacy. The 1915 "General Report," and the AAUP's restatement in 1925, not only defined a professor's responsibilities, freedoms, and privileges, it also defined the professor's relationship with the university, the public, and the students. Perhaps one of the boldest assertions of the time was that university trustees are not the employers of professors. The 1915 AAUP committee stated,

The responsibility of the university teacher is primarily to the public itself, and to the judgment of his own profession; and while, with respect to certain external conditions of his vocation, he accepts a responsibility to the authorities of the institution in which he serves, in the essentials of his professional activity his duty is to the wider public to which the institution itself is morally amenable. (AAUP, "General Report" 22-23)

To describe the nature of the relation and obligation between professor and university, the AAUP drew upon the metaphor of a judge and appointing president (AAUP, "General Report" 26). Once appointed, the judge must serve the people and remain independent of the person and institution that provided his or her position. A professor must be "exempt from pecuniary motive or inducement" (AAUP, "General Report" 25), free from "mental reservation" when teaching (28), free from "dependence upon the favor of any social class or group" which includes benefactors and parents (30-1), and free from the tyranny of "public opinion" (32).

Typically, infringement and retribution of professors for their speech came from within colleges and universities or from their benefactors (Hofstadter & Metzger 413-508). Few university officers and benefactors concerned themselves with the unspoken thoughts of a professor. Infringement of inquiry and research was considered slight enough to be "disregarded in this report" (AAUP, "General Report" 20). However, the same could not be said of teaching and public speaking. The authors of the report were so concerned by numerous reports of infringement upon professorial speech that they focused almost exclusively upon the student teacher relationship and professorial privacy.

The AAUP argued student / professor relationships are exceptionally fragile, because such relations are based upon character and integrity. The committee held, "no man can be a successful teacher unless he enjoys the respect of his students, and their confidence in his intellectual integrity" (AAUP, "General Report" 28). Respect and confidence in a professor may be lost in two ways. If a professor withholds thoughts and resists speaking candidly because he or she is repressed or intimidated by outside forces, students will lose respect for the professor they see as an intellectual coward. Secondly, if a student senses that a professor is teaching conclusions or findings corrupted by outside interests, the professor's character will be suspect. Intellectual integrity depends upon

both the courage to speak truth and the character to defend truth from corruption. Without integrity, the professors' "educative force is incalculably diminished" (AAUP, "General Report" 28). Understandably, the AAUP sought to define the obligations and freedoms of the professorate. In doing so, the AAUP also defined the university in terms of academic freedom.

According to the AAUP, the value of the university is dependent upon the professor's relationship with those who seek his or her instruction and counsel. A university can only fulfill its obligation to the community if a scholar remains independent, isolated from outside pressures and is

free not only to pursue his investigations but to declare the results of his [sic] researches, no matter where they may lead him or to what extent th[e]y may come into conflict with accepted opinion. To be of use to the legislator or the administrator, he must enjoy their complete confidence in the disinterestedness of his conclusions. (AAUP, "General Report" 29)

Lacking disinterested professors freely sharing the benefits of their work, a university is little more than "a proprietary school designed for the propagation of specific doctrines" and professors little more than skills employed to spread the doctrines of those in power (AAUP, "General report" 21).

It is clear the authoring committee was trying to define academic obligations and freedoms they saw as threatened. The effect of the 1915 "General Report" was to release academic freedom from specific spaces, architectures, and institutions and enshrine academic freedom as a professor's assertion of a private space. Declaring the professor an independent agent of public edification, as opposed to the university, the professor was granted the power to define pedagogical space. In simple terms, the space of the classroom is carried in the professor's pocket and may be deployed at any time. According to the terms laid down by the AAUP in 1915, when a professor sets to educating students, citizens, public servants, or anyone, in a classroom, courtroom, or under a tree, the professor raises the wall of privacy protecting research and educational relationships. A reverse example proves the case. Without a professor present, individuals occupying a room are not protected by academic freedom.

Academic freedom is not the freedom to do or say anything. The AAUP set limits upon the liberty of the professor by linking academic freedom to the obligations and duties of the scholar. In the words of the authors of the 1915 "General Report,"

The claim to freedom of teaching is made in the interest of the integrity and of the progress of scientific inquiry; it is therefore, only those who carry on their work in the temper of the scientific inquirer who may justly assert this claim. The liberty of the scholar within the university to set forth

his conclusions . . . is conditioned by their being conclusions gained by a scholar's method and held in a scholar's spirit. . . . (AAUP, "General Report" 33)

The shield of academic freedom does not protect activities that do not adhere to disciplinary standards, promote inquiry, advance human understanding, and serve the public. Moreover, only the professorate, and not university officials, has the expertise to determine what is and is not protected by academic freedom.

The early arguments of Warren, Brandeis, and Pound that gave force and form to the right of privacy resonate in the American concept of academic freedom. As Warren and Brandeis argued, an individual has the right to determine the extent to which his or her thought is communicated to others. Pound argued society is served, more than the individual, when personal privacy is respected. The AAUP drew upon the national debate to define what a professor is and does. As a result, the privacy of the professor's intellectual labor was disengaged from the classroom and made portable so both students and the at large community could be served. Significantly, the American professorate defined its own freedoms and obligations. And as authoring body, the AAUP reserved to itself the right to determine who can assert the private place of academic freedom.

In 1970, the AAUP once again attempted to shape the space of the university by extending academic freedom to contingent instructors. It is precise to say academic freedom was extended, because composition instructors were not part of the professorate for whom academic freedom was initially defined. The AAUP's original 1915 "General Report," the 1925 "Conference Statement on Academic Freedom," and the "1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure" did not address the academic freedom of graduate or contingent instructors. Things changed in 1969 when the AAUP and the Association of American Colleges (AAC) met to discuss and clarify the "1940 Statement." The committee decided not to alter the "Statement," but added a section entitled "Interpretive Comments." Interpretive comment number 4, adopted as AAUP policy in 1970, represents the first attempt to extend academic freedom to instructors. "Both the protection of academic freedom and the requirements of academic responsibility apply not only to the full-time probationary and the tenured teacher, but also to all others, such as part-time faculty and teaching assistants, who exercise teaching responsibilities" (AAUP, "1940 Statement"). The freedoms and rights of professors were not altered to meet the needs of instructors. This is understandable considering the long, hard, and continuing battle to maintain the freedoms and rights professors enjoy. In essence, the AAUP was trying to bring a large number of friends to a party the professorate alone had been invited. However, the AAUP's comment of inclusion, with all the persuasive force a comment can muster, has done little to convince college and university administrations to acknowledge the privacy and academic freedom of graduate and contingent instructors.

Composition instructors, by and large, have been unable to assert the privacy of the classroom and lay claim to the academic freedom the

AAUP declared is crucial to the education of students and necessary to serve the public. This fact is due, in part, because of the way American academic freedom was defined, and in part, because of the way the AAUP defined itself. Composition instructors do not enjoy the academic freedom of a typical professor's classroom because the American concept of academic freedom is based upon personal privacy, not the classroom. And the AAUP can do little for the contingent instructors who appeal for protection, because the AAUP's initial definition of academic freedom, which has long been the standard for American colleges and universities, is limited to tenure track and tenured professors. When colleges and universities absorbed the AAUP's 1915 definition of academic freedom, the exclusions implied by the "General Report" were also absorbed.

If academic freedom is a necessary condition of the professor's service to students and community, disregarding the composition instructor's assertion of a private pedagogical space differentiates their labor and the classrooms in which they teach. While the professor serves the students and public through exclusion and isolation, an untenured or non-tenure track composition instructor serves the public by being exposed: their opinions unprotected and their classrooms open to scrutiny, intrusion, and incursion. In essence, the composition classroom, staffed with non-tenure-track employees, serves as the proprietary college the AAUP warned higher education would become if not for professorial privacy and academic freedom.

Conclusion

One would be hard pressed to find a college or university that has a policy denying the academic freedom of non-tenure track instructors. Then again, one would be hard pressed to find a college or university that respects the privacy of the composition classroom. It wasn't in the interests of the AAUP to represent the instructors of composition, because by 1915, few professors taught composition and fewer still wanted to. Composition courses had changed long before the American professorate organized around the battle for academic freedom. Rhetorical instruction, the mainstay of higher education in the first three quarters of the nineteenth century and a requirement of sophomores, juniors, and seniors, had already slid down the curriculum to fill a literacy hole discovered in the 1874 freshman class of Harvard. To this day, the modern composition classroom is more an institutional response to a crisis than it is a reflection of a discipline or a professor's research, intellect, and character. Undeniably, first-year students learn to access academic discourse through composition. Increasingly, the atypical topography of the composition homeroom makes it possible for the institution to access the experience of freshman.

As we have seen, composition courses, among all the courses in the academy's catalogue, are the homerooms of the university. At base, the issue is not so much who teaches composition, but how the space of writing instruction is defined. Composition does not possess the classroom. The homeroom possesses composition studies, rhetoric has been nudged out of our pedagogy, and most of those who teach

composition are powerless to define their curriculum. Even graduate level composition theory seminars can be seen as serving the institution's need for maintaining a low cost pool of composition instructors. It is quite possible that the years of research and practice that culminate in today's and tomorrow's composition theory and practice may lose its place in the curriculum. Where will the difficult work of learning to write elegantly, persuasively, and vividly take place if freshman composition becomes "University 101?"

As I see it, we have three depressing options and one radical option. First, we could leave things as they are. We simply continue our research knowing the importance of rhetoric and composition in the lives of our students and our society, and yet teach in a homeroom that undermines our discipline, authority, and scholarship. Second, we could follow Schuster's recommendation and absorb the external initiatives that are attracting cash and gaining momentum as they move into the homeroom. I fear, however, that this would lead to our eventual displacement. The lease is up and new tenants are on their way in. Making peace with the new tenants will simply mean carrying their baggage. Third, we could act on Crowley's suggestion and imagine composition beyond the first year class. I agree that the subjugation of our discipline to the universal requirement of composition and the humanist pedagogy has inhibited our discipline. And, I am convinced that writing instruction, fully informed by composition studies and rhetoric, can thrive elsewhere in the university. It may yet be necessary to abandon the homeroom. However, before we pack our bags, we should try to exercise a fourth option: continue to work with first-year students and build new walls to protect ourselves. Rather than imagining our discipline free of first-year composition, I think we should imagine a first-year writing course (part of an extended sequence) that is a full-throated expression of our discipline and as protected as any other university course.

This fourth option, the one I advocate, has two steps. First, we encourage the parallel *yet separate* development of FYE programs and freshman seminars. In short, make FYE the homeroom of the university, remove the intercom from the composition classroom, and reinforce the walls and structures that protect our curriculum. That way, when the student affairs office wants to do a survey they will have a homeroom of their own to take care of business. Above all, we must draw a clear distinction between the pedagogy of our discipline and every other well-intentioned initiative. However, we can only deflect intrusions and begin to distinguish our pedagogy if FYE, or whatever comes next, takes over as the university's homeroom. The writing courses I imagine have the same relationship to the homeroom as do business or chemistry courses.

The second step is to make a new place in the university. Building a new pedagogical place within the university is not as overwhelming as it seems. It is worth remembering that at the end of the nineteenth century, the position of denominational college professors was comparable to today's contingent instructors. In 1900, the American Economic Association stood up for Edward A. Ross because they recognized in his firing a threat to all university professors. Academic freedom had yet to

be formalized at that time. There was no professional organization with lawyers, lobbyists, and money, much less experience, to protect Professor Ross. Fortunately, the AAUP is better equipped and has almost 100 years of experience. If the increasing dependence upon contingent faculty is a threat to academic freedom, as the AAUP's policy statement on "Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession" claims, then the protection of a contingent instructor's academic freedom is a defense of the American professorate's freedom. Like the AAUP, I would prefer more tenure-track lines; however, this line of argument is losing ground fast and cannot possibly be a defense against the real erosion of academic freedom by way of semester contracts.

If the AAUP will not be moved to make good on the 1970 statement, we must move them. This will mean a radical politicization of the role of the WPA. As we draw a line around our classrooms, WPAs and tenure track professors must support and encourage competent instructors to stand up for their right of pedagogical and intellectual privacy. The AAUP must also be pushed to defend the academic freedom of instructors with as much zeal as full professors. Oddly enough, this may mean that as a WPA, I could end up encouraging one of my own instructors to file a grievance with the AAUP objecting to policies I am required to enforce. It may also mean questioning the qualifications of tenured professors to teach composition. I am sure every non-tenured WPA reading this just said 'count me out.' Indeed, I myself have yet to be tenured and recognize the danger of my suggestions. Yet the tenuous position of WPAs is, for me, evidence of the serious threat posed by the rhetorical topography where the composition classroom serves as university homeroom. In essence, the rhetorical construction of the homeroom has silenced an entire class of instructors as well as another class of, typically, junior faculty WPAs. With each uncontested intrusion and incursion, the walls of the homeroom become that much more permeable and the administrative easement that much more concrete. If instructors and non-tenured WPAs can't speak, tenured professors and our professional organizations must speak out for the academic freedom of the individual instructor.

A great deal is at stake. We are not talking about the loss of a single instructor's freedom. We are talking about generations of graduate students that will have to work as homeroom instructors or future professors of rhetoric and composition who will manage homerooms. If we cannot draw upon the composition classroom to feed our research or to serve as an expression of our research and theory, our very discipline is threatened. For fear of overstating my case, allow me to temper my concerns with the following question. Since the middle of the twentieth century, when the AAUP reached its zenith as a powerful political body, has the academic freedom of American colleges and universities gained breadth and muscle or has it diminished?

I can't point to a single person or group who is responsible for this atypical, power-inhibiting place in which my instructors and I find ourselves. I can't even tell you who owns composition. And that is the problem. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the freedoms and

obligations of the American professor coalesced around the battle for personal and intellectual privacy. The fate of the composition instructor, on the other hand, was tied to the pedagogical space that remained undefined. In the simplest terms, composition emerged as the universities' homeroom as the American concept of academic freedom emerged from the battle for privacy. I can, however, point to the organization that once asserted a private intellectual place called academic freedom and may be pushed to do it again. The AAUP should hear us knocking.

Notes

1. See Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998) 10. ([Back](#))

2. As Crowley and others such as Bruce Kimball and Thomas Miller have noted, rhetoric taught in vernacular English and designed to train active and able citizens to lead society was central to American undergraduate education up to the civil war. In most colleges, composition was aided by four years of rhetorical study (Crowley, *Composition In* 50). See also Thomas P. Miller, "Where Did College English Studies Come From?," *Rhetoric Review* 9.1 (1990): 52. When literature was taught, it was as a model of elegant expression and style taught by Rhetoric professors (Crowley, *Composition In* 51). However, after the civil war and the emergence of American research universities, humanists redefined literature "as a special sort of text that represented immediate experience better than any other sort of text . . . Literature conceived in this way offered teachers of English a body of materials to study at the same time as it justified that study on aesthetic and moral grounds" (80). Where the object of rhetoric had been the preparation of students for public service, the study of literature took the student and their development of moral character as an objective. As Crowley explains, the Arnoldian humanist pivoted the focus of writing pedagogy, from the discourse of the world, inward toward personal experience (84). ([Back](#))

3. Ed White has argued that the question of classroom privacy and academic freedom are often used to shield inept teaching and classroom misbehavior; Edward M. White, "Academic Freedom: Definition by Personal Narrative," Academic Freedom and Writing Programs, CCC Convention, Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, San Antonio, TX, 26 March 2004. White is, of course, correct to make academic freedom dependent upon pedagogical relevance and justifiable intellectual pursuits. For this reason, White does not see the question of privacy and academic freedom as applying to instructors in training, such as teaching assistants and instructors with little or no experience. Curricular coherence in a large freshman composition program is made easier with White's view. It is easy to make sure everyone is on the same page if a WPA hands instructors the syllabus and if a WPA is free to drop into the classroom to double check. Unfortunately, once the protective veil of privacy is pulled back from a few sections taught by teaching assistants

and contingent instructors the entire instructional topography of composition is thereafter exposed. Fear of incompetent instructors has both erased the protections of academic freedom from well trained contingent instructors and made it possible for inept professors to step into the homeroom shielded by academic freedom. ([Back](#))

4. A reviewer of this article made the point that the question, "Who owns composition?," is settled. His answer, and a persuasive one, is that English departments own composition, with exceptions. The reviewer argued intrusions upon composition are much more likely to come from English departments than meddling administrators. The reviewer is correct. However, the reviewer is wrong to suggest that there is any daylight between the intrusions of an English department and that of an administrator. As long as composition remains the political buffer and economic foundation for the advanced literature courses favored by tenure line professors, it will be administrated in just those terms. English departments administer composition while defending literature courses from administrative intrusion. ([Back](#))

5. I would not want to cause undue embarrassment and I see no reason for identifying this college. Therefore, I have withheld the name of the college and the benefactor that serves as the main attraction. ([Back](#))

6. See D. Anderson, B. Priestly and S. Hammond, *Draft Report of First Year Student Study* (Parkville: University of Melbourne UP, 1956). Interest in the experiences of freshmen shifted to the states in the 1970s. See Burton Clark, "Development of the Sociology of Higher Education," *The Sociology of Higher Education* 46 (1973): 2-14. ([Back](#))

7. The University of South Carolina now serves as the home for The National Resource Center for the First- Year Experience and Students in Transition. *The Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, first published in 1989, is also located at the University of South Carolina and is an active advocate of FYE programs. ([Back](#))

8. The "2000 National Survey of First-Year Seminar Programming" of 2000 found 88% of the seminars surveyed carry academic credit toward graduation. ([Back](#))

9. Few faculty members have expertise in these areas, which is why other campus professionals are often utilized in FYE seminars. The 2000 survey of FYE programs conducted by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition found 89% of the respondents involve faculty in course instruction. The same survey also found 53% involved instructors from student affairs, 37% made use of campus administrators and other campus professionals as instructors, and 28% included undergraduate or graduate instructors. See "National." ([Back](#))

10. These courses are found on many college and university campuses. Brandeis University, Boston College, and Washington State University represent some of the most developed FYE programs and seminars.

[\(Back\)](#)

11. It should be noted that contingent instructors teaching at institutions that rely upon student evaluations of teaching, beyond all other educators, have many reasons to attend to student experience and opinion. [\(Back\)](#)

12. James Berlin, Robert Connors, Raymond Williams, Thomas Miller, and many others have provided exhaustive histories of the diminishment of composition in higher education. Histories and analyses of the economic and social structures that changed higher education and altered conceptions of the poetic explain what happened to composition. However, these texts do not explain why composition is now perceived as important to institutional health. [\(Back\)](#)

13. See E. L. Goodkin, "The Rights of the Citizen," *Scribner's Magazine* 8.1 (1890): 60-7. Godkin, writing in an 1890 edition of *Scribner's Magazine*, described privacy as a modern luxury enjoyed by those who could afford multi-roomed houses and private transportation. Etiquette required a respect of another's feelings and protection from embarrassment. However, it was impossible to enforce etiquette and social mores upon organizations such as newspapers, which Godkin saw as the "chief enemy of privacy in the modern age" (66). More to the point, law did not protect feelings. In 1891 the county court of Rochester, New York ruled for the first time that the privacy of Abigail Roberson had been violated by the Rochester Folding Box Company and were subject to punishment. This ruling was appealed and upheld in 1901 (see *Roberson v. Rochester Folding Box Co.*, 64 Appellate Division, 4th Department State of New York 30, 33). A year later, New York's highest appellate court then reversed the first two decisions in favor of the defendant (see *Roberson v. Rochester Folding Box Co.*, 171 N.Y. 538). In the appeals, privacy was argued in terms of personal property. Copyright laws recognized the ownership and fair use of intellectual property, but "feelings" had never before been considered property. The NY Court of Appeals ruled that no law existed to protect an individual's private thoughts and feelings, and therefore, no remedy was necessary. [\(Back\)](#)

14. See New York Laws of 1903. Chapter 132. See also New York Civil Rights Law sections 51 and 52. [\(Back\)](#)

15. See also *Sperry & Hutchinson Co. v. Rhodes*, 220 US 502, 1911. [\(Back\)](#)

16. This case concerned the unauthorized publication of a surgeon's classroom lectures by a student. The case was settled in favor of the surgeon plaintiff. [\(Back\)](#)

17. During Pound's tenure as dean, Brandeis served as a visitor to the law school. Dean Pound and visiting professor Brandeis shared many interests and were in frequent contact. For example, Brandeis and Pound had a running argument about the size of Harvard Law classes. See Melvin Urofsky, "Louis D. Brandeis on Legal Education," *The American Journal of Legal Education* 22.3 (1978): 192, 197-8. [\(Back\)](#)

Works Cited

AAUP. "1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments." American Association of University Professors. June 2002.

<http://www.aaup.org/statements/Redbook/1940stat.htm>

- - - . "Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession." American Association of University Professors. November 2003.

<http://www.aaup.org/statements/SpchState/Contingent.htm>

- - - . "General Report of the Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure of the American Association of University Professors." *AAUP Bulletin* 1 (1915): 16-56.

Barefoot, Betsy O., and Michael J. Siegel. "National Survey of First-Year Co-Curricular Practices: Summary of Findings." The Policy Center on the First-Year of College. 2002. Brevard College, Brevard, NC 14 Nov. 2003 1-6 <http://www.brevard.edu/fyc/survey/cocurricular/>

Coleman, Lisa and Lorien Goodman. Introduction.

"Rhetoric/Composition: Intersections/Impasses/Differends."

Enculturation 5.1 (Fall 2003): http://enculturation.gmu.edu/5_1/intro.html

Crowley, Sharon. *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1998.

- - - . "Composition is Not Rhetoric." *Enculturation* 5.1 (Fall 2003):

http://enculturation.gmu.edu/5_1/crowley.html

Hofstadter, Richard, and Walter P. Metzger. *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States*. New York: Columbia UP, 1955.

Dickson, Chidsey. "Outside Pressure?" Online posting. 7 April 2003.

Writing Program Administration List. 7 April 2003.

<http://lists.asu.edu/archives/wpa-l.html>

Jarratt, Susan. "Rhetoric in Crisis?: The View from Here." *Enculturation* 5.1 (Fall 2003): http://enculturation.gmu.edu/5_1/jarratt.html

Kyburz, Bonnie. "Outside Pressure?" Online posting. 7 April 2003.

Writing Program Administration List. 7 April 2003.

<http://lists.asu.edu/archives/wpa-l.html>

Mensel, Robert E.. "'Kodakers Lying in Wait': Amateur Photography and the Right of Privacy in New York, 1885-1915." *American Quarterly* 43:1 (1991): 24-45.

National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition. "2000 National Survey of First-Year Seminar Programming." *National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*. 2000. University of South Carolina, Columbia. 31 December

2003.

<http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/surveyfindings/surveys/survey00.html>

Pound, Roscoe. "Interests of Personality." *Harvard Law Review* 28.4 (1915): 343-63, 445-56.

Roberts, David H. "Outside Pressure?" Online posting. 7 April 2003. Writing Program Administration List. 7 April 2003.
<http://lists.asu.edu/archives/wpa-1.html>

Schuster, Charles. "Confessions of an Associate Dean." *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 24.3 (2001): 83-98.

Warren, Samuel, and Louis Brandeis. "The Right to Privacy." *Harvard Law Review* 4.5 (1890): 194-219.

Citation Format:

Peters, K. J. "A New Rhetorical Topography: How the Composition Classroom Became the University Homeroom and Where to Draw the Line." *Enculturation* 5.2 (2004):
http://enculturation.gmu.edu/5_2/peters.html

Contact Information:

K. J. Peters, Loyola Marymount University
Email: kjpeters@lmu.edu
Home Page: