

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Culture Shock and the Practice of Profession: Training the Next Wave in Rhetoric & Composition*, edited by Virginia Anderson and Susan Romano. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2006. 352 pp.

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I have come to discover that many fellow rhet/compers choose the field for similar reasons as I did: First, the field teaches a practical, useful skill: writing. Second, jobs abound (supposedly) in rhetoric and composition whereas jobs in literature can be tough to come by. Finally, the relative youth of the field leaves much to study, to theorize, to write, and to learn, and we all want to be a part of something seminal and exciting. From my vantage point, with only the above list motivating my hopes and dreams of what my career might look like, I found the essays, stories and reports in *Culture Shock and the Practice of Profession* both refreshing and harrowing.

Anderson and Romano have set out to craft a series of essays that offers three perspectives on what the work of a rhetoric and composition professional looks like: “Experienced teachers and administrators designing the preparation of future faculty . . . graduate students grappling with their own unstable situations . . . and newly hired PhDs [who can speak about] what it feels like to be suddenly ‘out there’” (4). These three perspectives are offered within three sub-categories that divide the book. Section 1, entitled “Being (Out) There: What We Got and How It Served,” focuses on stories from new and old members of the field reporting on how well served they have been by their PhD programs. Section 2, called “Models and Frameworks for Change,” offers practical advice on how PhD programs in rhetoric and composition should consider changing to meet the realities of the work said PhDs will be asked to do. Finally, section 3, “Visions Light and Dark,” suggests new (sometimes radically new) ideas about how to shape a different sort of future, one that better meets the needs of up-and-coming professionals.

In chapter 1, Lisa Langstraat and Julie Lindquist lead off the book with a common theme: a sense of under-preparedness for the “emotional demands” and “pragmatic skills” of real-world work in rhet/comp. Chapter 2’s authors, on the other hand, claim that their doctoral work was too focused on practice and not focused enough on training scholars to engage a relevant audience. Chapters 3 through 6 delve into specific types of programs and institutions, such as Technical Communication studies, online teaching, two-year college teaching, and Writing Program administration, and all three come to similar conclusions: PhD programs need (but often fail) to “respond to the

communit[ies] of diverse students [they] teach, rather than relying on an abstract definition of what graduate school is supposed to be” (84). At the end of this opening section, Scott Stevens succinctly sums up the problem, saying that “graduate study fails by not teaching us about the seemingly trivial things” (140).

Section 2 of the book picks up where section 1 leaves off, calling in chapters 7, 8 and 11 for future WPAs to be trained as citizens-rhetors by faculty who maintain a “leader-with-others ethos” rather than a “leader-above-others” ethos (146). Too much information about the realities of writing program administration gets transferred merely by observation rather than by explicit education in such matters. Textbooks are needed that directly address the practical, intellectual and political work that goes into writing program administration. In the midst of much repetition, Carter et al., in “It’s a Two-Way Street,” offer particularly helpful insights into issues of race in mentor-mentee relationships among faculty and graduate students. They, along with Sosnoski and Burmester in chapter 16, call for new models of authority in the teacher-student relationship in the belief that “strategies for cultivating individual relationships” are much more helpful in promoting intellectual achievement than traditional “helping behaviors” offered by teachers to students (257). These authors believe that changing the nature of the teacher-student relationship would bring about many of the other changes called for in this book. Finally, rounding out the second section, Brooke and Bender call for technological integration into the training of graduate students who will inevitably be asked in ways small and large to incorporate technology into their future classrooms.

In section 3, Brown and Miller propose that rhetoric and composition provides a perfect site for transformation in models of higher education because “we study and work at sites where the hierarchy of research, teaching, and service is coming apart at the seams as it fails to account for the conflicting purposes pushed upon institutions of public learning” (289). In chapter 15, Bazerman et al. suggest that the aims of composition marry nicely with the aims of educational theory and thus perhaps composition training belongs in schools of education, where “making a difference in lives and societies” fits with the core values of rhetoric and composition studies. The final two chapters call for reform from within, pointing out that we who see the problems mentioned in this book need to lead the charge for change if change is ever going to happen. As we rethink what rhetoric and composition should be, we have the opportunity to change English departments from within, but more importantly we have the chance to change entire universities and maybe even some of the antiquated modes of thinking in higher education.

Reading this volume as a graduate student leaves me feeling both excited by the possibility of helping change the future of our discipline but

also frightened that I'm not being prepared as I should for what lies ahead. That said, I would have found the book more helpful had it been both more concrete and better organized. Too many of these pieces call for broad, sweeping changes to the entire field of rhet/comp and graduate education. When I came across Brooke and Bender's conclusion in chapter 13 that "it is often the small changes that make a real difference" (284), I found myself wishing that this book offered more suggestions for "small changes." Carter et al.'s chapter about white faculty mentoring African-American graduate students offered just the sort of small suggestion this book needed more of. Yet I found it curious that it wasn't coupled directly with Sosnoski and Burmester's similar chapter about mentoring. Perhaps the book would have been easier to follow if the sections had been broken down by sub-disciplines such as Writing Program Administration, Technical Writing, and so on. It could have ended with a "General Changes" section where new ideas for teacher-student relationships, new ideas for textbooks, etc. could have been presented. While all of these concepts existed in the volume, they were scattered throughout the book in essays that were repetitive and difficult to synthesize.

Finally, I found some irony in the fact this book does call for necessary changes in rhet/comp education, but it seems to perpetuate the very problem it decries—that too much emphasis is placed on research and academic writing in our training institutions, and not enough emphasis gets placed on training for the day-to-day, practical work one ends up doing. Thus, while I found that this collection raised insightful and sometimes practical points (especially section 2, as that was its purpose), my own call is for those of us who see the need for reform to focus our writing more on practical suggestions for change—changes we try first and then reflect upon—rather than offering untried theories of how things ought to be. While Anderson and Romano deserve commendation for compiling a thought-provoking collection on how rhetoric and composition training needs to change, I found myself wanting more of the practical and less of the theoretical. After all, that seems to be the call of the collection itself.

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