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# The Mt. Oread Manifesto on Rhetorical Education 2013

Without rhetorical competence, citizens are disabled in the public arenas of citizen exchange—the marketplace, the representative assembly, the court, and public institutions—and democracy turns into a ruse disguising the reality of oligarchic power. Capacitating students to be competent citizens is our birthright. It has been ours since antiquity. Modern education has stripped us of it. We need to reclaim it. The call to action is urgent, as much because of shrinking resources and institutional inertia as in spite of them.

—Gerard Hauser

## Preamble

One hundred years ago, formal instruction in writing and speaking were severed from one another in American colleges and universities.<sup>1</sup> In the hands of separate disciplines, they evolved disciplinary and pedagogic lives of their own, without reference to a common vision of public and civic life. Complex institutional, financial, and practical factors led to this separation, yet considerations for the quality of student education were not among them. The ability to use language to speak and to write about public issues—indispensable for citizens in a free society—had been inseparable in the rhetorical tradition since the classical era—two sides of the same coin. Even if faculty who taught speech in English departments in 1914 believed that their colleagues were neither prepared to teach speaking nor interested in developing such expertise, severing the teaching of speaking permanently from writing served only to divide faculty, encourage increasing specialization, and ultimately impoverish education for all students.

Throughout the twentieth century, faculty on both sides of the English/Speech divide lamented the sundering of these two modalities of rhetoric and periodically worked to reunite them. One of those moments emerged just before and after World War II, when high schools and colleges adopted an integrated curriculum designed to encourage civic action and train officers. Called the “communications movement,” this curriculum was driven by passionate integrationists. For example, speech teacher Clyde Dow wrote in the pages of *College English*:

I see . . . a unification of the objectives of composition and communicative speech to the great advantage of the student . . . I believe there are so many objectives [of these courses] that can be developed together that it is simply good educational technique to

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<sup>1</sup>Written by William Keith and Roxanne Mountford, with editorial and conceptual contributions from the participants in the “Rhetoric in/between the Disciplines” Seminar at the 2013 Rhetoric Society of America Institute in Lawrence, Kansas: Kerrie L. Carsey, Emily Murphy Cope, Mike Donnelly, Kendall Gerdes, David Grant, Derek Handley, Rachel Herzl-Betz, Jonathan Maricle, Katrina Miller, Timothy Oleksiak, Lester C. Olson, Ersula Ore, Amy Patterson, Samuel Perry, Craig Rood, Jonathan Rossing, David Stock, Joona Trapp, Sara VanderHaagen, and Gerard Yee.

## 2 *Manifesto*

combine the teaching of the beginning forms of writing and speaking in a communication course. (332)

The common objectives included “clear thinking, judgment, evaluation, organization, methods of development, vocabulary, good informal usage, and knowledge of how language influences others and ourselves” (332–3). The reunified general education curriculum in reading, writing, listening, and speaking replaced separate first-year courses in composition and public speaking in 200 colleges and universities, lasting in some from around 1940 to 1960. However, as historians such as James Berlin, Sharon Crowley and Roxanne Mountford have shown, this movement was quashed by disciplinary inertia and sometimes outright resistance from both sides.

Now in the twenty-first century, a unified vision of rhetorical education is both more important and realizable than at any time since Speech filed for divorce from English. Thanks to technology and the expansion of modes and modalities of public communication, the civic dimension of the rhetorical tradition is plainly crucial to producing students with the communicative capabilities needed in this world. And the reunification process has already begun: increasingly writing teachers assign formal presentations, and speaking teachers require writing. If any more proof were needed, the integration of digital technologies into our teaching confirms that the formal divisions between speaking and writing are untenable and indeed, in practice, are beginning to dissolve. However, the centrality of rhetoric to the learning of speaking and writing is rarely articulated, and the work of teachers of writing and speaking to develop common learning outcomes is sadly uncommon.

It is time for rhetoricians from across the disciplines to work toward an integrated vision of rhetorical education. Without such a vision, we deny our students, as well as society, an essential resource for political and social progress. It is also time to address the institutional structures that make impracticable the integration of instruction in writing and speaking. Though their history within separate disciplines obscures it, rhetoricians have a common interest, an interest that is disguised by the current separation of writing and speaking instruction.

The idea of a manifesto on rhetorical education is not itself new. Writing on behalf of participants of the pedagogy group of the 2003 Alliance of Rhetorical Societies, Gerard Hauser called for such a manifesto in order to reassert “rhetoric’s role in civic education” (39) and correct a perspective that rhetoric is somehow not a teaching tradition (41). Based on ARS discussions, Hauser distilled the pedagogy group’s call for actions, including the following:

1. “[S]tructure(s) that can collect and facilitate dialogue on models of courses, course sequences, and modes of instructing.” (45)
2. “Cross-tradition dialogue on rhetoric courses, curricula, and pedagogy.” (47)
3. “Sustainable structures that foster collaboration among the member organizations of ARS for pedagogical development across traditions.” (47–48)
4. “[A] statement that identifies the concrete outcomes of rhetoric instruction . . . [and] an assessment program to validate its claims.” (48, 49)
5. “Sustainable structures to promote understating of teaching as involving scholarship, to validate research on teaching, and to promote research that will advance our teaching as essential to civic education.” (50)

Ten years later, we continue the work of the ARS Pedagogy Group by writing this manifesto. The members of the RSA 2013 seminar have agreed we should make public and manifest the following resolutions:

- Whereas*, a free society requires citizen participation in discourse—not simply voting or consuming information,
- Whereas*, participation in the issues shaping a society necessarily means being able to understand a problem from more than one position;
- Whereas*, rhetoricians agree that we have a common cause and history,
- Whereas*, reuniting the teaching of speaking and writing cannot be done responsibly without engaging rhetoricians across multiple disciplines;
- Whereas*, rhetoric is “owned” by too few in the academy;
- Whereas*, rhetorician and their traditions are stronger together than separated by departments, disciplines and pedagogies;
- Whereas*, general education is under assault, with more and more foundations courses taught as “vocational skills” by non-specialists or out-sourced as low-level and decontextualized instruction;
- Whereas*, our textbooks—often taught by those without training in rhetoric—enforce artificial boundaries between our disciplines and offer defunct theories and approaches;
- Whereas* rhetoric provides a focus on the process of discovering, making, refining, delivering, and listening to messages, whether they are oral, written, visual or digital;

*Be it resolved that*

Rhetoricians should cross departmental and disciplinary lines and collaborate to design and implement an integrated curriculum in rhetorical education to replace separate introductory courses in communication (public speaking or presentation) and first-year written composition in order to develop citizen participants, not simply future employees or more literate students. This consolidation should result in an increase in resources for teaching students, not budget or resource reduction. Rhetoricians should also work to establish pedagogy as a respected area of scholarship in our transdisciplinary field.

*We seek a world in which*

- Average citizens can perform rhetorical analyses of the discourse around them and ask productive questions of politicians, employers, business and community leaders, and each other, as fellow citizens;
- All stakeholders in public life feel motivated and competent enough in their communication skills to advance an idea in the public sphere and engage in meaningful deliberation about ideas;
- Students are exposed to authentic projects and audiences that connect them to the public sphere, rather than artificial, textbook-driven, assignments;
- The *paideia* is a life-long pursuit that habituates citizens to rhetorical practice from kindergarten through adult education;
- Instruction in writing and speaking serve primarily to offer rhetorical education, even though this education may also prepare students for the job market;

- Rhetorical education draws promiscuously from the work of rhetoricians in English/Writing Studies, Communication and Classics;
- Citizens recognize the limits and possibilities of a given mode of communication for their purpose and the needs of the audience and situation;
- Rhetoricians own and work to overcome their misunderstandings and biases about each other so that they can meaningfully engage in the work of co-education;
- Assessment of speaking and writing is neither merely skills-oriented nor limited to often simplistic national standards of “civics education,” but grounded in a holistic, contextualized approach to public meaning-making;
- Business and political professionals trained in rhetoric are insightful, creative problem-solvers who understand why compromise is vital to a republic and how collaboration grounded in a strong ethical understanding serves the public good.

While there are many possible pathways to succeeding in this endeavor, **we propose creating an Interdisciplinary Project on Rhetorical Education (iPRE)**. As originally envisioned by the ARS Pedagogy Group, this independent organization would bridge multiple professional and scholarly organizations. Its mission would be to advance scholarly and professional engagement on rhetorical education at all levels of learning, with rigorous inclusiveness: K-12, undergraduate and graduate settings, research intensive as well as liberal arts and women’s colleges, tribal colleges, historically Black colleges and universities, community and technical colleges, and the extra-curriculum (including civic settings and service learning). Because no current journals, including *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, focus on rhetorical education, we envision the development of a new interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal, perhaps called *Journal of Rhetorical Education*. The iPRE should promote and sponsor collaboration among rhetoricians from all disciplines, though primarily Communication and English/Writing Studies, including practitioners, researchers, instructors, and professionals from across disciplines, through the establishment of communities of practice that extend beyond the walls of the academy and into the communities that surround us. An initial action would be the creation of a Rhetorical Education SIG at 4Cs and a Division of Rhetorical Education at NCA. We envision ongoing, productive dialogue with existing organizations, such as the Association of Writing Program Administrators.

The hardest work will take place at each campus. But the iPRE can sponsor and promote curricular changes across institutions of higher education that identify and collaboratively work to link various rhetorical education stakeholders, working with the AAC&U (especially the LEAP initiative) and other organizations with experience in improving the outcomes of university education. Teaching is not limited to the classroom, however, and iPRE can highlight the civic engagements possible in all modes of communication, including visual, literate, digital, and oral forms. In particular, iPRE can foster and support projects that look at the interplay of rhetoric and the civic sphere—historical, theoretical, pedagogical—as they pertain to rhetorical education.

One hundred years later, we are confronted with the opportunity to reconsider the decision to allow rhetorical pedagogy to be fractured. One hundred years later, we assess the strengths and benefits of the separation, and find it wanting. One hundred years later, we find ourselves to be sophisticated scholars, dedicated teachers—and under-appreciated professionals. There is still work to be done in the classroom, the curriculum and in society, for training in rhetoric to achieve its potential. We call all scholars and teachers of rhetoric, whatever their professional and departments homes, to work together on this project.

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