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UMI
IDEOLOGICAL INTERSECTIONS:
INTERROGATING CULTURE AND PEDAGOGY IN TELECOURSES THAT
TEACH AMERICAN LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

by

Randolph Alan Accetta

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
WITH A MAJOR IN ENGLISH
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2000
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GRADUATE COLLEGE

As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Randolph Alan Accetta entitled Ideological Intersections: Interrogating Culture and Pedagogy in Telecourses that Teach American Literature and Composition and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Philosophy.

Annette Kolodny

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4-18-00

4-18-00

4-18-00

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copy of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Dissertation Director

4-18-00
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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SIGNED: [Signature]
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have long believed that a successful life is one devoted to the pursuit of excellence in an endeavor that you love, while surrounded by family and friends. I cannot say that I have loved every moment of this particular endeavor, but I have been fortunate to be surrounded by family and friends who encourage a pursuit of excellence. I extend my appreciation to my brothers Alex, Clay, and Beale; my step-parents, Alex Tejada and Nancy Accetta; and my grandmothers, Mary Crane and Grace Accetta. I especially thank my mother, Beth Crane, and my father, Tony Accetta, for their constant efforts on my behalf. I also want to thank two friends, Piret Ehin and Greg Wenneborg. Piret’s love of language, her work ethic, and her joy in learning have inspired me to extend my intellectual limits. Over the course of a good many dusty miles, Greg and I have argued over the place politics has in education, and for his friendship I am grateful.

Without the significant efforts of my dissertation committee, this dissertation would be much the worse for wear. Judy Temple, Annette Kolodny, and Ken McAllister have read countless drafts of this manuscript, and their insights and encouragement have been invaluable. I thank, too, my friends, colleagues, and teachers at the University of Arizona who encouraged me, who argued with me, and who pushed me to think more deeply about this project. As well, I very much appreciate Marcia Marna in the English Department for shepherding me through my career at the University of Arizona, Georgia Ehlers for helping with a grant proposal that resulted in the Dean’s Dissertation Fellowship that funded a year’s worth of this project, and Dorian Vorhees for all of her assistance during the Fellowship. Dan Davidson at Pima Community College taught me how to teach on television and provided invaluable assistance during the early days of taping the telecourses. In addition, this dissertation is rooted in the intellectual work that I did in high school at Phillips Academy, as an undergradate at Wesleyan University, and as a graduate student at Humboldt State University, and I thank my teachers from all three schools.

As you will read, my students have always taken a central place in this project, and I thank them for their insights into the nature of teaching English by television.

I am tempted to conclude with a list of those who doubted the possibility that I could actually succeed in this doctoral endeavor, but for the sake of decorum, I shall pass on the opportunity. However, I encourage all to remember that cynics and naysayers are endemic to any demanding task, and I suggest that such folks should always be ignored.

Finally, although I am indebted to others for the success of this project, I and I alone am responsible for any mistakes or inaccuracies in this dissertation.
To my parents


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ABSTRACT

IDEOLOGICAL INTERSECTIONS: INTERROGATING CULTURE AND PEDAGOGY IN TELECOURSES THAT TEACH AMERICAN LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

Randolph Alan Accetta, Ph.D.
The University of Arizona, 2000
Annette Kolodny (co-director), Judy Nolte Temple (co-director), Ken McAllister

In Ideological Intersections: The Cultural Work and Practical Implications of American Literature and Composition Telecourses, I draw on my own experience developing, producing, and teaching two composition telecourses and an analysis of three nationally-produced and distributed telecourses in order to explain the benefits and disadvantages of using one-way, non-interactive telecourses to teach English studies courses. The Introduction locates the use of educational technologies within the increasing corporatization of higher education and the growing concern of exploited academic labor. Chapter 1 situates the telecourse within the theoretical and pedagogical issues that confront teachers of writing, Chapter 2 describes in detail the viewing experience and the logistics of three composition telecourses, and Chapter 3 focuses on two of the leading, nationally distributed literature telecourses. The first sections of Chapter 4 demonstrate that telecourses have proved to be an accessible educational opportunity for students who would otherwise not attend school, an opportunity for faculty to gain new skills, and an additional revenue source for institutions. However, there are three primary disadvantages: 1) students have little opportunity for interaction, 2) telecourses have a markedly high drop-out rate; and 3) the course material is markedly conservative. The latter sections of Chapter 4 present technological solutions to the problem of interactivity, with the added warning that such computerized teaching
methods may function as a repressive surveillance system that inappropriately regulates faculty members and students.

Chapter 5 demonstrates that the telecourses function as an ideological apparatus that molds American culture. As such, the televised material reifies the rhetoric of the American melting pot, perpetuating the myth of standardized Americans who are happily inculcated into the educational and occupational systems of mainstream America, without acknowledging the complications or difficulties faced by such characters in real life. Moreover, the televised material reproduces the rhetoric of American individualism, offering students a false vision of a future of unbound glories in order to train the viewers in occupational and functional literacy at the expense of critical, oppositional thinking.

The Epilogue returns to the disturbing implications for academic labor and argues that classroom teachers may no longer be necessary if institutions can disseminate information with the help of new technologies and simply hire inexpensive teachers to be responsible for logistics and assessment.
INTRODUCTION

THE BIRTH OF A TELECOURSE TEACHER

Introductory Remarks

I wasn't reading and I wasn't writing. Instead I was watching television with friends, sitting on a sofa, channel surfing and talking. One friend held the remote control. Click: ESPN SportsCenter--"He shoots! He scores! The Rangers win." Click: MTV and a rock and roll video. After a few moments of watching the bump and grind, someone said, "Hey, let's watch the Randy Channel." And click, there I was in the foreground of the screen, sitting behind a lectern with my right hand stuck in a jar of peanut butter. On the background of the televised screen were these words: "Clear Writing: How to Make a P, B & J Sandwich. First, take some peanut butter and spread it on a piece of bread." I leaned forward on the sofa and watched my televised self use my fingers to spread the peanut butter on a slice of bread. I heard myself say, "OK, now remember what we said about the need for clarity. I've followed the written directions, but the result isn't exactly what we want, is it? Remember: language is powerful and we need to use words carefully." As my friends howled in laughter at my on-screen, peanut-butter hands, I grabbed the remote control and changed the channel.
A lot of people in Tucson, Arizona have viewed the two English telecourses that I have developed, produced, and taught for Pima Community College. The courses have been on the air for about six years now, and I am often stopped by strangers who have watched the programs on cable television. As one fellow said in a supermarket a couple of years ago, “I know you, you’re the writing man.” Because the concept of taking an English class by television is alien to many people, these strangers often ask if teaching by television works. I generally respond to their query with an answer along these lines: "In a lot of ways, yes, it does work. The students who make it through the course seem to like it. Remember, these are generally students who work and raise a family—and they’ve probably dropped out of school somewhere along the line. If a course on television helps them complete their education, then it’s a great idea.” If the questioner is still interested, I offer a caveat: “But there are a lot of problems with a course like this. I became a teacher so that I could work personally with students, and in this type of class I rarely see students and they rarely see each other. I have to teach much differently on television than I do in a conventional classroom. And in terms of my own labor, an even bigger problem is that the college’s administration can try to make money from the course by overloading students into a class, thus forcing a part-time teacher into teaching too many students. This hurts everybody involved.” If the questioner is still awake at this point, I generally conclude with something like this: “On the whole, though, if they are used correctly, I think telecourses can be really helpful—but if we don’t address some important issues, all of education may suffer.”
I generally don't tell such questioners what Jean-Francois Lyotard claims about the role of knowledge in the post-industrial age. The nature of knowledge is being transformed, Lyotard argues, from something that builds character and helps create a better person to a commodity "produced in order to be sold" (4). He suggests that knowledge has become an "informational commodity"; consequently, he claims, commodified knowledge "is already, and will continue to be, a major--perhaps the major--stake in the worldwide competition for power" (3). Based on the astounding growth of information technologies world-wide, as well as my own more specific experience as a developer, producer, and teacher of English studies telecourses, I tend to agree with Lyotard's warning. When he asks the following questions, his concerns provide a way to inquire about the implications of using telecourses to teach English studies: "If we accept the notion that there is an established body of knowledge, the question of its transmission, from a pragmatic point of view, can be subdivided into a series of questions: Who transmits learning? What is transmitted? To whom? Through what medium? In what form? With what effect? A university policy is formed by a coherent set of answers to these questions" (48).

Interrogating his premise about an "established body of knowledge" and focusing exclusively on the telecourse that teaches composition and literature, I seek in this dissertation to provide a coherent set of answers to Lyotard's questions so that those who develop, teach, and administer English studies telecourses can better determine their personal and professional policies. In order to provide practical strategies for addressing several of the important issues at hand, the chapters to follow contain an analysis of three
nationally distributed telecourses, anecdotes supplied from students and colleagues, hard
data, student comments from course questionnaires, and personal observations from my
years as a developer and teacher of telecourses. As technology becomes increasingly
prevalent at all educational levels, it is imperative that we address the growing
commercialization of knowledge and its implications for English studies.

We all like to think ourselves unique, and I am no exception. Sadly, however,
individuals rarely rise above their cultural conditions. As Lyotard writes, "no self is an
island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever
before" (15). In this introduction, I hope to weave a tapestry from the various fabrics that
make up higher education and technology. I will tell a short story about myself,
interspersing the autobiographical narrative with a series of statistics and conversations
about higher education in order to reveal how my situation is but a strand in the larger
tapestry of higher education in a post-Fordist, post-millennial America.

I

The Birth of a Gypsy Scholar

I graduated from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut in the Spring of
1985. The photos in the yearbook that year show me mostly in shorts and running shoes,
captaining the cross country and track teams. None capture me at poetry readings or
Literary Society events. Although an English major, I wasn't a big part of the English
Department scene; my choice of English came about because I love to read books and
talk about them, not because I felt destined for a career in literary studies. In 1985, I
knew nothing of the post-structuralist trends then gaining momentum throughout the humanities. Frederic Jameson, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes—these names never once graced my bookshelf. Instead, I was happy enough to know the difference between the well-wrought urn and a mild sort of reader-response which emphasized archetypal interpretations. I studied American literature and film with Richard Slotkin and Joe Reed, poked around in feudal Japanese history, Soviet history, and early American history, took some psychology and sociology, a bit of biology, and by the time my four years were up I had a solid liberal arts education. I knew not only a variety of information, but how to ask the questions that would lead to more information. I also had a sharp sense of social responsibility—perhaps as the outgrowth of an education based on what James Berlin calls "social constructionist rhetoric," the sort of education that comes from progressive politics and democratic populism. In this construction, according to Berlin, the individual is a sovereign free agent who is capable of transcending material and social conditions, all the while with a sense of responsibility to the larger community, especially those less fortunate. Berlin argues that "Colleges ought to offer a curriculum that places preparation for work within a comprehensive range of democratic educational concerns" (51), and I think Wesleyan offered such a curriculum.

I had always wanted to be a teacher, but as a student, my favorite teachers were the ones who brought to life the world that existed between the lines on the page. So instead of seeking a teaching position in a secondary school or applying directly to graduate school, after graduation I spent a number of years in the San Francisco Bay Area pursuing my dream of becoming a world class distance runner and cobbling together a
living by selling shoes, tending bar, hanging sheet rock, and helping produce special events. Finally, five years after my BA, I decided to go back to school. Based on my work with Slotkin, I had long wanted to study the constructions of masculinity in narratives of the American westward movement, and so in the Fall of 1990 I started night school in the English Master's program at California State University, Hayward (CSUH). Based on the advice of the department secretary, I took one night course, Introduction to Teaching Writing. Hayward didn't have the same bucolic feel of the ivy-covered brick buildings and rolling lawns of Wesleyan, but the view of the Bay Area almost made up for the concrete buildings and asphalt parking lots. Based on my performance in the Teaching Writing course, I was fortunate to be selected to teach Basic Writing. And so I spent one year at Hayward, each term taking one class and teaching one class. I never did study masculinity in the American West, instead taking a creative writing and American literature course my last two terms. To make a living, I managed the sales staff of a Berkeley shoe store in addition to my part-time job at CSUH.

As a part-time faculty member at Hayward I was not unique, for, as The Chronicle of Higher Education reports, the early 1990s saw a growth in Hayward's reliance on part-time faculty: "In 1992, [CSUH] employed 407 tenured and tenure-track professors and 142 lecturers. In 1995, those numbers were 373 and 330" (Leatherman 6). I shared an office with some other first-year teachers, and I received a free parking permit (a small perk, perhaps, but to me a symbol of a certain professionalism). My classes, though nominally Basic Composition, were essentially ESL courses for immigrants--among them former Afghan rebels, a Guatemalan grandmother, and a Vietnamese refugee. Hard-
working though they were, these students were not ready for the sort of college-level
efforts to which I had been accustomed at Wesleyan. Although somewhat put off by their
lack of preparation for college, I enjoyed working with them. Walking into the classroom
three days a week, I felt as if I were stretching my own limits and helping others at the
same time. I also felt a genealogical connection with the teachers who had so influenced
me, and I tried to bring the same sort of professionalism to my job that my East Coast
teachers had brought to theirs.

What I did not recognize at the time was that we part-timers were merely "in the
university for a time, but [. . .] not of the university," as a Hayward faculty "Statement of
Concern" would put it in 1997 (Leatherman 6). I did not know that I was part of the
growing trend toward a two-tier faculty system, nor did I recognize that I was a pawn in a
major political struggle between faculty, administration, and the California State
Legislature over funding and hiring practices. And I certainly did not realize that for all
my pride in going back to school, becoming a teacher, and having a free parking permit, I
was merely a cog in the university machinery, a tool used to teach the sorts of students
with whom few others wanted to work.

After that first year of part-time graduate school, I followed my then-wife and
transferred to Humboldt State University, three hundred miles north, in Arcata,
California. Two years later, I received a Master of Arts, with one specialty in Literature
and one specialty in the Art of Teaching Writing. Again, I never quite got around to
studying masculinity in the American West. My literature thesis was a Foucauldian
reading of Macbeth; my composition thesis argued for a method of teaching that utilizes
theories of socio-cognitive learning and the liberatory pedagogy of Paulo Friere. I still believe much of what I wrote then, including these sorts of declarations: "We need to teach ourselves to recognize and discuss the incoherence of our principles" (37); "Educators are charged with seeking recognition of indignation and with searching for knowledge of the soul" (79); "I am not so naive to think that the writing classroom will change every student's life; nor do I expect the specific classroom to change the country. But if students learn to effectively use the written word to rethink their own previous assumptions and the assumptions of others, then the classroom is a success" (81); and finally, "If we do not teach the nuts and bolts [. . .] we are doing an immense disservice to our students" (44). At the time, I was deeply influenced by Paulo Friere, and as these comments indicate, research and theorizing joined closely with the practicalities of the classroom.

I taught two semesters of Introduction to Composition at Humboldt, and in the Fall of my second year in the Master's program I landed a temporary position teaching two sections of Composition at the nearby community college, College of the Redwoods. I taught Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at the College of the Redwoods, driving thirty minutes down the Pacific coast to teach and hold office hours. On Tuesday and Thursday I taught and held office hours at Humboldt State, where the English Department sits high on a hill, the Pacific Ocean six miles of farmland away from the front door and a redwood forest out the back door. In addition to the dual teaching loads, I fit in my coursework and theses writing as best I could. None of my graduate student colleagues taught at both schools; as far as I could tell, I was unique in having jobs at two separate
institutions. I still did not recognize that I was part of a larger system of what some would consider over-worked, under-paid, and exploited part-timers.

The life of the so-called "freeway flyer" or "gypsy scholar" has been chronicled in both the academic and popular press. The individual teacher, "who bravely cobbles together an existence by teaching at several institutions in a metropolitan area, grading papers while driving to work, lacking an office to see students in, and receiving absurdly low pay per course" (Robinson 21), has become a cause celebre in academia recently. The MLA Delegate Assembly Meeting of 29 December 1997 received a draft document called the "Statement from the Conference on the Growing Use of Part-Time and Adjunct Faculty" which says that "The working conditions of part-time faculty members vary widely, but in comparison to their full-time colleagues, the majority of part-time faculty members teach under emphatically substandard conditions" (4). The report argues that the use of part-time faculty is a significant threat to the quality of higher education:

    We believe that those concerned about the quality of education must act together now to ensure that the use of part-time and adjunct appointments (most often utilized to achieve monetary savings and other short-term goals) does not risk imposing far more serious costs on students and their families. The threats to student access to faculty, cohesive curricular development and implementation, the intellectual community, and faculty governance—the fundamental basis for educational quality—require our immediate attention. (1)

As strongly worded as this statement is, the same warning had been sounded over a decade earlier: "The growth of the gypsy scholar, the non-tenure track position, and the 'permanent' part-time employee base all pose a serious challenge" to the conventional educational system wrote George Biles and Howard Tuckman in 1986 (5).
In the Spring of 1993, I knew nothing of these issues. For me, teaching at both institutions was a boon: the money, though not much, was very helpful in a recent marriage, and whatever substandard professional conditions I experienced as a part-timer were worth the valuable teaching experience I gained. In addition, the significant differences between the community college students and university students enabled me to learn a variety of teaching methodologies and techniques.

Those in my graduating class at Humboldt were typical of students in most Master's programs: two went on to teach in full-time, non-tenure track positions at a community college, one continued to teach at the local high school, two went abroad to teach English, one opened an editing business, and two of us went on to doctoral work. At the time, I was ignorant of the over-crowded job market, but I had fallen in love with teaching and I recognized that without the terminal degree my primary job opportunities would come from secondary schools. While I still idolized teachers from my own secondary school experience at Phillips Academy, in 1993 I didn't want to teach high school. More than that, though, I still wanted to study masculinity in narratives of the American West. So I applied to Ph.D. programs and in the Fall of 1993 enrolled in the University of Arizona's Literature program. I had begun full-time graduate study six years after my BA, and I had at least five more years before I would complete the Ph.D.

I want to reiterate that my experience is similar to that of other graduate students. As Howard Bowen and Jack Schuster write, "The average elapsed time between decision to enter advanced study and completion of Ph.D. programs may easily be ten years or more" (173). Because I had taken years off to pursue a career as a professional distance runner,
I was a bit late in starting graduate studies. Bowen and Schuster report that "According to a 1981 Summary Report from the National Research Council, the median lapse of time from Baccalaureate to Doctorate in the Humanities was 10.8 years overall, which included 7.7 years where the student was formally registered for study" (173). If I hurried through the program, I could receive my degree at the same age as the median age for all Humanities doctorate students, 33.5 years old (173).²

The University of Arizona offered me a Graduate Tuition Waiver but no teaching position, so I scrambled for a job as an adjunct at the local community college and I continued with the student loans I had begun taking during my Master's program. Again, my actions fit the profile of a typical graduate student: according to the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, for the 1992-93 school year, Masters students had an average of $10,200 in student loan debt and over 44% of the students surveyed had some debt. Doctoral students averaged $16,800 of debt.³

In the Fall of 1993 I started teaching as an adjunct at the Pima County Community College District (PCC) in Tucson, Arizona. According to the 1993-94 Factbook put out by PCC's Institutional Research Office, PCC "serves more than 53,400 of the almost 700,000 persons who reside in the 9,240 square miles of Pima County" (1). To serve these 53,000 students, PCC relies heavily on part-time faculty: "In Fall 1993, PCC employed 45 administrators, 314 full-time faculty, 1,222 part-time or adjunct faculty" (Factbook 61). Pima also uses significant numbers of part-timers for their support personnel, employing 567 regular institutional support personnel and 1,059 temporary support staff (61). This is an almost 4:1 ratio of part-time faculty to full-time faculty and
a 2:1 ratio of part-time support personnel to full-time staff. Of PCC's five separate campuses, I had been hired by the Community Campus, where the percentage of part-time faculty was considerably higher. Of the 345 total faculty employed by that campus, only two were full-time and 343 were part-time (93). Thus in 1993 over 99% of the faculty at the Community Campus were part-timers. I want to stress again that my career in higher education accorded with national statistics regarding the increased use of part-time faculty and employees.

According to a report by the American Federation of Teachers, "Between 1971 and 1986, the full-time contingent [of faculty] had grown from 379,000 to 459,000, a gain of 22 percent, while the part-time instructional force had vaulted from 113,000 to 263,000, an increase of 133 percent" (Robinson 5). The report concludes that a "major, probably irreversible shift to reliance on part-time faculty has spread throughout U.S. higher education" (5), a claim in accordance with the findings of the 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (Zimbler 12). Completed with the oversight of the Department of Education, the NSOPF93 reveals that in higher education in the Fall of 1992, "About two-thirds of faculty and staff were employed full time (593,941) and one-third were employed part time (291,855)" (Zimbler 12).

These numbers have not gone unnoticed in the field of English studies, as made clear by the 1997 Final Report to the MLA Delegate Assembly Meeting by the MLA Committee on Professional Employment: "The disturbingly heavy reliance on part-time faculty that characterizes American higher education today contributes both directly and indirectly to the failures of our academic system" (Gilbert 3). The MLA Committee
situates the growth of part-time faculty within the trends of decreased funding and increased numbers of students: "So long as the growth of the full-time professoriat at our colleges and universities fails to keep pace with the growth of the student population--so long, that is, that public funding of higher education continues to diminish so that tenure-track positions dwindle--the temptation to assign major pedagogical tasks to part-time and adjunct faculty members will remain strong" (3). While the 1993 NSOPF report indicated that the primary use of part-time faculty was to teach, by 1997, the MLA is concerned about the "temptation" to assign major pedagogical tasks to part-timers. The word "temptation" in this context is intriguing, suggesting as it does that to use part-timers for important professional tasks is more than merely expedient but somehow morally—and professionally—naughty or wicked.

II

The Birth of a Telecourse Teacher

During my first semester of teaching for PCC, Fall of 1993, I taught two sections of Writing II, an Introduction to Literature course; the night courses were held in a local high school. The mission for Pima's Community Campus differs from the other campuses. As the Factbook states, the Community Campus is designed to provide "an alternative delivery system for offering college classes where students live and work" (75). While the bulk of the courses offered by the Community Campus are held in local high schools, as well as churches, prisons, and community centers, the Community Campus increasingly utilizes advanced technology to achieve its mission. In addition to
one-way, non-interactive telecourses purchased from such distance education consortia as the LeCroy Center for Educational Telecommunications, the Campus develops and produces its own telecourses, interactive teleclasses, and Internet-based courses. In Fall of 1993 a half-dozen telecourses were offered, and by Spring of 1998, over sixty courses were offered in the fields of Anthropology, Business, Computer Science, Economics, Food Science and Nutrition, Home Economics, Humanities, Political Science, Sociology, Spanish, Math, Writing, Psychology, History, and Literature via eight- and sixteen-week telecourses, interactive teleclasses, and the Internet.

In September of 1993 I attended a distance education workshop given by Thomas E. Cyrs and Frank A. Smith, authors of *Teleclass Teaching: A Resource Guide*. The PCC event taught faculty how to develop and teach telecourses. Within a week of the workshop I had approached my immediate supervisor, the associate dean, about developing and teaching a Writing telecourse, a course that had not yet been produced in-house at PCC. Perhaps encouraged by my enthusiasm, or perhaps because there was no full-time faculty pool from which to draw, the associate dean agreed. By December 1993, I was in a television studio taping the first televised session of Writing 100, Writing Fundamentals, a course on paragraph and short essay development. By the end of the Spring semester, we had completed the thirty hours of taping required for Writing 100; by the winter of 1994, I had completed developing and producing the next level course, Writing 101. Thus by the end of 1994, we had taped two, thirty-hour Writing telecourses. I can claim copyright for the courses (which I have not yet done), while PCC can present the televised sessions at their discretion via cable television and video
cassette, as long as the material is used for the PCC's non-profit, educational mission. As of this writing, both of the Writing telecourses which I developed and produced are offered by the Community Campus to over 250 students a year in eight-week, sixteen-week, and independent study classes.

These composition classes are one-way, non-interactive telecourses, that is, pre-prepared semester-long courses that combine televised lessons with text books, study guides, and other complementary printed material. An industry-accepted definition of telecourse is found in one of the premier studies of telecourses, Ron Brey's "Telecourse Utilization Survey Project." Brey quotes from Tom Gripp's 1977 article "Telecourses Have Designs on You" to define a telecourse as an integrated learning system that employs television and various print materials. This system is specifically designed to involve a variety of learning strategies to forge a complete education unit available to the student in the convenience of his own home. [It] is not a correspondence course with pictures; nor is it a television lecture with supplementary readings. It is an examination and presentation of a body of knowledge and information through the use of sight, sound, color, movement, and print in a manner designed to stimulate, clarify, and quantify. A telecourse is designed to take maximum advantage of the strengths of each component to lead the student through a 'success-oriented' experience. (5)³

Brey adds to this definition the use of new instructional technologies, such as CD-ROMs and personal computer software, concluding that, "An increasing number of institutions now use live components such as audio, audio/video and personal computer networks, in conjunction with prerecorded telecourses" (Brey 5). Given the growth of informational technology, we can only guess what future technologies, such as Interactive Television and WebTV, will be utilized in distance education.
These sorts of telecourses are different from a "teleclass" in which a given lecture is taped and transmitted live in real time over cable or satellite networks to students watching either in other classrooms or at home. A telecourse is also different from an "interactive teleclass" in which students and faculty in classrooms at multiple sites are linked in real time by some combination of video and audio. In a telecourse, instead of visiting a classroom with a teacher and fellow students, the students watch a weekly televised lecture from their own home, taking notes, completing assignments, and taking tests almost as if doing an independent study. The nationally produced and distributed telecourses in literature and composition use a variety of formats, including interviews with authors, experts, and students, as well as dramatizations followed by the commentary of experts. The best of such English courses succeed in including a variety of authors, experts, and texts to reflect the pluralistic nature of the United States.

Essentially, there are three different types of telecourse producers. According to Brey's report, one source for telecourses is "television series produced for broadcast but not originally meant for telecourse use. However, after production they are then adapted for use as a telecourse. These also include training programs produced for commercial training and business organizations" (15). These sorts of courses are not in high demand in higher education. What is in high demand are broadcast-quality documentary-style telecourses produced by consortia and then marketed nationwide. Brey reports:

A small number of organizations fund or produce television series that are used explicitly as a telecourse and marketed to other institutions. Coast Community College District, Dallas County Community College District, Miami-Dade Community College District, and The Southern California Consortium, are examples of such organizations. Others, such as The Annenberg/CPB Project, fund telecourses
which are produced for use by others. Some of these are distributed as prime time
television series, such as *Art of the Western World* on PBS. (14-5)

Far and away the most influential English studies telecourses come from these types
of business and educational consortia. According to Brey's 1989 study, the four major
telecourse producers and one funding agency "have been responsible for the production
or funding of sixty-nine different telecourses[. . .]. Their courses account for ninety
percent of the total enrollment and eighty-two percent of the total reported uses of
telecourses [. . .]. These telecourses tend to have relatively large enrollments because
they are core courses at most institutions" (Brey 25). Such courses include, for instance,
productions like *The Write Course* and *A Writer's Exchange*, produced by the Dallas
County Community College District's LeCroy Center and distributed nationally by
Annenberg/PBS Communications, and *Voices and Visions: A Television Course in
Modern American Poetry* presented by the South Carolina ETV Network, produced by
The New York Center for Visual History, and distributed as an Annenberg/PBS Project.
A pattern has been developing over the past decade or so, in which a small group of
institutions is creating knowledge for a vast majority of students, particularly in the core
course general education requirements most undergraduates are required to take.

It is not just in the field of telecourses that this commercialized centralization of
knowledge is occurring. As a 1997 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article on the
computer technology-based Western Governor's University makes clear, more and more
courses are "designed by teams of technology experts and professors, then marketed by
publishers or brand-name universities" (Young 10). According to this model, the
appropriate educational material for a college education will be chosen by a narrow
cluster of scholars and technicians, then disseminated by a select group of business
organizations—organizations whose primary goal is not to allow more access to
intellectual growth or create a better citizenry—the sort of educational process Emerson
called for in "The American Scholar" address—but to make a profit. In other words,
decisions on educational content will be based on what makes money, not on what may
be intellectually important. As the Chronicle puts it, if education is created by "teams of
professors and technicians working side by side in a publishing company's offices or on
the campus of an Ivy League or Big Ten university," curriculum development may be
"like producing a Hollywood film or a video game" (11). More so than today, in the
future knowledge disseminated by computer and telecourse will become a commodity to
be bought and sold.

The expensive consortia-produced telecourses that almost monopolize the telecourse
industry compete with what Brey considers the third source of telecourses: "a college or
university that produces a telecourse for its own use and has no intention of marketing it
to others" (15). The two courses I have developed and produced for PCC fit into this
category—small-scale, home-made productions designed for a specific and local
audience.

Here in Tucson, each week's session is broadcast via cable four separate times, so the
students can watch them in real time, or they can tape them and watch at their
convenience. Each televised Writing course is shown twelve hours each week, for a total
of twenty-four hours per week of television broadcasting devoted to the form, structure,
and use of standard written English. For students who don't have access to cable
television or a VCR, the three college libraries have each session available for internal viewing. In addition to watching the cable sessions, students can attend classroom review sessions at the Community Campus. Students can also reach the instructor via voice mail and regular mail. As of this writing, PCC has not integrated the Internet or other computer-assisted instruction into the telecourse instruction.

In the Writing 100, Writing Fundamentals course, students are required to view the weekly televised sessions, read sections from the course textbook, and complete seven short essays emphasizing the conventional rhetorical modes, such as narration, description, process, and persuasion. To guard against plagiarism and to encourage the writing process, students are required to include all pre-writing and rough drafts with their final drafts. They either mail their completed assignments to the support staff at the campus, drop them off, or fax them in. The Community Campus telecourse support staff then puts the essays in the teacher's mailbox. The teacher grades the work and returns it to the support staff, who mails the essays back to the students. The whole process generally takes between seven and fourteen days.

In the courses that I have designed, students also keep a twenty-five-entry journal, complete an in-class mid-term and final exam, and turn in an expanded three-essay portfolio, in which they choose three essays to rewrite according to the skills they've gained throughout the semester. The portfolio is crucial because it offers the only opportunity for the students to apply the revision skills necessary to improve a given writing assignment. Each student in PCC's televised Writing 100 course turns in over 5,000 graded words of writing a semester and an additional 4,000 informal journal-entry
words (in comparison, the University of Arizona requires roughly 5,000-6,000 graded
words in English 100 and roughly 6,000-8,000 graded words in English 101).
Assessments based on student portfolios and questionnaires indicate that students who
complete the course demonstrate significant improvement in a variety of important
writing skills, from complexity of thought to organization to sentence level mechanics.
This accords with studies indicating that grades for telecourse students fall in the same
range as classroom students, as indicated by the following assessment report on the
nationally distributed *The Write Course*: "In several of the comparisons of Write Course
classes and traditional classes, Write Course students improved their writing much more
than did students enrolled in traditional classes" (Cherry, et al. 6)

Although students who complete the writing telecourses at Pima generally master the
course material, not all students who begin the course complete the course. While the
majority of Community Campus courses have a high completion rate, the telecourses do
not. For instance, in Fall of 1993, compared with the other Pima campuses, "the
Community campus showed the highest percentage of successes (75%) and the lowest
percentage of withdrawals (21%)" in the conventional classroom courses. 6 However, the
writing telecourses have a different dropout rate. Take for example, one Spring 1995
section of Writing 101. Thirty-eight students initially registered for the class, and
twenty-four completed the first assignment, while nineteen completed the final
assignment. The final grades of the twenty-four who completed the first assignment
break down as follows: eleven/A's; four/B's; one/C; two/D's; six/Y's (indicating an
instructor withdrawal). Thus, sixteen of the twenty-four students who turned in the first
assignment successfully completed the course, less than half of the thirty-eight who had initially enrolled in the course. If the students had been required to attend class, based on the quality of their early work, I estimate that the majority of those Y's would have been in the C range, perhaps with a few D's. Studies of telecourse effectiveness indicate that the most significant indicator of student success in telecourses is strong self-management, a function of individual maturity, self-responsibility, planning, goal-setting, and personal motivation. Questions arise, though, such as, do institutions offering telecourses have a responsibility to help students become responsible and self-motivated? If so, what systems do institutions need to implement to help their students succeed in these courses?

The two-hour cablecast sessions of my telecourses are available to every cable-ready home in the Tucson area, reaching roughly 200,000 households. Thus not only registered students but non-enrolled observers have access to material that is normally contained within the four walls of a college classroom. This open access to higher education differs from the University of Arizona's telecourses which are blocked throughout the region by some of the cable providers. I don't have statistics on how many people watch or how often they watch, but anecdotal evidence suggests that a fair number of people view the PCC telecourses. I've received letters and phone calls from non-enrolled observers, and I've been approached by non-enrolled observers in restaurants, shopping markets, and libraries--in fact, a waitress once wagged her finger at me: "You," she said, "are on TV way too much." Such anecdotal evidence suggests that the televised courses open to a
wider, unofficial audience the official college material that is generally kept behind the
closed doors of a classroom.

This open quality marks the primary benefit of telecourses: those who cannot
otherwise attend institutions of higher education can attend to their own learning because
of these new technologies. When I started teaching over television, I did not foresee this
benefit. In fact, when I began preparing the first telecourse, I was deeply conflicted,
mainly because the nature of the telecourse contradicts my teaching philosophy. In the
telecourse, the teacher is primarily a dispenser of information and the televised sessions
are primarily a means of transmitting an established body of knowledge. A telecourse is
not a place where knowledge is constructed, where knowledge is questioned or held up
for scrutiny. Rather, the telecourse is primarily a place for the educational authority
figure to present a pre-determined body of knowledge which the student must
demonstrate having learned.

This conflicts with my personal philosophy of teaching English. Influenced by the
writings of Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, and other post-modern
theorists, I hold that knowledge is a fluid entity that is historically conditioned and
socially constructed, not a stable commodity to be passed intact from one generation to
the next. Following the lead of such contemporary thinkers as Gregory Jay, Paulo Friere,
Ira Shor, bell hooks, and James Berlin, as well as nineteenth-century figures such as
Ralph Waldo Emerson, in my teaching I seek to create a sort of critical literacy, a way of
looking for deeper meanings and root causes that lie beneath the surface meaning of the
dominant myths and official pronouncements. I will argue in later chapters that the
telecourse functions primarily as the *transmitter* of dominant myths and official pronouncements and not as a *questioner* of those myths and pronouncements—and certainly not as a *creator* of alternative forms of knowledge.

While I believe that one goal of English studies is to prepare students to read and write for private pleasure, students must learn the signifying practices of text consumption and text production, whether in academic, scientific, political, or poetic discourses. Following the lead of James Berlin, I would argue that English studies should enable students to study and critique various signifying practices—the signs and codes of the multiple discourses that inform our economic, social, and political conditions. Although I maintain that English studies should teach students a measure of facility in writing and reading practices so as to prepare them for public discourse in a democratic society. As Alan Bloom writes in *The Closing of the American Mind*, "The liberally educated person is one who is able to resist the easy and preferred answers, not because he is obstinate, but because he knows others worthy of consideration" (21). As we shall see in later chapters, the content of telecourses designed for public viewing and a long shelf life is often more conservative in nature than the content of a similar classroom course. The telecourse all too often presents what we might call the "easy and preferred answers"—not quite a dumbing down of educational material, but certainly not the sort of cutting-edge material that is often seen in college classrooms. It seems that education suffers here. If distance education continues to moderate the pursuit of knowledge, my fear is that we will only pursue moderate knowledge and not take the risks that push our common intellectual horizons. We must guard against that.
Although I believe that an effective teacher adjusts teaching methods and styles depending on the particular student, subject, level, and situation, I also believe that knowledge is meant to be discussed, shared, constructed. To that end, I believe in collaborative learning, small groups of students who analyze and solve problems and help one another revise and edit their work. This model of teaching is especially important in the discipline of English studies, where we have come to acknowledge the dangers of believing in universal truths dispensed from on-high. Collaborative learning is designed to increase participation, to make use of a variety of learning skills, and ultimately to create knowledge rather than just regurgitate it. Kenneth Bruffee argues that in collaborative learning environments, students "learn to construct knowledge as it is constructed in the academic disciplines [. . .] they learn the craft of interdependence" (1). I shall argue that the telecourse does not teach this craft of interdependence very well, for by its very nature, the telecourse enforces a hierarchy in which the sender of a message is intended to be clearly more dominant than the receiver.

For now, though, it is worth noting that in my role as television teacher of standard written English, I represent what Alan Bloom praises as the "dominant culture," supervising that culture's "traditions, its literature, its tastes, its special claim to know and supervise the language" (31). My image on television represents the "special claim to know and supervise the language" (31), as Bloom phrases it. As the telecourse teacher, I am not a moderator of the communal pursuit of knowledge in a collaborative classroom, but am instead a dispenser of information who dictates the terms and standards of appropriate knowledge.
III

Marginalized Students. Marginalized Faculty

Returning to the autumn of 1993, why would I take the job of developing, producing, and teaching telecourses if those tasks conflict with my personal beliefs about the purpose and method of education? I took the job initially because it was in my financial and professional interest. To develop and produce the course, I was paid the equivalent of one semester’s teaching load, $1,545. Among other tasks, developing the course required doing research and gathering materials, mapping lesson plans, translating plans into Macintosh PowerPoint slides, adding PowerPoint graphics, addressing copyright concerns, and rehearsing. For each hour of television time, I spent roughly ten hours preparing. At thirty televised hours, this means I spent about 300 hours of preparation time, which works out to about five dollars per hour compensation. Although my five bucks an hour is far more generous in comparison to the compensation figure of sixty-three cents per hour reported by one English department adjunct faculty member in a 1998 Chronicle article (Schneider A14), it is still not very much money for all the work devoted to the project.

One of the advantages to being the telecourse teacher, however, is that the teacher of record receives the typical salary of $1,545 per course. Once I had developed the course material, teaching the telecourse was easy for me because I was only responsible for handling the logistics of each course and grading student papers. I did not have to create
any new knowledge, nor did I have to update the course—indeed, I could not update the course because the material was already canned.

Although I would receive no remuneration or royalties for the televised material, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to work on such a unique project. James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo reminds us that we each have our particular gifts, and in many ways the telecourse allowed good use of my gifts. For one thing, I think the telecourse made me a better teacher by forcing me to confront my weaknesses. For instance, I became a more organized teacher, turning scattered files of course handouts into codified PowerPoint slides. The material I created, while not quite in textbook format, was organized, detailed, and centrally located. In addition, I think preparing for the telecourse classes has enabled me to clarify my teaching mission, which in turn has enabled me to prepare better for classroom courses. This overlap of teaching methods is not uncommon among those who teach in the classroom and on television. A study of the influence of telecourses on the faculty who teach them suggests that "the longer instructors teach via distance educational technology, the more their teaching approaches in both traditional and distance settings tend to resemble each other" (Scott, dissertation abstract). 10 In my case, one drawback to this, as I shall discuss in more detail in later chapters, is that my teaching style has become more and more what Paulo Friere would call banking-oriented. That is, for all my affection for a pedagogy rooted in collaborative learning in which students and teachers together construct knowledge, I now find myself lecturing in the classroom more than I would like, depositing information into a more passive, receiving student. This leads me to wonder about the implications of the overlap between teaching
styles: given that teaching in a classroom is in many ways a performative act, do faculty take some of the communication/performance tricks from television and apply them to beneficial effect in the classroom? Or does the classroom become more akin to the passive, transmission-based television program?

Another reason I continued working with telecourses was, simply, that it is fun. Although the classroom is a stimulating environment, working with television and technology was new, exciting, and most certainly a challenge. The production staff, the graphics artist, and I were a team in building an informative and entertaining curriculum as best we could within financial and technological constraints. I was working in the same building as the dean, associate dean, and president of the Community Campus, and I became better acquainted with them by chatting in hallways and discussing the progress of the telecourse. Moreover, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the ego factor: my face, my words, and my beliefs are on television 20 hours a week, more than David Letterman or Dan Rather, and almost as much as Michael Jordan in his basketball days. Even though there are many, many teachers here in Tucson who would do an excellent job on television, I certainly enjoy being recognized on the street or in the market. Some people may say, as one woman did, "Well, you're a bit childish on television," but on the whole I get a certain ego satisfaction from these fifteen minutes of cable glory. Our culture adores Hollywood, and this experience gave me a small taste of the acting profession.

Finally, aside from my own gratification, I believe that these educational telecourses endorse education. Because television is a cultural industry with the power to validate
the work of the mind that takes place in an English class, the simple fact that so many hours a week are devoted to the importance of reading and writing substantiates the field that I love. As I’ve said, in my own experiences, people from all walks of life view the courses. For example, on a recent late Saturday night I was stopped on a sidewalk by a tipsy, denim-clad man wearing a Harley Davidson motorcycle cap who enthusiastically praised me for teaching standard English. “Kids today, they don’t know how to write, and by God, you’re teaching ‘em,” he gushed. In addition to woozy motorcycle enthusiasts, I’ve been contacted by a fifteen-year-old boy who watched the program while recovering from chemotherapy, and an IBM sales executive has told me that he watches the course occasionally for writing tips he can use at work. As these anecdotes indicate, the telecourse has tremendous potential to make college-level educational material available to a wide range of people.

Not only do the telecourses turn the teacher into a sort of public intellectual, but they reach an important audience of adults who have in general been marginalized professionally, economically, and academically. A 1993 telecourse study found that typical distance students are “financially disadvantaged” and have had a “previous lack of success with traditional programs” (7). Indeed, many of my own telecourse students have responded to a questionnaire regarding their course experiences. Their responses explain why I still believe in the potential benefits of telecourses despite the pedagogical drawbacks. To the question of why they are taking this particular class through television, students have written these replies:
• A telecourse is more convenient for my schedule. I have a full load (wife, mother, work, full-time student) and felt a course like this would be easier to take this way [. . .]. My health is questionable and I can assure myself I won’t fail by absences.

• I did have knee surgery, and it was real difficult to move around, and I also have a job 30 hours a week.

• I work during the day, and there are not enough classes available during the evening.

• I have neither the ways nor the means to get to a regular class. My schedule is both full, and constantly changing. My husband is disabled, and we still have three children at home.

These responses well represent the situations of students who take telecourses. For students burdened with the overload of family, occupation, and schooling, telecourses provide one of the few opportunities available to break the pattern of financial and professional insecurity. As Kim Kirlin, one telecourse student, put it in a questionnaire: "The course gave me self-confidence; I was never a good student in high-school and [the course] [. . .] gave me worlds of self-confidence. My boss was a big advocate of taking the class--before the class, any time I had to write I would run back to her and ask if this is right and most often she said it wasn’t. Now [. . .] I don't need to go to her."12

Ms. Kirlin's testimony reveals that learning standard English is a functional skill that allows access to dominant power structures. As Robert Pattison argues, "standard English should be taught as a practical tool of social advantage, never as a moral or
aesthetic norm" (167). "The goal of teaching formal English," he says, "should be to provide all citizens with the ability to read and write all those public documents by which society organizes itself" (168). Following his urgings, I see that my job as an English teacher is to facilitate this access, whether in the classrooms of the University of Arizona or through the telecourse at Pima Community College. Of course, the telecourse isn't a panacea for all societal ills, but it is clear that many students gain important benefits that they would not otherwise have. I offer this snapshot of the student as one reason why I would be willing to teach the telecourses: telecourses have the advantages of making college education available to those who need it the most, which is very satisfying to me.

But all is not perfect in the Pima Community College telecourse world. Our production quality, though reasonable, is not at broadcast-level quality. Some of the computerized slides contain typographical errors. On screen I would sometimes fumble with words. Sometimes I would hit the wrong computer keys and bring up the wrong televised slide. Other times, to my critical eye at least, my hair is out of place and I look silly on camera. On another level, our support staff (comprised of mostly part-timers) would misplace student work, correspondence would be mailed to the wrong address, or the voice mail system would crash. Although many of these troubles are to be expected when putting together a distance education program with a limited budget, these problems do need to be addressed if we expect to have a product of the highest quality. Given the opportunity, I would like to take the time and resources to improve the quality of the courses. However, one of the primary drawbacks of a telecourse is that it cannot be changed without a substantial financial and time commitment. Until the college
administration allocates the funding necessary to revise the telecourses, the same
televised material will continue to run every semester as it has for the past five years.

For all their weaknesses, the PCC telecourses are still a success with the students—
too much of a success, in some ways. In response to student enrollment, within a year of
introducing the Writing 100 telecourse, the administration decided to raise the enrollment
cap in Writing 100 from thirty students to forty-five students. Although a high number of
telecourse students ultimately do not complete the course, the faculty workload is still
increased considerably by the additional students. When I discussed the drawbacks of
such a policy with the Community Campus administration, I was told that the cap would
remain at forty-five students, significantly above the National Council of Teachers of
English standard for enrollment limits of twenty-four students in a college writing course
and well above PCC's own limit of twenty-seven. The administration claimed that
because the telecourse instructor of record did not have to prepare and attend a weekly
class, the instructor had more time for grading. They also said that because the course
was a short-essay composition course, the teacher didn't even have much grading to do,
so forty-five students was a reasonable number. Finally, they said that other telecourses,
such as Math, Computer Science, and Psychology, had sixty students, so the Writing
class was well below the telecourse norm. However, these other telecourses assess their
students primarily via scantron and short answer tests, rarely relying on essays or
research papers. In general, the teachers of record for these courses are responsible for
monitoring the students’ progress and administering assessment tests, but are rarely
responsible for the sort of in-depth teaching required when one grades essays.
As an adjunct, I was only able to teach two courses per semester, and as the telecourses gained in popularity new teachers needed to be hired. In 1995, we brought in a friend of mine, David, who had just received his masters degree in English from the University of Arizona. I trained David to be a telecourse teacher. Under this system, the telecourses are essentially team-taught: students view my image on television, learn the material that I have prepared for them, and follow the syllabus I have created; as the teacher of record, David coordinates review sessions, telephones students, grades their papers, and is responsible for their final grades.

In January of 1997, three sections were opened in Writing 101, and each class had roughly twenty-five students. David signed a contract for one of the courses, and I signed contracts for the other two. The next day, the associate dean stopped me in the computer lab where I was designing a web page for another new course, an Internet-based Writing 101 class. She said that the administration had canceled one of the telecourses for which I had signed a contract and was overloading the remaining section. Thus David and I would each teach one section of thirty-six and thirty-seven students, respectively, well over the college-mandated cap of twenty-seven—and over the cap of thirty that our contract had called for. Now, I do not particularly mind increasing my workload for a short while. I had taken on extra students before, and it is not a significant burden, especially given the high dropout rate of the telecourse. I believe it is appropriate in times of crisis to ask faculty to pitch in and help by taking extra students.

However, this student overload did not occur in a time of crisis and was actually the continuation of an earlier pattern. The year earlier the administration had raised the limit
of Writing 100 from thirty to forty-five students, and now the Writing 101 class limit was being raised. When I asked the associate dean if David and I would be compensated for the extra students, I was told no, with the additional comment that, “You should just be happy you have a job.” She added that many of the telecourses PCC offered were over-enrolled and those teachers didn't complain about the extra work. When I responded that I was frustrated because I had already signed a contract and I had been counting on the paycheck for the second course, she replied that if I needed money perhaps I should look elsewhere for work.

Not only were the faculty asked to teach more students at the same rate of pay, but the students were at risk. As I've said, in my own courses, roughly 50% of the students who sign up for the course complete the course with a grade—part of the pattern of telecourses. The administration has used this statistic as rationale for raising the enrollment cap, claiming that half the students drop out by the end by the end of the semester so teachers aren't really teaching all that many students anyway. This seems to be a foolish argument, for if the teacher cannot retain thirty students, how can we expect the teacher to retain thirty-seven, or forty, or forty-five? Instead of using the high dropout rate as a reason for overloading course sections, PCC should address the many complex reasons for the poor retention rates. For example, according to Ahni Dale Foley's study on attrition factors in telecourses, the “primary reasons for telecourse student withdrawal [include] job conflict (23%), personal problems (20%), structure of telecourse (19%), academic ambition (12%), teacher-initiated drop (7%), academic failure (7%), and other (12%).” Foley recommends the following solutions to the
problem of low student retention rates: "(1) Improvement of the advertisement of telecourses. (2) Improvement of academic guidance. (3) Additional training for telecourse instructors. (4) Implementation of student retention strategies. (5) Periodic evaluation of telecourse programs." Instead of addressing the issues raised by Foley and trying to solve the problem of high dropout rates, PCC simply decided to increase the number of students in each section. The pattern of overloading students into telecourses at the expense of teacher salaries and student success is unacceptable. The fact that many teachers of record are part-timers with little power turns the situation into exploitation.

As an adjunct, I had no support system to address my particular concerns, so I sent letters to the area chair of my department, the associate dean, the dean, and the president of the Community Campus, suggesting that we discuss the issue of low retention rates and overloaded classes. Although I had always enjoyed good relations with members of the Community Campus administration, I received no response. I scheduled a meeting with my dean and was told that the college reserved the right to increase student enrollment. I visited with the area chair and was told, "keep your head down." Perhaps I should have, but I did not heed her advice. Instead, I attended a Committee for Department Area Meetings (CDAM) meeting. The CDAM is comprised of full-time, tenured faculty at the five PCC campuses. The committee supported my argument and saw it as an opportunity to press for decreased class sizes throughout PCC's five campuses. Accordingly, although I did not realize it at the time, the CDAM committee sent an inter-office memorandum to the five campus presidents and instructional deans as well as to the senior vice chancellor. The memorandum addressed the "inconsistency in
the college's enforcement of class size limits, particularly in televised, distance-learning writing courses offered through the Community Campus" (Inter-Office Memorandum, dated April 29, 1997). The memorandum's penultimate paragraph reads, "Although we recognize the different retention rates between telecourses and classroom sections, it should be kept in mind that quality of instruction affects retention. We may be able to recruit students by overloading sections, but the CDAM members question that we can retain students, if we do not give them sufficient instructional, grading, and conference time."

As with all stories, there are multiple perspectives and interpretations to this tale. However, one perspective that will remain constant is that following receipt of this memo the Community Campus stopped hiring me to be the teacher of record for the telecourses that I created. Because adjuncts are hired under a course-by-course contract, the Community Campus is under no obligation to continue hiring them; adjuncts can be let go at any time. In my case, the Community Campus continues to run the tapes of the two courses, but as of this writing they have hired new teachers of record. I am certain that my dismissal is not a function of my teaching abilities. Not only have my teacher evaluations been uniformly excellent, but the Community Campus still uses the telecourse material I developed. Moreover, the Community Campus hired me as an adjunct to develop and teach PCC's first-ever On-Line Writing 101 course. In my view, I was not re-hired for the simple reason that I had questioned the institution's decision to overload sections at the expense of the faculty and the students. Their decision, as the dean said in a later conversation, to "move in a different direction" is a punitive one.
Because distance education can be a profit center for institutions, the motivation to make money may have played a role in the PCC decision to raise the student enrollment figures. According to the 1993-94 Pima Factbook, after a peak enrollment period in the late 1980s, 1994 saw a continuing decline in enrollment at the Community Campus: "The decrease in [full-time student equivalent, or FTSE] enrollment that started in the Spring 1993 semester continued with a similar decline in enrollment in Spring 1994. The head count enrollment in Spring 1994 was the lowest credit student enrollment in the last nine years" (77). More specifically, "Annual total FTSE decreased by 532 (-21%), down from 2,548 in 1992-93 to 2,016 in 1993-94" (79). Thus there was a pressure to increase enrollment and contain faculty costs at the same time that telecourses were growing more popular. These facts may explain why PCC emphasizes its telecourses. The extra students who enrolled in a telecourse could be taught by a small number of part-time faculty, allowing the college to increase FTSE while decreasing its already low faculty cost. Seen in this context, the college decision to raise the enrollment cap of its Writing telecourses appears especially problematic. At PCC, the pattern appears to be to use the telecourses as a site for increased FTSE at the expense of faculty workload and student success.

While I have long recognized the many educational and social benefits that can arise from teaching by telecourse, I have also noticed a number of troubling issues. My recent experiences have added an urgency to this project, forcing me to look beyond my own narrow sphere toward the larger, systemic patterns in higher education. Thus, this account of the theoretical, cultural, and pedagogical implications of teaching English by
telecourse is born not only of an intellectual impulse, but of an autobiographical impulse, a desire to "seize the public by the button" as Nathaniel Hawthorne puts it in the Custom House sketch (35). Like Hawthorne in 1848, I felt the figurative sting of a blade that severed my professional head from my professional body, and I cannot but agree with him when he suggests that the "moment when a man's head drops off is seldom or never [. . .] precisely the most agreeable moment of his life" (71). Yet, the rupture of happy patterns provides opportunity to create new patterns, to use the power of the break to move in different directions, directions that allow us to analyze and examine the events that led to the rupture. It is in this spirit that I write this dissertation, for it is my hope that what I have to say will lead to a clearer picture of the benefits and dangers of using telecourses to teach English studies.

IV. Beginnings

This introductory narrative has been designed to situate my analysis of the benefits and disadvantages of telecourses within the context of the current academic labor crisis in our discipline. In Chapter 1, I situate the telecourse more squarely within the theoretical and pedagogical issues that confront teachers of writing. In the first part of the chapter, I present a functionalist justification for teaching standard written English, after which I present a somewhat detailed picture of what observers see when they view the telecourses that I created for Pima Community College. The final section of Chapter 1 reviews the pedagogical methodologies commonly associated with teaching writing. When reviewing the strands of contemporary composition theory and practice, my goal is to
present key terms and concepts (such as current-traditional pedagogy, expressionist rhetoric, discourse communities, epistemic transactional rhetoric, liberatory, and cultural materialist pedagogies) in order to establish a framework for the forthcoming examinations of the cultural and educational implications of teaching via telecourse. I do not pretend to offer a comprehensive history of composition theory and practice and, instead, rely heavily on those who have already undertaken such a project, including Sharon Crowley, Kurt Spellmeyer, and the late James Berlin. Ultimately, I argue that it is appropriate to teach standard English so that students can function in the various academic and professional communities to which they aspire. Following James Berlin, I also argue that English studies should teach students the skills necessary for critical reflection by helping them learn the signifying practices of various discursive categories, such as imaginative literature; academic discourse; political and religious rhetoric; and the discourse of film, radio, and television.

My primary goals for Chapter 2 are to describe the viewing experience and the logistics of three composition telecourses: the two courses that I produced and taught for Pima Community College, and A Writer's Exchange, an internationally distributed telecourse developed and produced by Dallas County Community College District. Unlike a traditional dissertation in literary studies where both the writer and the audience have read a common text, the telecourses are not common knowledge. Consequently, I describe in some detail the televised material, including my own talking head, the various interviews with academic experts, and the dramatized vignettes that are meant to
represent student experiences. Student responses to questionnaires from my own courses are used to illustrate how the typical telecourse student responds to the televised material.

In Chapter 3, I focus my efforts on representative sample programs from *Voices and Visions* and *Literary Visions*, two of the leading nationally distributed literature telecourses. My analysis of the televised treatments of the imaginative literature reveals the paradoxical nature of telecourses. On the one hand, the material is interesting, generally accurate, and a provocative entry into literary studies. Using as representative samples the Walt Whitman film from the *Voices and Visions* course and the Stephen Crane segment from *Literary Visions*, we can conclude that the telecourse provides the viewer with an excellent introduction to the writers and their work, while at the same time providing the telecourse student with thought-provoking critical insights. On the other hand, however, there are significant problems with this form of instruction. For example, much of the material quickly become out-dated, leaving the viewer with an incomplete and inaccurate impression of the imaginative literature, the author, and the cultural work of the text. Furthermore, as demonstrated by an analysis of the televised segment on the influence of Walt Whitman’s sexuality on his verse, I argue that the telecourses are significantly conservative, focusing on literary appreciation at the expense of the cultural work and political implications of the imaginative literature.

Part 1 of Chapter 4 details the practical advantages and disadvantages of telecourses for students, faculty, and institutions. I review the research on telecourse instruction and present the general consensus that telecourses have proved to be accessible educational opportunity for many students who would otherwise not attend
school, an opportunity for faculty to use new pedagogical and technological skills, and an additional revenue source for institutions. However, there are three primary disadvantages: 1) students have little interaction with fellow students and the teacher, 2) there is a markedly high drop-out rate for telecourse students; and 3) the course material is markedly conservative.

In Part 2 of Chapter 4, I present a variety of solutions to the problem of interaction. I review such educational technology as electronic mail; dedicated listservs; multi-user object-domains, user-oriented (MOOs); and online courseware systems that can provide faculty the opportunity to create a collaborative community among the students who are at a distance. Even though such technological advances are beneficial, I conclude this section by warning of the disadvantages of such technologies. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s description of the panopticon, I argue that online courseware systems and educational MOOs have the potential to function as a repressive surveillance system that may regulate faculty members and students. As I will illustrate, in these virtual spaces students can feel threatened by the fact that their teacher have continued access to all the student’s written utterances.

Chapter 5 examines the cultural work of the telecourses. In Part 1, I explain how composition and literature telecourses in the United States function as what Louis Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). In addition to drawing on Althusser, I lean on Michel de Certeau’s theorizing of “reading as poaching” and contemporary television reception theory in order to demonstrate that the telecourses utilize the ISAs of education and television in order to reproduce particular ideologies. In
Part 2 of Chapter 5, I examine those ideologies, arguing that the telecourses can be read as another in the long line of rhetorics that seek to mold American culture. In this section I present three main points. First, that the enacted dramatizations of the televised material reify the rhetoric of the American melting pot. The telecourses claim to represent the cultural diversity of college students, and, on the whole, the televised material presents successful role models and positive examples that empower students in their quest for personal achievement. However, the televised material is standardized in such a way that the diverse cultural experiences of the representative students are elided from the television narrative. In this respect, the telecourse narratives create a myth of standardized Americans who are happily inculcated into the educational and occupational systems of mainstream America, without acknowledging the complications or difficulties faced by such characters in real life. In order to demonstrate how the telecourses rarely admit oppositional voices, I conclude this section by comparing Gloria Anzaldúa’s provocative voice in Borderlands/La Fronterá with a telecourse’s happy depiction of an Hispanic woman learning to write a cover letter.

The second point I make is that the televised material reproduces what I call an American rhetoric of self-reliance. I juxtapose the rhetoric of the telecourse with the rhetoric John Smith, Benjamin Franklin, Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, and Ralph Waldo Emerson in order to illustrate how the telecourses figure their students as self-reliant individuals whose primary concerns are to advance themselves within economic and occupational hierarchies. The result of such a figuration is that students and other observers of the televised material are taught that any economic, social, and political
disadvantages are the result of private, individual travails, and not intertwined with prevailing cultural and material forces. I conclude by arguing that in many ways the telecourses present images of the American Dream that betray an excessive faith in existing power structures. The courses offer students a false vision of a future of unbound glories in order to train the viewers in occupational and functional literacy at the expense of critical, oppositional thinking.

Finally, in the Epilogue I return to the disturbing implications for academic labor. The teacher of record for these courses becomes little more than a tutor and a logistical coordinator, shepherding the solitary students through the pre-arranged course material. As we advance into the twenty-first century, classroom teachers may no longer be necessary if institutions can disseminate information with the help of new technologies and simply hire inexpensive teachers to be responsible for logistics and assessment, rather than hire professional academics to do the more demanding labor of professional scholarship and teaching. Consequently, professional academics will become even more under-valued than they are today.

NOTES

1 As I write this, I recognize with a certain bashfulness that in one quoted sentence I split an infinitive unnecessarily while in the next I argue that teachers should teach the "nuts and bolts" of usage.
2 The Chronicle of Higher Education 1999-2000 Almanac Issue (Vol. XLVI 27 August 1999: 29), reports in its chart titled "Characteristics of Recipients of Doctorates, 1997," that the median number of years from bachelor's degree to doctorate in the arts and humanities is 11.7, and that the median number of years that students are registered as a graduate student are 8.6.
3 The original web page URL for this citation was http://nces.ed.gov/surveys.datasurv. However, as of February 2000, that address is no longer active.
At Pima Community College, English Departments are divided into two areas, Literature and Writing. Consequently, I shall use the capitalized term “Writing” as a titular form to refer to a course in composition.


It should be noted that many of the students who initially enroll in a telecourse do so without understanding the telecourse requirements. Many students think it is a self-paced tutorial, for instance. As well, some students register in order to qualify for financial aid, such as grants and loans. Each semester, a number of students who register do so without intending to complete the course.

See James Berlin’s *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, especially pp 77-94.

See, for instance, my discussion of Walt Whitman in Chapter 3.

See Patricia Jean Gregurich Scott’s 1994 dissertation at the University of Oregon, “The Effects of Distance Teaching Technology on Faculty Perceptions of Teaching.” Scott also reports the following findings: “[...] that while students may have become comfortable with their autonomy, instructors have not gained similar comfort with increased student autonomy; that while interactive technology supports traditional communication patterns, the use of preprogrammed technology is associated with increased instructor efforts to maintain interaction; that the use of highly structured teaching modules is offset by highly personal communication.” My quotation comes from her abstract; I have not read the entire dissertation.


Personal conversation, April 1, 1997. Quoted by permission.

See Foley’s 1993 dissertation, “Identification of Attrition Factors in Telecourse Students at Pasadena City College (California).” (My quotations come from the dissertation abstract.)
CHAPTER 1
SITUATING THE COMPOSITION TELECOURSE

Introductory Remarks

I move now to a description of telecourses that teach English. I will focus in the next two chapters on five separate courses: two Pima Community College telecourses; A Writer's Exchange, a composition telecourse produced and distributed nationally by the influential R. Jan LeCroy Center, a part of the Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD); Voices and Visions: A Television Course in Modern American Poetry; and Literary Visions--Reading and Writing About Literature, an introduction to short fiction, poetry, and drama that utilizes twenty-six thirty-minute television programs. These last two literature-based courses are distributed nationally by the Public Broadcasting System and will be discussed in Chapter 3.

I have four primary goals for these next two chapters: (1) to situate the composition telecourses within a brief typology of contemporary composition theory and practice; (2) to describe the viewing experience and the logistics of the telecourses that I produced and taught at Pima Community College (PCC); (3) to describe the viewing experience and the logistics of A Writer's Exchange; and (4) to establish a framework for the forthcoming examinations of the social, educational, and ideological implications of teaching via telecourse. When reviewing the strands of contemporary composition theory and practice, my goal is to present key terms and concepts (such as current-traditional
pedagogy, expressionist rhetoric, discourse communities, epistemic transactional rhetoric, liberatory, and cultural materialist pedagogies) so that the reader will be prepared for the forthcoming analysis of the teaching methodology utilized by the telecourses. I do not pretend to offer a comprehensive history of composition theory and practice and, instead, rely heavily on those who have already undertaken such a project, including Sharon Crowley, Kurt Spellmeyer, and the late James Berlin. I draw most from Berlin's histories of composition, primarily *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* (1987) and the posthumous *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies* (1996). James Berlin assumes that English studies is in a long-standing crisis, attacked by the right for a teaching of political correctness at the expense of tradition and standards and attacked by the left for not taking into account the sorts of concerns raised by structuralist and post-structuralist speculation that calls into question conceptions of knowledge, language, interlocutors, and audiences.¹ I agree with Berlin's claim and add to the list of troubles the long-term implications of the so-called "job crisis." Because the English telecourse functions as an apparatus of education, language, and communication, the telecourse is an important site to study within this crisis.

The main point of my argument is this: On the one hand, the composition telecourses that teach a pragmatic, functionalist literacy are offering their students exactly what the students are paying for: the practical tools to use English to enter new discourse communities. The largely working class, adult student population that typically takes telecourses does so in an effort to better their personal, academic, professional, and
economic situations. These students take English courses because they are required for a college degree, but also because the students seek the practical skills that enable them to enter the academic and professional discourse communities to which they've previously been denied entrance. I believe this educational goal is worthwhile: the general telecourse student (a working adult who is a parent) deserves to achieve the specific goal she has set for herself. She pays money to achieve her goal of learning to write well so that she can advance her academic, economic, and professional opportunities, and she deserves to get her money's worth. On the other hand, such an educational experience rarely offers the student the sort of liberal arts education that teaches her the skills for critical self-reflexivity and rarely emphasizes the value of using reading and writing as a means to question her social and material condition.

Before I begin a description of specific telecourses, I wish to locate the discussion of telecourses within the question of literacy, for any discussion of reading and writing pedagogy must first ground itself in literacy's basic principles. I wish to establish what I consider the fundamental principles of literacy that should guide the teaching of composition.
I

Literacy And A Functionalist Justification For Teaching Standard Written English

Robert Pattison provides a useful description of the vexed term "literacy" towards the end of *On Literacy*, an important book for any understanding of the teaching of English studies:

Literacy is an ambiguous word in our society. On the one hand it implies a rational application of the mind to the problems of language, an exalted cultural achievement. On the other hand it means the acquisition of mechanical skills in reading and writing, an important but not usually noble attainment. (181)

According to Pattison, there are two main strands of literacy: applying rational thought to the complexities of language and acquiring the expected conventions of written expression. At the least, then, the ability to use the mechanical skills of reading and writing leads to a functional literacy, that is, the ability to use language well enough to survive the daily requirements of contemporary society.

Shirley Brice Heath's study of language use in a working-class community in the Carolinas illustrates the complex nature of language use. At times, she concludes, we use language on our own terms, and at other times, we use it on terms over which we have little control:

In what may be referred to as a post-industrial age, members of each community have different and varying patterns of influence and control over forms and uses of literacy in their lives. They exercise considerable control within their own primary networks. In institutions, such as their churches, they may have some control. In other institutions, such as their places of employment, banks, legal offices, etc., they may have no control over literacy demands. (370)
Heath points out that using language is not always a chosen activity: we are compelled by our social situation to manipulate language in order to function in contemporary society, whether it be to provide ourselves with a job or to navigate the legal and economic systems. The dual nature of choice and compulsion are reflected in Kenneth Levine's definition of functional literacy: "the possession of, or access to, the competencies and information required to accomplish transactions entailing reading and writing [in] which an individual wishes--or is compelled--to engage" (qtd. in Kintgen, Kroll, and Rose xv). Taken together, Heath's study and Levine's definitions indicate that an individual has a certain autonomy over his or her use of language, but they also remind us that individuals are at times compelled to use language according to societal conventions.

Sylvia Scribner extends the definition of functional literacy, arguing that functional literacy is "the level of proficiency necessary for effective performance in a range of settings and customary activities" (73). Although the definition of "functional" is also debated,² the general need for literacy skills cannot be debated. As Scribner writes,

No justification is needed to insist that schools are obligated to equip children with [...] literacy skills [...]. And basic educational programs have a similar obligation to equip adults with the skills they must have to secure jobs or advance to better ones, receive training and benefits to which they are entitled, and assume their civic and political responsibilities. (73)

According to this perspective, the ability to read and write at a functional level is not only necessary for both individual and communal survival, but is at the same time a means to personal and political power.

It is an educational commonplace that the better an individual can control the technologies of language, the better opportunities she will have in our society. As
Eugene Kintgen, Barry Kroll, and Mike Rose write, "Today there is a widespread, commonsensical belief that it is necessary to be literate in order to be economically successful, and, indeed, the large percentage of illiterates whose earnings are below the poverty level seems to support this" (xii). In their report to the Ford Foundation on adult illiteracy, Carman St. John Hunter and David Harman conclude that a large proportion of the U.S. population "suffers serious disadvantages because of limited educational attainment. In this country persons with limited education are often the same persons who suffer from one or more of the other major social disadvantages--poverty, unemployment, racial or ethnic discrimination, social isolation" (390). Of course, the ability to read and write does not automatically alleviate all social ills; nonetheless, a person has an advantage if he or she can use language effectively. Pattison pushes this view a step further, arguing that the ability to control language gives access to social power: "The manipulation of language is a means of controlling the world. Those who are conscious of this manipulation have a powerful tool of authority [. . .]. Literacy of this sort is power" (209). If the ability to read and write well leads to a measure of individual empowerment and a measure of economic and social power, what are the implications for teachers of writing?

Pattison offers three reasonable suggestions for the teaching of English. First, "Standard English should be taught as a practical tool of social advantage, never as a moral or aesthetic norm." Pattison here refers to a moral concept that Sylvia Scribner calls "literacy as state of grace." According to Scribner,

In the literacy-as-a-state-of-grace concept, the power and functionality of literacy is [sic] not bounded by political or economic parameters but in a sense transcends
[sic] them; the literate individual's life derives its meaning and significance from intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual participation in the accumulated creations and knowledge of humankind, made available through the written word. (77)³

In contrast to this notion of salvation, Pattison stresses the economic benefit of learning standard English, while at the same time recognizing the cultural and linguistic validity of non-standard forms of English.

His second suggestion is that standard English should be taught as a separate language from a student's oral and vernacular language: "standard English should be treated as a second language, not as the correct form of the language the student already speaks and writes" (167). Although a local vernacular may be acceptable in many contexts, Pattison argues that students "should be required to learn the rules and uses of this formal language for their own economic good" (167). Pattison's third suggestion emphasizes correctness in form, regardless of whether in standard or non-standard English:

Teachers should permit the greatest possible freedom in students' personal writing, with these understandings: that society at large will not accept ideas written in this form; that the speech and writing must be clear and comprehensible according to its own standards; that the student should develop his awareness of the uses of language as a result of his own writings. (167-68)

Pattison here argues two main points that provide a valuable foundation for the teaching of college-level writing: first, the personal expression of students should be honored in a classroom—as long as that expression demonstrates a linguistic self-awareness—and second, access to "society at large" is provided by an awareness of and ability to express oneself in standard English.
Writing from a similar economic and social functionalist perspective, Rei Noguchi offers practical reasons in support of teaching the formal conventions of standard written English. Noguchi begins *Grammar and the Teaching of Writing* by repeating the conclusions of a significant number of studies on the effectiveness of teaching grammar. Although, as Noguchi reports, "the formal study of grammar brings no significant gains to student writings" (vii), the debate over teaching grammar and usage rages. According to Noguchi, on the extremes of the debate are two groups of writing teachers. On the one side of the grammar divide stand "a staunch cadre of pro-grammar instructors [. . . who] place so much emphasis on the mechanical errors that they 'red-ink' student writing to a fatal hemorrhage and thereby destroy student interest in writing and writing improvement" (13). On other side stand "a growing number of equally staunch anti-grammar teachers who view mechanical errors as unimportant low-level 'surface' features which detract little from writing quality and which students can easily edit out during the writing process" (13). In presenting a number of methods for teaching solutions to the sorts of grammatical and usage problems that he considers the most essential for students, Noguchi treads the middle ground, arguing that even though studies show formal grammar teaching doesn't seem to improve writing, sentence-level writing is important for achieving social, economic, and professional goals.

Noguchi defines grammar as "the set of categories, functions, and rules (both descriptive and prescriptive) that teachers commonly employ to describe a sentence and its parts" (2). Noguchi bases his rationale for emphasizing the teaching of sentence-level usage on two studies that demonstrate the academic and social impact of writing that does
not accord with formal conventions. For example, based on the 1988 study by Robert Connors and Andrea Lunsford, "Frequency of Formal Errors in Current College Writing, or Ma and Pa Kettle Do Research," which reports that teachers mark a high number of apostrophe, diction, and sentence and clause boundary errors (22), Noguchi implies that students who do not master sentence-level writing receive lower grades, just one of the social consequences of poor sentence-level writing. Noguchi also cites Maxine Hairston's study of the attitude of people in the professions toward writing errors. Hairston's study, "Not All Errors are Created Equal: Nonacademic Readers in the Professions Respond to Lapses in Usage," suggests that writing that violates conventions of standard English marks for the business professional the lower social status of the writer.

According to Hairston, business professionals react negatively to a range of syntactic and semantic mistakes, including non-standard verb forms, a lack of subject-verb agreement, double negatives, sentence fragments, run-on sentences, faulty adverb forms, and a host of other faulty usage constructions. "The results of the Hairston study," argues Noguchi, "indicate that the professionals surveyed, many of whom occupy high management positions in their fields, are highly aware of and often react strongly to certain kinds of formal and usage errors" (24). The Hairston study indicates that people in positions of economic and professional power hold "correct" English in high esteem and privilege those who communicate in it while dismissing as lower status those who communicate with faulty grammar. For Noguchi, the underlying point is important to bear in mind when deciding how to teach English: "Rightly or wrongly, the professional
public can be offended, sometimes very strongly, by apparently minor features of writing" (28). This study reveals the valuable lesson that social status is in some ways defined by how well we communicate in standard English. In light of these social implications, Noguchi agrees with Pattison's claim that standard English should be taught not for aesthetic or moral reasons but for practical reasons. "It boils down to a question of practicality," says Noguchi. "Different situations call for different styles" (30). To that end, Noguchi offers specific strategies for teachers so that their students are able to avoid the status-marking errors that may hinder them from achieving their professional, economic, or social goals.

Not all agree with this pragmatic view, though. In a lengthy critique of his own profession, Richard Ohmann is concerned that the teaching of rules, prescriptions, and form perpetuates the conditions that allow for an alienated work force in a capitalist society. Influenced by the Marxist liberatory pedagogy of the late 1960s and early '70s, he asserts that English teachers who focus on correct writing and adherence to rules contribute to the process of training workers who are a-critical cogs in the damaging machinery of capitalism: “English teachers have helped train the kind of work force capitalists need in a productive system that relies less and less on purely manual labor” (8). Ohmann's argument has proven compelling. His books, English in America and Politics of Letters, have become touchstone texts for those seeking to move beyond the emphasis on teaching formal writing and toward an understanding of the social dynamics of cultural situation, audience, and rhetorical purpose.
To see how this argument plays out in relation to English telecourses, I turn first to a
description of what the viewers see when watching the telecourses that I have developed,
produced, and taught. After establishing the viewing experience, I will situate that
experience within elements of composition theory, including current-traditionalist,
expressionist, and liberatory pedagogies.

II

Viewing the Pima Community College Telecourses

As in virtually all communities in the United States, the lower-numbered television
channels in Southern Arizona are devoted primarily to broadcast television, including the
traditional networks CBS, NBC, ABC, PBS, and FOX. Travelling up the television dial,
popular cable channels appear, like the History Channel, ESPN and MTV, as well as pay-
per-view channels, including sports, movies, and pornography. In Southern Arizona, the
higher-numbered channels are generally devoted to public affairs, whether local
community-access efforts or such national programming as CSPAN and CNBC. It is in
these far reaches of the remote control that the two Pima Community College channels
are found, providing educational programs to a daily audience of more than 250,000
cable-ready homes throughout Southern Arizona. Depending on the programming
schedule, viewers may see pre-packaged documentaries on Western Civilization,
Marriage and the Family, or American National Government and Politics; at other times,
viewers see in-house productions of courses such as Basic Mathematics, Algebra,
Psychology, Writing 100, and Writing 101. Close to 1,500 students a year enroll in these
Pima Community College telecourses, while roughly three hundred enroll in the two Writing telecourses that I have developed.4

As I discussed in the Introduction, there are two primary producers of telecourses: (1) individual educational institutions that develop telecourses for their own use and (2) national consortia of academic institutions and telecommunications organizations that develop telecourses to be distributed nationally. The nationally prominent telecourses utilize a wide range of televised genres. For example, the televised material in *Voices and Visions*, a telecourse in modern American poetry produced by The New York Center for Visual History, includes formal interviews with professional writers and candid depictions of writers writing. Likewise, one of the oldest-running composition telecourses, *The Write Course*, produced by the Dallas County Community College District in 1984, has the feel of a situation comedy, dramatizing in an up-beat and humorous manner an office of educational professionals as they struggle with various writing projects and rhetorical strategies. An updated version of *The Write Course* was developed by Dallas Telecourses in the early 1990s and copyrighted in 1995 under a new name, *A Writer's Exchange*. This program, which we will explore in significant depth below, has the feel of a talk show—although instead of interviewing film and television celebrities, the host interviews different academic experts during every session. In addition, the program dramatizes specific academic and occupational writing situations to develop the theoretical points made by the academic experts.

In contrast to such well-funded national courses are those courses produced in-house at smaller academic institutions. Representative of the growing number of such colleges
and universities, PCC has produced seventeen separate telecourses since 1992, two in the field of English. The following sketch of the telecourse viewing experience is based on the second televised session of the fifteen, two-hour televised sessions that comprise Writing 100, a required, transfer-level composition course. Produced on a limited budget and with limited technology, PCC's televised material consists primarily of a talking head disseminating information with the help of Macintosh PowerPoint computer slides. This particular televised segment addresses a number of topics, including a lesson that defines literacy, a lesson on the writing process, a lesson on the rhetorical mode of descriptive writing, a usage lesson on verbs, and, to conclude, a motivational discussion of how to set and achieve goals. The words I attribute to myself are not an actual transcript of the televised session, although they do represent the sorts of comments I make and the stories I tell when on-screen. The PowerPoint slides that I developed for the class are transcribed verbatim, including the spelling mistakes and the ad hoc punctuation.5

The Viewing Experience

An introductory comment: In his Foreword to John Daniel's Mega-Universities and Knowledge Media: Technology Strategies for Higher Education, Russell Edgerton, president of the American Association for Higher Education, writes that Daniel's book is not "the view of someone so immersed in the daily life of an institution that the forest is lost from sight" (viii). Daniel, Edgerton writes, "is rather like a general who has struggled onto some high ground and now, from those heights, can finally see the whole terrain" (viii). Daniel deserves Edgerton's praise, but despite this implied warning that
scholars may miss the forest for the trees, I suggest as well that it is precisely the trees on which we should focus. That is, in order to understand the deeper implications and long-term repercussions of teaching English composition and literature by telecourse, we need scouts who know the specific landscape of the telecourse and who have successfully and unsuccessfully navigated its various pathways. We need those who have an intricate knowledge of the forest's daily doings, so that, as James Fenimore Cooper writes in *Last of the Mohicans*, when "the dense shadows [...] draw an impenetrable veil before the bosom of the forest" (46) we can "begin again to know the signs of our course" (66). To help us navigate our way through the telecourse forest, we need to know the signs of these courses. To that end, in the coming sections I shall rely heavily on the words of telecourse students, for they are the ones navigating the dense shadows of the telecourse.

I started developing the first PCC telecourse in English in the Fall of 1993, and the first course was offered in the Spring of 1994. That same spring, I developed a questionnaire that I gave to my students during their final exam. These and subsequent questionnaires were designed to provide students the opportunity to give their feedback about the newly developed course they had just completed. I tinkered with the questionnaires every semester, trying to find out more about the students' reactions to the course. In the pages that follow, I offer the students' responses to a variety of questions. For example, the following quotation from J., a telecourse writing student, is in response to the question that asked him when and how he watched the televised sessions:

- *I would watch it after everyone went to bed. 10:00 PM and while sitting on the couch in the living room, dimly lit[...]*. Put the tape in VCR—press play --
Dr. Pepper in one hand, remote in the other. I would watch until the point was made, then fast forward until the next slide. –J.

The televised program begins with the orange logo of Pima Community College against a navy blue background. The image cuts to a graphic of seagulls in full flight, the words, Writing I, Randy Accetta, M.A. scripted across the screen. This computer image fades and is replaced by an image from a television studio that looks rather like a newscast set. In the background hangs a blue cloth backdrop that looks similar to the thick curtains designed to block the city lights in an urban hotel room. In the foreground and off to the left side of the television screen sits a computer on a rolling metal cart. The television camera focuses front and center on a man sitting on a tall stool behind a wooden lectern. The man on the screen is Anglo, slight of frame and about thirty years of age, with dark eyes and high, narrow cheekbones. His short brown hair is combed, but he wears none of the makeup typical of television personalities. On this day, he is wearing a light blue, button-down shirt with a tie. The camera is tight on his torso and face so that the viewer cannot see below his chest. Although it appears as if he's wearing slacks that go with his dress shirt and tie, he's actually barefoot and wearing a pair of hiking shorts against the heat of the bright studio lights.

The camera presents a close-up image of his tie, a representation of Rodin's sculpture, "The Thinker." The televised figure fingers the tie and explains why he's wearing it: "I wore this tie today to remind you that there can be no writing without thinking. Remember that the first hat a writer must wear is the thinking cap."
• [I watched when] everyone [was] in bed, nice and quiet room [. . .] can of diet coke, black pen, note pad, writing book, and a pillow (I watch the TV on the floor) [. . .] Usually I would watch the sessions alone, if I had a certain question on a part of the session, I would show the specific session to the tutor I am working with.—S.

The televised scene cuts to the image of a computer screen with a computer slide written in PowerPoint 3.0. On a black background the following words are written in bright green:

**Writing is Thinking**

To put thoughts on paper, we need to have thoughts. We need to think critically about the topic, the subject, or the goal. We need to think deeply about what we know and what we believe. We need to not just memorize rules, but instead to reflect consciously about our situation in life.

"Acquiring literacy does not involve memorizing sentences, words, or syllables [. . .] but rather an attitude of creation and recreation, a stance of self transformation producing a stance of intervention in one's context" (Paulo Friere, "Literacy as Action for Freedom").

The televised teacher's disembodied voice reads through this written message, repeating key phrases and adding additional comments that develop Paulo Friere's contention that literacy is not simply the functional ability to manipulate the language, but rather the ability to use language to think critically about what Freire calls "our situation in life."

The teacher's eyes are earnest and he's made a fist with his right hand, which he shakes now and then for emphasis. "Now this is important," he says. He stares at the camera for a moment, his gaze intense but distant, as if he's thinking about what to say. Clearly, he is not reading from a pre-prepared script. After a brief moment, he begins again. "The more information you have, the better off you are. Knowledge is power,
right? So although you won't be tested on them this semester, you may want to learn some key terms. We'll start with the parts of speech. But before we do, remember these points--." He interrupts himself to look down at the keyboard, then taps a button. The image cuts from his talking head to another computerized slide. He reads from another PowerPoint slide, offering additional ad-libbed commentary as he goes:

Like it or not, our country is guided by what has been called the 'dominant language': standard English. To become literate, to be able to read and write in standard written English requires that we can negotiate our cultural signs. We need to understand the conventions that our culture lives by. To succeed in communication in mainstream culture, we need to be able to manipulate the signs, the codes, of English.

These two slides present the viewer with an abridged summary of two prominent theoretical perspectives: the pragmatic point of view that it is important to use conventional forms of standard English, over and against the critical (or liberatory) perspective that learning and using language provides one with "a stance of self transformation."7

The televised image cuts again to a graphic of a Tucson-area road map. The teacher's voice-over says, "When we drive, we want to know where we're going. And when we read, we want to know where we're going. Your job as a writer is to provide the readers with the map that they expect. In other words, you need to be able to have a direction in mind--to think critically about your topic--and to write about it using the maps and codes that your readers expect."
- I watched them by myself because my husband didn’t enjoy watching them w/me [. . . or] when my kids would be napping—preferably. Also when my husband was away. I would sit on the floor with a notepad & pencil.—P.

After the lesson on literacy, the televised teacher turns to a lesson on the writing process, focusing on how the student can gather material for a descriptive essay. A graphic of a cartoon man balancing a variety of cartoon hats fills the blank space across from the listed words.

**Six Hats of the Writer**

1) The Creator
2) The Writer
3) The Reader
4) The Reviser
5) The Editor
6) The Final-drafter

The teacher explains the slide from off-camera: "All through my school years, I was told to just write a paper and turn it in. The teacher marked it with a red pen and gave it back. Now, though, we’ve found ways to talk about the processes that help us get our thoughts from our brain onto the page. Writing is a lengthy, recursive process. By that I mean that each of the phases of the writing process requires a different skill. We need to wear different hats for each of these skills."

After he goes through the list of the metaphorical six hats of the writing process, his face re-appears on screen. He reaches below the podium and pulls out a black cowboy hat. "This is my thinking hat," he says, tugging the brim low over his eyes in the manner of a western desperado. “I wear it to discover my ideas. Let’s see what I mean. How do we put pre-writing to use in writing a descriptive essay?"
I watched the sessions in the beginning of the semester, while recording them, sitting in my living room by myself. [. . .] I found my mind wandering while watching the sessions. The tapes dragged on [. . .]. I don't remember any props except for your thinking cap. —Ja.

The televised image cuts to a new computer slide that develops various methods a writer can use in the pre-writing process.

**Six Hats of the Writer**

1) The Creator:
- creates the ideas for writing
  - think
  - talk
  - brainstorm--no idea is stupid
  - cluster
  - asking questions-who, what, where, when, why, how
  - freewrites--focused on topic, timed

The teacher discusses each element of the list in some depth, defining the method and explaining how it can be used. On the right hand side of this screen is a cartoon light bulb, meant to invoke the conventional cartoon image of intellectual insight. The technical engineer has placed the televised image of the teacher within the center of the cartoon light bulb. From inside this cartoon, the black-hatted teacher is now talking and gesturing with a green plastic dinosaur in his right hand. "Although there are no real rules for how to write well," he says, "some things have been proven effective."

The teacher reappears on the screen. He places the green dinosaur on a table next to his lectern and twists the metal winding device that sticks out of the dinosaur's back, producing a chiming, music-box version of "Tomorrow," the theme song from the Broadway show *Annie*. "Now, in your notebook take a few minutes to brainstorm the
physical characteristics of the dinosaur." During the rest of this lesson, the students are asked to complete a series of short, pre-writing exercises designed to gather material for an essay that describes the dinosaur. After the students do their pre-writing, the teacher models the exercises for the students, handwriting a list of the dinosaur’s attributes, then drawing circles around certain terms and demonstrating the clustering technique.

- *My son would actually think it was a show for him. In other words, the props were sometimes too childish (Sesame Street like).* --anonymous

He concludes his examples by presenting a PowerPoint slide of a one-paragraph description of the dinosaur to illustrate how the ideas gathered in pre-writing can come together in a coherent piece. He ends the section by playing the dinosaur’s music box version of “Tomorrow” one more time.

- *[The graphics] kept me from getting bored or distracted[... the props made me] able to think (or clearly visualize) what I was suppose to be doing. For instance, sometimes I need more instructing in a different manner (than verbal or written on paper) and seeing it another way, is how I 'grasped' what the teacher was trying to teach me.* --P.

Having finished the combined lesson on pre-writing and descriptive writing, the teacher announces a ten-minute break. During this ten-minute break, the screen displays the course logo of flying seagulls. When the program begins again, the teacher first reviews the material presented during the previous hour, then he reviews material initially presented in the televised session that first aired a week earlier. After a review of the various parts of speech, he presents a specific lesson on verbs. "Remember: verbs carry
the action of the sentence. Let's look at some examples,” he says, tapping the computer button that produces the televised image of the following PowerPoint slide:

**Verbs: Key Elements in Writing**
- Verbs show action
- The battle *raged* throughout the day.
- Verbs link nouns with conditions
- Violence is unnecessary.
- Verbs take different forms
  - tense: past, present, future
  - voice: active, passive
  - form: regular, irregular
  - as part of phrases: participle, gerund

“Check your writing, though,” the teacher says. “When you revise and edit, circle the ‘to be’ forms, like the ‘is unnecessary’ in this slide. Instead of writing ‘violence is unnecessary’ and leaving it at that, perhaps find a stronger verb and turn ‘unnecessary’ into an adjective. For example, ‘Unnecessary violence weakens a community’ or something along those lines. The human brain can handle only so much information at one time, and crisper, stronger writing will keep the reader’s attention.”

Such lessons are designed to provide the viewer with a general overview of grammatical, linguistic, and punctuation terms. These overviews are often then related to style, emphasizing how students can better communicate within academic and occupational writing communities. Based on information presented in the course syllabus and other televised material, the students know that these lessons are designed simply to give them the opportunity to re-familiarize themselves with the jargon of standard English; the students know that they will not be graded on their knowledge of such terms.
After a lesson on verbs, the teacher changes subjects yet again. The next computer slide is titled "Ask Mr. Wizard How to Succeed in School" and includes the PowerPoint graphic of a little cartoon wizard waving a cartoon wand. The teacher begins a series of slides that offer information on strategies that students use to succeed in school.

**Steps to Achieving Goals**
1. Set reasonable expectations
   - achievable but not too easy
   - demanding, but not impossible
2. Break larger goal into manageable chunks
   - create smaller, easy-to-achieve steps
3. Reward success
   - celebrate; tell your friends
4. Have fun

While flipping through more slides on study tips, the teacher tells about some of the troubles he has had as a student. "Well, my first semester in college I got a zero out of 200 on a calculus test. I probably should have studied, but I was eighteen years old: I thought I knew everything. Anyway, I went back and hit the books, and on the next test, I received a seven out of 100. And that's why I'm an English teacher," he says, laughing at himself. "The point is, don't be afraid of failure--after all, Babe Ruth only got one hit every three at-bats. Be like Babe--just keep swinging. OK, now, before we review the material we talked about today, I want you to take out your notebook again, and spend four or five minutes writing a paragraph about a time you succeeded at something important to you. Describe the habits and behaviors you used to succeed."

The televised image is now another computer slide that announces, "Five Minute Writing: Habits for Success." Soft jazz music plays in the background while the teacher speaks in the whispered voice of a golf announcer, leading the viewer through what feels
like a guided meditation: "First, make a list of your recent success [. . .] just throw them on the page [. . .] the order doesn't matter [. . .] then list the strategies you used to prepare for your task [. . .]." This exercise puts into practice the previous lesson on the discovery process of writing. In this two-hour televised lesson, then, the students have been taught the method and theory of pre-writing and twice been given the opportunity to practice that method.

- *I watched them at home and in the campus library alone [. . .]. I would get comfortable in my chair with my notebook and pencil, and do the writing exercises and take notes. Sometimes I would talk to or comment on what was said or look it up in my book [. . .]. I never had time to finish what was assigned in [the freewrites] and it made me feel that I was not doing well [. . . the props] did [add] for me. For me, the more senses I use to learn, the more I learn. —A.*

This specific televised session ends with the teacher summarizing the information transmitted during the previous two hours and then presenting a brief introduction to the material to be covered in the next session: how to write the compare and contrast essay; strategies for effective reading; and general punctuation, especially the usage rules for commas, semi-colons, and colons.
III

Telecourse Objectives

In many respects, the course content that I have described is conventional fare for the English course whose objective is to teach standard written English. In its emphasis on prescribing rules and strategies regarding usage, coherency, and form in standard written English, the televised material might be considered what composition theorists call "current-traditional rhetoric." This material wasn't pulled from a vacuum, though, and is based not only on my prior academic and professional experiences, but on the expectations of the institution that hired me: Pima Community College.

When I started developing the telecourses for the PCC Community Campus in 1993, I had been teaching for PCC for less than a semester. At the time, the Community Campus had no department head to supervise the hundred or so English faculty among the 343 part-time faculty members, and consequently, I received no administrative oversight in developing the telecourse curriculum. The school did provide instructors with the Writing Instructor's Handbook (1993), authored by Otis Bronson, department chair at one of the PCC campuses. Designed primarily as a guide for the many adjunct faculty, the Handbook provides an overview of the Writing courses, including course descriptions and sample syllabi. According to the Handbook, both Writing 100 and Writing 101 count as university-level transfer credits and are required for graduation from PCC. At the conclusion of Writing 100, a course which "reviews sentence structure, but concentrates on paragraph development in preparation for whole essays" (11), PCC expects that

[... ] students will demonstrate skills in the techniques of sentence structure and a practical knowledge of revision, the elements of style, and levels of usage. They will
be able to write a simple essay of three to five paragraphs arranged in logical order in support of a thesis. The paragraphs will use specific evidence to support generalizations. The mechanics will not distract from the paragraph's content. (19)

To accomplish these goals, PCC recommends that students write at least 5,000 words per semester, including drafts, revisions, and journals (19). The *Handbook* advocates teaching the basic "five-paragraph expository or persuasive essay" as "a workable plan for handling practically any topic," recommending that "variations on this pattern" be taught as well (34).

The five-paragraph model of introduction-three body paragraphs-conclusion is also recommended in Writing 101, the transfer credit course designed to "meet university writing requirements for freshman composition" (11). According to the *Handbook*, students leaving Writing 101

will demonstrate the ability to write effective essays based on various modes of composition, including exposition and persuasion, both in class and as homework. A completed essay should fully develop a thesis, usually in three or more pages; arrange paragraphs containing specific details in a logical order; show existence of critical thinking (analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation); use "school dialect" appropriately; and exhibit reasonable skills in revising and editing. (20).

In sum, then, the PCC curriculum approaches composition in ways similar to those called for by Robert Pattison. It asks students to master a "school dialect"—presumably standard written English—and it asks students to establish the ability to critically engage with language well enough to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate various uses of language. It emphasizes sentence structure and paragraph development to promote unity and logical order.

Many PCC students transfer into the University of Arizona (UA), whose primary composition course is English 101. According to the 1993-94 edition of *A Student's*
Guide to First-Year Composition, a program-specific textbook written primarily by doctoral candidates in the UA English program, English 101 emphasizes critical thinking skills that are designed to aid students in a wide range of disciplinary writings: "Over the course of the semester you will write a sequence of papers that prepare you for writing across the curriculum. In addition, you will read essays by student and professional writers that will provide a basis for discussion about writing and communicating and models for your own writing" (21). The primary goals of this course are to teach the critical reading skills that enable students to reflect on the "interaction among writer, reader, text, and context" (21) and to teach writing skills applicable across the curriculum--writing skills similar, perhaps, to what PCC calls "school dialect." That is, students are expected to learn the conventions of writing, thinking, and reading that will enable them to enter the wide range of academic communities they will encounter in their university experience.

At the UA, students in English 101 are expected to familiarize themselves "with various sections of the library system as well as with methods for finding and evaluating different kinds of sources" (A Student's Guide 22). At PCC, however, the telecourse students are not required to do any library research in Writing 100 or Writing 101. Students are asked, instead, to write merely with information gathered from personal experience, personal observations, and common sense. These goals accord with similar classes from institutions around the country, whether classroom or telecourse. For example, according to the Teacher's Guide written by Harryette Brown, the content specialist for the nationally prominent composition telecourse, A Writer's Exchange,
Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) expects that upon completing the telecourse, students will be able to accomplish these tasks:

1. Draft, revise, and edit papers for a variety of purposes and audiences.
2. Collaborate with peers in individual and group writing assignments.
3. Use rhetorical techniques to motivate readers in a variety of papers.
4. Establish credibility with readers.
5. Apply standards of evidence (sufficiency, plausibility, reliability) to support claims.
6. Use both personal experiences and knowledge gained through reading or observation of others as the basis for papers.
7. Read critically and respond analytically to students and professional text. (5)

In the DCCCD course, students are not required to research their persuasive papers, but are asked rather to draw upon personal experience in order to provide the logical evidence necessary for persuading an audience. Thus, unlike in the UA classroom course, both the PCC and DCCCD telecourse students do not need to engage in extended pursuit of outside library materials to support their claims.

IV

**Typology of Composition Theory**

Now that we have an overview of both the telecourse objectives and the viewing experience, I wish to step away from the telecourse for a moment. In order to better understand the pedagogical implications of teaching composition via telecourse, I wish to provide an abbreviated taxonomy of recent theories of composition. I focus for now on these categories: current-traditional, expressionist, discourse communities, epistemic transactional, liberatory, and cultural materialist. Although I present them here as discrete and separate approaches, they are not mutually exclusive.
Current-Traditional Instruction

In his histories of writing instruction in American colleges, James Berlin locates current-traditional pedagogy as an outgrowth of the Scottish Common Sense Realism, the same objectivist philosophical strand that so influenced Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalists. In brief, this position holds that epistemological and ontological truth can be determined by objectively observing sensory data. Once observed, this truth can then be conveyed through the appropriate use of language. From this perspective, Berlin writes, "Truth, located first in nature and then in the response of the faculties to nature, exists prior to language." According to these principles, a writing class must then strive to teach its students how best to capture an essential, verifiable truth. In this description, we hear echoes of the PCC Instructor's Handbook and its call for a "logical order to support a thesis" and "specific evidence to support generalizations" (19).

There is no room in such a pedagogy for questions of relativity or value; instead, the focus is on applying rational systems of objective thought to expository writing. As Berlin says about the roles of the observer/writer and the reader respectively,

The responsibility of the observer, then, is to engage in an innocent reaction to sense impression, examining it without allowing any distortion to occur [. . .]. The audience is likewise outside of the meaning-making act. It is also assumed to be as objective as the writer, so that the language presented can stimulate in the reader the experience the writer originally had. (8)

According to Berlin, then, the goal of the writer is to present in expository, rational form a supposedly objective reporting on the supposedly objective truths of the world for the supposedly objective reader. "Current-traditional rhetoric," Berlin emphasizes, "thus
teaches the modes of discourse, with a special emphasis on exposition and its forms--analysis, classification, cause-effect, and so forth" (9). The Writing telecourses I've produced fit this description, with their emphasis on rhetorical modes like description, narration, and compare and contrast. In addition to emphasizing these rhetorical modes, according to Berlin, current-traditional pedagogy pays "special attention" to "precise language" that possesses "energy and vivacity" (9). Because the major goal of such writing "is to demonstrate the individual's qualification as a reputable observer worthy of attention" the writer's language "must conform to certain standards of usage, thereby demonstrating the appropriate class affiliation" (9). Thus special attention is also paid to "superficial correctness: spelling, punctuation, usage, syntax, and [ . . . ] paragraph structure" (38). The telecourse material described above that teaches the correct use of verb tense is but one example of this special attention to correctness, although other examples of current-traditional pedagogy abound in today's colleges and universities.

A quick look at a few such examples will help us understand the current-traditional approach to teaching. Take, for example, the popular college-level textbook, Subject and Strategy: A Rhetoric Reader, edited by Paul Eschholz and Alfred Rosa. In its fifth edition in 1990, Subject and Strategy focuses on ten specific rhetorical strategies: "narration, description, illustration, process analysis, comparison and contrast, analogy, division and classification, definition, cause and effect analysis, and argumentation" (v). Each chapter includes a definition of that rhetorical strategy and, as the editors say, "explains in detail why authors use that strategy, how one should read an essay using the strategy, and, finally, how one goes about writing such an essay on one's own" (vi). In
addition to explaining the reasoning behind writing conventions, the textbook provides prescriptions for utilizing its methods. For example, the section on "Writing an Essay Using Illustration" includes the directive advice, "It is important to arrange your examples in an order that serves your purpose, is easy for readers to follow, and will have maximum effect. Some possible patterns of organization include chronological order and spatial order, as well as moving from the simplest example to the most difficult, from the least to the most controversial, or from the least to the most important" (146). The emphasis on directives and prescriptions suggests that an objective truth of good and bad writing exists and that a well-trained student will recognize which methods of writing are successful and which are not. Two other popular college-level textbooks present a similar perspective.

David and Sarah Skwire's *Writing with a Thesis: A Rhetoric and Reader*, in its seventh edition in 1998, and Jean Wyrick's *Steps to Writing Well*, in its fifth edition in 1993, both offer specific directives for writing in the rhetorical modes utilized in current-traditional pedagogy. As its title implies, *Writing with a Thesis* provides the reader with advice on how to establish a thesis for expository writings--one of the goals of the PCC curriculum. For example, after telling the reader that "*Your primary purpose is to persuade the reader that your thesis is a valid one*" (3 italics original), the authors offer a series of example sentences and the instruction, "*Write G next to each good thesis statement. Write NG next to each statement that is not sufficiently restricted, unified, or specific, and be prepared to suggest revisions*" (10). There is no room here for debating the merits of each sample thesis statement--an objective, rational inquiry can gauge an essential,
verifiable quality. A hallmark of current-traditional pedagogy, such instructive drilling is also used by Jean Wyrick in *Steps to Writing Well*.

Like many composition textbooks, this text is literally bound by convention, for the back of Wyrick's front cover and the front of the back cover provide a listing of proofreader's correction symbols, along with a note to the student: "Your instructor may use some of the following symbols to comment upon your writing" (np). With early sections on rhetorical modes and writing strategies similar to the ones presented in *Subject and Strategy*, and later sections entitled "Major Errors in Grammar," "A Concise Guide to Punctuation," and "A Concise Guide to Mechanics," Wyrick's book falls squarely into the current-traditional camp with its emphasis on prescriptions, usage, and form. For example, in a section titled "Word Logic," Wyrick tells her readers that "good writers also choose words that firmly implant their ideas in the minds of their readers [. . .]. To help you select the best words to express your ideas, the following is a list of do's and don't's covering the most common diction (word choice) problems in students' writing today" (162-63). Wyrick then presents lists of that are labeled as either "clear" or "unclear," along with a rationale for the labeling. For example, the sentence, "She is involved in a lawsuit," is labeled as unclear, while the sentence, "She is suing her dentist for filling the wrong tooth," is approved as clear. These lessons on diction reflect Berlin's contention that current-traditional pedagogy champions precise language as correct language.

Wyrick clearly is making a good-faith effort to present beginning writers with what she considers important information for communicating in standard written English, but
this sort of prescriptive advice for precise language has its critics. One such critic is Richard Ohmann, who argues in his influential article, "Use Definite, Specific, Concrete Language," that when writing teachers follow the textbook's calls for precise language, "we may inadvertently suggest to students that they be less inquiring and less intelligent than they are capable of being" (242). Alan France follows Ohmann's lead and criticizes a contemporary college handbook for instructing the student "to select 'the exact word needed to express your idea [. . . the word] that precisely denotes what you have in mind'" (95). In criticizing this objectivist rhetoric, France argues against what he sees as a faulty epistemological foundation.

The implication of this dictum, that ideas can exist in the mind apart from our language (as reflections of 'reality'), is no longer tenable. There is no object or relation 'outside' in nature that a subject merely perceives and matches 'precisely' to a word that other subjects can likewise match with their own cognitive relations to the object-world. (95)

France recognizes that an objective of a composition course is to help students "learn the conventions of institutional communication" (98). However, he objects to the theoretical base that does not acknowledge that "any proposition is unstable, at best a momentary consensus in the flux of language and history" (98). For France, "the construction of knowledge is in this sense always political, always an argument for advancing, defending, or disputing a claim to represent knowledge" (98). The current-traditional pedagogy that does not acknowledge this political essence of discourse--either in theory or in practice, to itself or to its students--is dangerous, according to France, because it merely reproduces "the set of discursive rules that assign students to their proper places in the institutional hierarchies of corporate capitalism" (1).
Sharon Crowley also advances the sorts of objections France and Ohmann make to current-traditional pedagogy. Based on an analysis of style books and textbooks used in schools and colleges throughout the twentieth century, Crowley argues against the current-traditional reliance on formulas, not just on stylistic terms, but because they serve to shape culture in ways to which she is opposed:

The formal standards the textbooks imposed on student writers reflected ethical and social values fully as much as intellectual ones. A discourse marked by unity, coherence, and emphasis, stringently construed, would of necessity reflect a strong sense of limitations, of what was possible, as well as a grasp of the proper relation of things within the universe. (138)

One example of the formula that Crowley rejects is the five-paragraph essay, that staple of current-traditional pedagogy that PCC champions in its Handbook. Rooted in the conventional rhetorical modes, the five-paragraph essay formula emphasizes an introduction that establishes the theme, with three supporting paragraphs to develop the theme, and a conclusion reiterating the main point. Such a formula is open to heavy criticism, such as this jab by Crowley: "The five-paragraph essay simply imposes itself between a writer and her text. Like a boorish guest at a party, it muscles its way into any conversation that she might want to begin" (149). Crowley criticizes the "institutional project of current-traditional rhetoric" because the result "produce[s] quiescent, moderate, and solicitous student discourse" (138). It is worth noting that telecourse students are a prototypical quiescent student. After all, there is no talking back in class, students cannot challenge anything the teacher says, and the teacher rarely has individual contact with students.
France, Crowley, and Ohmann are not the only ones to criticize current-traditional methods as the sort of prescriptive teaching that leads to uncritical, quiescent students. A wide range of contemporary English studies scholars believe that the current-traditional rhetoric rooted in objectivist philosophy is an inappropriate method for teaching writing. Advances in composition theory and practice over the past thirty years or so include what can be termed expressionist, epistemic transactional, liberatory, and cultural materialist rhetorics. As we shall see, telecourses that teach writing are limited in their abilities to incorporate some of these pedagogical approaches.

**Expressionist Pedagogy**

According to James Berlin, contemporary theories of rhetoric follow a Platonic epistemology: "truth transcends the material realm, is attainable through a solitary vision, and resists expression" (12). Influenced by post-Freudian cognitive psychology, recent subjective rhetoricians have argued that truth is located "within the individual or within a realm that is accessible only through the individual's internal apprehension" (11). In terms of teaching, this view means that the teacher cannot dispense objective truths as in current-traditional rhetoric, but must instead merely facilitate the student's individual efforts. Because "truth must finally be discovered or, at the least, confirmed through a private act of intuition," says Berlin, "the teacher cannot communicate truth" (13). Thus, in contrast to the current-traditional perspective that holds that the teacher can dispense formulas and prescriptions for correct writing, subjectivist teachers can only "provide an environment in which the individual can learn what cannot be taught. This environment
must include provisions for encouraging the expression of private versions of expression" (13). An example of such teaching can be found in the televised image described above. While wearing the black cowboy hat that symbolizes the thinking cap, I told the students, "Although there are no real rules for how to write well, some things have been proven effective." My language was designed so that the viewer would not feel pressured to follow prescriptions, but would feel, instead, as if she had control over her private choices about how to gather her ideas.

This belief in the power of individual expression manifests itself in what has been called expressionist pedagogy. According to Berlin, an expressionist pedagogy is characterized by three activities, "each designed to teach the unteachable by fostering a learning environment that encourages private vision. These activities are the search for original metaphor, the keeping of a journal, and participation in peer editorial groups" (14). In Common Ground: Dialogue, Understanding, and the Teaching of Composition, Kurt Spellmeyer writes that the "Proponents of what might be called expressionist pedagogy, most notably Peter Elbow, have reconceived the activity of writing as a public demonstration of the writer's private 'power' and autonomy" (18).

The main themes of expressionist pedagogy are well represented by the opening sentences in Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff's chapter titled "Private Writing: Finding What You Have to Say" in their book, A Community of Writers: "In this unit we want to teach you that you always have lots to write about and that you can always get it on paper without much agony. We will show you two processes for using private writing to find what you have to say" (117). Rather than the current-traditional emphasis on fitting the
student's perceptions within an acceptable framework, the emphasis here is on the
student's internal struggle with finding his or her personal voice. Elbow and Belanoff
emphasize the self-reflexive, recursive nature of writing by teaching students how to read
and comment on their own texts and the texts of fellow students. "The ability to give
responses to your classmates' writing and to get their responses to your writing may be
the most important thing you learn from this book [...]. We want you to try out many
methods; we ask you to be rather disciplined in following our directions" (4). The
telecourse material that I described makes significant use of expressionist pedagogy. Not
only does the metaphorical Six Hats of the Writer encourage the recursive writing
process, but the discovery methods that encourage individual expression—such as
talking, asking questions, brainstorming, clustering, and freewriting—are rooted in the
Elbow-Belanoff pedagogy. Similarly, as we shall see more clearly below, the national
telecourse, *A Writer's Exchange*, also utilizes expressionist pedagogy—you may recall
that DCCCD *Teacher's Guide* written by *A Writer's Exchange* content specialist
Harryette Brown claims that students should use "personal experience [...] as the basis
for papers" (5).

Although expressionist pedagogy claims to break from the current-traditional focus on
objective truths and formulas in an effort to privilege the writer's private voice, it should
be noticed that prescriptions are still given. They couch their directions in a polite,
communal tone represented by such phrases as "We will show you" and "We want to
teach you," yet Elbow and Belanoff still tell the students what to do: "We ask you to be
rather disciplined in following our directions." Teachers may theorize, as Berlin says,
that students can learn what cannot be taught; however, teachers still teach. In the telecourse, I, too, give prescriptions: be certain to brainstorm, I say. Use strong verbs, include the senses when describing, follow the codes of standard English.

Epistemic Transactional Rhetoric

Transactional rhetoric, Berlin says, "is based on an epistemology that sees truth as arising out of the interaction of the elements of the rhetorical situation: an interaction of subject and object or of subject and audience or even of all the elements--subject, object, audience, and language--operating simultaneously" (Rhetoric and Reality 15). Berlin classifies transactional rhetoric into three categories: classical, cognitive, and epistemic. In classical transactional rhetoric,

truths of rhetoric [. . .] are by their very nature uncertain, open to debate, contingent, probable. They deal not just with the empirical or rational analysis of experience [as in the current-traditional rhetoric that seeks to represent objectivity removed from the material social condition], but with the emotional, aesthetic, and ethical--in other words, with the total range of human behavior. (15)

Cognitive transactional rhetoric grows out of the psychological studies that focus on the behavioral stages of the human mind (see Berlin 16, 159-165), and emphasizes the way the individual arrives at truth "through engaging the surrounding material and social environment" (16). The third form of transactional rhetoric, epistemic rhetoric, "posits a transaction that involves all elements of the rhetorical situation: interlocutor, audience, material reality, and language" (16). Berlin is describing the rhetorical triangle: writer, reader, and text at the points, surrounded by the context, that historical, material, and cultural condition of the external world. According to this perspective, meaning comes
not from verifying an objective reality or seeking it from inside our individual selves, but rather from the simultaneous interaction of the three parts of the triangle and the surrounding context (167).

In the classroom that is rooted in epistemic transactional rhetoric, then, the student's voice is privileged. However, the individual is conceived, not as a self-reliant, autonomous subject who has direct access to truth as in current-traditional or expressionist pedagogy, but as a member of a social web which determines what is considered true and what is not. "Truth," says Berlin, "is never simply 'out there' in the material world or the social realm, or simply 'in here' in a private and personal world. It emerges only as the three—the material, the social, and the personal—interact, and the agent of mediation is language" (17). The moment of interaction of various readers and the writer is important here. "All truths arise out of dialectic," Berlin argues, "out of the interaction of individuals within discourse communities."

Thus, one manifestation of epistemic transactional rhetoric is the pedagogy of discourse communities. Kurt Spellmeyer reports that the notion of discourse communities "accepts the fragmentation of knowledge as a fait accompli and conceives the teaching of writing to be an initiation into various warring tribes of the academy" (18). Spellmeyer points out that the pedagogy of discourse communities is "often linked to the names of Kenneth Bruffee and Patricia Bizzell" (18).

Like Robert Pattison, Patricia Bizzell suggests that every student starts with a home discourse comprised of particular conventions, rules, and strategies. Students seek to broaden their discourse communities and join a "work discourse community" or a "school
discourse community," each of which shares language conventions with each other, and each of which has its particular conventions (80). Teaching writing, then, is an attempt to prepare students for the various communities to which they seek access. "Writing is always already writing for some purpose that can be understood in its community context," says Bizzell. Rather than writing so that we adhere to a prescribed pattern for all occasions, Bizzell suggests, "We write to be understood" within a given "community's interpretive conventions" (89). In this respect, the goal of writing instruction is not so much to prescribe a formula that solves a problem of form or usage, as much as it is to explore with the student-writer the relationship between the author's intent and the audience's expectation. For example, "a major force of writing-across-the-curriculum programs is to demystify the conventions of the academic discourse community" (81).

This emphasis on multiple discourse communities breaks with current-traditional rhetoric (and its emphasis on standardized correctness) and expressionist pedagogy (in its emphasis on the writer's autonomy) by placing significance on the particular intended audience.

According to Kenneth Bruffee, students enrolled in higher education seek to gain entrance into communities (first academic, then professional) to which they have previously been denied. To gain entrance, they must become proficient in a language, or discourse, in which the professional teacher is already proficient. Bruffee locates standard English as the site of entrance into these communities: "It is with their writing, after all, that students apply for official membership in the communities [. . .] that are larger, more inclusive and more authoritative than any plenary classroom group" (48).
The goal of a writing teacher, then, is to provide students with opportunities to move in and out of various discourse communities. As Bruffee says of a particular teaching experience, "The community that the students were not yet members of and were asking to join by virtue of committing themselves to attend college was of course the (to them) alien community of the 'literate' and the 'college educated'" (17).

To demonstrate how the construction of knowledge can occur in such a classroom, Bruffee offers a model of classroom collaboration. Students are divided into small groups and assigned a task, "usually designed and preferably tested ahead of time." He suggests that after completing the intellectual task, the small groups then join one another in order to "hear reports from small group and to negotiate agreement among the group as a whole." Teachers should not monitor the groups too closely, otherwise they will deliver what Bruffee considers a "foundational message: that students should first and foremost be striving to use the language of the teacher's discipline, the teacher's own community of knowledgeable peers" (29). The goal of such collaborative work is to create what Bruffee calls "a transition community" in which, "Empowered by their conversation, students are less likely to be wowed into passivity by whizbang lectures. They are more likely to question actively and synthesize what the teacher has to say" (31).

The lore of teaching writing provides countless articles, books, and written tips on how to structure a writing group. For example, Ann Ruggles-Gere introduces her book, *Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications*, with a list of the various types of communal writing used in academia:
Writing groups, the partner method, helping circles, collaborative writing, response teams, team writing, writing laboratories, teacherless writing classes, group inquiry technique, the round table, class criticism, editing sessions, writing teams, workshops, peer tutoring, the socialized method, mutual improvement sessions, intensive peer review. (1).

This wide variety of names indicates a wide variety of techniques, including reading aloud, offering verbal or written responses, giving the writer specific advice on what to do next, or not giving the writer any advice. Ruggles-Gere asserts that if student writers see themselves within a community of readers and writers, they will be less alienated from academic and written discourse:

Students who slide their papers under the bottom of an instructor's stack may be merely self-conscious about their work, or they may actually be exhibiting sense of alienation [...]. Collaboration in writing groups addresses this alienation by providing writers with the opportunities to explore the language of their linguistic community in the company of members of that community. (68)

Teaching writing, according to this perspective, is much more than teaching the simple do's and don't's of current-traditional rhetoric. Richard Ohmann reiterates this point in a discussion of how he uses collaborative groups in a writing course; the group process, he writes, "has begun to make clear that writing is itself a dense social relation that calls into play moral judgment and a kind of politics, not just a familiarity with conventions and rules" (Politics of Letters 256). In epistemic transactional rhetoric, teaching writing is considered a political act with political consequences. You may recall that there was very little of what Ohmann calls “a kind of politics” in the description of the telecourses that I developed for Pima Community College; there was, however, a significant amount of current-traditional and expressionist teaching.
Liberatory Pedagogy

Epistemic transactional rhetoric has been influenced by the liberatory, or critical, pedagogy of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. Perhaps best known for his metaphor of the banking system of education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire describes teachers as depositing fixed pieces of information into the students, who are figured as passive receptacles waiting to be filled by the teacher:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the 'banking' concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filling, and storing the deposits. (58)

In this system, according to Freire, the teacher is the master of the subject matter and the student is assumed to be the ignorant vessel waiting to be filled with the transmitted information poured from on-high. In this scheme of teaching, information flows one-way from the all-knowing teacher to the un-knowing student. There is no interplay of intellectual ideas, no reciprocal flow of information. The paradigm behind the banking system is in many ways akin to the objectivist paradigm utilized in current-traditional pedagogy, where the instructor transmits prescriptions to a student who then demonstrates an ability to mimic the instructor's lessons. A similar paradigm holds true for much of the televised material. The telecourse is designed so that the teacher presents information, which is then transmitted through the medium of television to passive students who simply observe the material.¹⁰

Freire argues that the banking system functions as "an exercise in domination"(65) to keep students from developing a critical consciousness of their place in the world: "The
more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world." Those who are receptacles are not trained with the means to take control of their lives, but are instead "more easily [. . .] dominated" (60) by a banking system that "attempts to control thinking, leads men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power" (64) says Friere, in language similar to Crowley's contention above that current-traditional pedagogy "produce[s] quiescent, moderate, and solicitous student discourse." Friere establishes a series of binaries to prove his assertion: "the teacher teaches and the students are taught [. . .] the teacher talks and the students listen, meekly [. . .] the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply [. . .] the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher [. . .] the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it [. . .]." (59).

In an effort to disrupt the one-way flow of information and power presupposed by these binaries, Friere offers a counter-philosophy of teaching, what he calls "problem posing education" in which the student's voice is empowered and a dialogue emerges between the teacher and the student. The classroom turns from a teacher-centered space where the teacher's lecture is privileged to a student-centered space where the student's voices are privileged: "Through dialogue," Freire says, "the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers [. . . and] they become jointly responsible for a process in which they all grow" (67). In this system of education, information flows from student to student to
teacher to student, all of who are at the same time ignorant of certain truths and carriers of wisdom. As the students interact with each other, with the teacher, and with the knowledge at hand, they gain a consciousness of language and a consciousness of themselves that, according to Freire, cannot be gained in the banking system of education.

After *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published in English in 1970, Friere's efforts at honoring the student's learning process and helping the student find a personal voice became widely adopted by progressive teachers and scholars of writing in the United States. Proponents of this version of liberatory pedagogy, most notably for our purposes Ira Shor and bell hooks, argue that teaching critical language skills creates a form of conscious thinking that will then enable the economically and socially disenfranchised to change their social situations for the better.\(^\text{11}\)

In *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change*, Ira Shor argues that all education is a politicized effort at socializing students into a capitalist community and presents a variety of strategies for a cooperative classroom. For example, Shor suggests that instead of transmitting information by lecture, teachers should moderate a classroom dialogue in which students search together for information in a participatory and interactive community. According to Shor, the students and the teacher negotiate and create much of the structure for their classroom community, deciding jointly, for instance, the rules for classroom conversation, student lateness, and the grading of assignments.
Following Friere, Shor advocates posing problems by focusing on the multiple power relations at play in the classroom, the institution, and the world at large. He wants students to reconsider the social and cultural contexts of knowledge by questioning the central bank of stored cultural knowledge as historical products and not universal wisdom. He concludes that to transform society it is necessary to transform educational practices, and to that end he proposes a pedagogy in which teachers teach an awareness of power relations and the tools for critical literacy in order to desocialize their students, perhaps even creating cooperative action in opposition to capitalist institutions. Shor emphasizes a multicultural pedagogy, which relies on material generated from a variety of cultures so that students feel ownership of their education. He argues that teachers need to learn new skills in moderating conversations in order to overcome the resistance of students who expect the teacher to lecture. Shor also argues for interdisciplinary teaching "across and outside the curriculum" (94). He wants students to understand that they are enmeshed in a political process of exclusion and inclusion and that they are dominated from above—by the media, their mass education, and the capitalist ventures that shape how people see the world and act in it. He wants them to challenge the structure of authority in and out of school and to critically rethink the ways they are socialized.

In Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom, bell hooks also develops Freirian pedagogy to argue for changes in teaching methods. Hooks's primary goal is to restructure the space for intellectual growth so that students and teachers gain a new appreciation for differences in race, sexuality, gender, and class: "In the effort to
respect and honor the social reality and experiences of groups in this society who are nonwhite [. . .] we must acknowledge that our style of teaching may need to change" (35). Hooks argues that no education is politically neutral and implies that a progressive pedagogy is necessary to make sense of the multiple and unstable meanings engendered by the pursuit of knowledge. To this end, she seeks to transform the classroom from a teacher-centered place for the dissemination of seemingly objective information to a community-based space where the mind-body split is erased, various cultural backgrounds are acknowledged, and class issues are raised. She offers classroom strategies to acknowledge various cultural backgrounds, and she claims that it is important to encourage languages other than standard written English. Finally, she seeks to make the classroom more of a common community rather than an individual enterprise where students compete against one another.

**Materialist Rhetoric**

Although in his book, *Composition as a Cultural Practice*, Alan France mentions neither Friere, Shor, nor hooks, he too advocates teaching methods that challenge students to rethink the ways they are socialized by contemporary American capitalist culture. France argues that much existing composition practice functions "to prepare students for their lives as producers and consumers of commodities" (2). Like Shor, Ohmann, and others, France claims that "dominant social groups confirm or 'naturalize' their dominance" (22) and that this dominance is manifested in language. He presents a short example of one such rhetorical situation, a sentence from a brochure for an ante-
bellum tourist attraction in Texas: "This was cotton country and surely the cabin was familiar with the rhythm of the banjo player and the 'hallelujah' of the negro spiritual for it was built by Mr. Howard with the help of his slaves" (19). Drawing on the neo-Marxist cultural materialism of such figures as Raymond Williams, France describes a reading method that deconstructs the written document with the intent of revealing the ways its language reproduces "exploitative class, race, and gender relations" (21) by inviting the reader to assume the white position of masculine dominance at the expense of historical veracity. As France indicates through this example, his goal in composition studies is to teach "students to perform a politically sophisticated criticism of what are called hegemonic discourses" (20).

Others are calling for a similar form of cultural criticism in composition. Anthologies such as Social Issues in the English Classroom and Becoming Political: Readings and Writings in the Politics of Literacy Education provide teachers with strategies for engaging students, not necessarily with the fundamental concerns of current-traditional pedagogy, but with contemporary political issues. For example, Social Issues in the English Classroom, edited by C. Mark Hulbert and Samuel Totten, offers essays that teach teachers how to teach writing in courses thematized around a range of political topics, including gay rights, environmentalism, feminism, and AIDS.

As I have indicated, the categories of composition theory that I have presented here are not exhaustive. Nonetheless, this brief typology is instructive because it establishes a context for our forthcoming discussion of the limitations and advantages of telecourses. As I will argue more fully in the coming chapters, I suggest that the telecourses as they
are currently constructed do not and can not utilize the forms of composition pedagogy that challenge the prevailing hegemonic cultural norms. Indeed, as I hope to demonstrate, instead of providing an opportunity for students to critique their place in culture, telecourses reify the hegemonic norm.

NOTES

1 See Berlin Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures, Chapter Four.
2 See Scribner, 76-78, for a fuller explanation of her term "literacy-as-grace."
3 As I said in the introduction, at Pima Community College, English Departments are divided into two areas, Literature and Writing. Consequently, I shall use the capitalized term "Writing" as a titular form to refer to courses in composition, particularly the two Writing courses that I developed for television.
4 Although I do not like the spelling mistakes displayed in the televised material, they provide an object lesson in the drawbacks of an in-house production. We initially produced the course on our limited budget within a brief time frame—often just a couple of days ahead of the scheduled air time. We were rushed for time and did not have adequate opportunity to perfect the televised material. Consequently, to my embarrassment, the slides with spelling mistakes are still aired. All written quotations are cited under Accetta, Randy. Writing Telecourse. 30 episodes. Pima Community College. PCC Cable, Tucson, AZ, 1993-94.
5 The bulk of the responses come from the Fall of 1995, and all words are transcribed as the students wrote them, including their grammatical and punctuation choices—even when that usage conflicts with standard English conventions. I have not modified their spelling, and I have tried to be true to their handwritten codes, such as using the ampersand to represent the handwritten "and" mark. Although each student has signed a research waiver, I have tried to use their real names with a single initial.
6 Although the information on the slide presents a practical view of language similar to the argument advanced by Pattison above, I had not read Pattison when I developed the lesson. The quotation, "dominant language," refers to Allan Bloom's contention in The Closing of the American Mind that the "dominant culture" supervises that nation's "traditions, its literature, its tastes[. . .]." (31).
8 My use of Babe Ruth as an example demonstrates how the telecourse material becomes outdated. In a classroom course today, I would reference Mark McGwire, whose recent 70 home run season has supplanted the exploits of Babe Ruth in the national imagination. I return to this topic at length in my discussion of Walt Whitman in Chapter Three.
9 There are gaps in this system, foremost among them when the student does not observe the televised material. In Chapter Four, I will return to the theoretical implications of the banking system and the telecourse.
11 Although Freirian pedagogy has been widely adopted at the university level, such a pedagogy is not without its detractors from the left. A consistent critique is that Friere's pedagogy is predicated upon a deeply patriarchal system. For a provocative critique of liberatory pedagogy, see the collection of essays in, *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy* (ed. Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore. New York: Routledge, 1992). In its efforts to advance Freirian pedagogy, this collection of essays draws upon what Luke and Gore call “poststructuralist feminist epistemology” (9), in part because, as the editors write in the introduction, “we are not at all convinced that men are giving up their identity and authority, even as they speak a good postmodernist game of ‘multiple narratives’ and ‘border crossings’” (6).
CHAPTER 2

USING TELECOURSES TO TEACH COMPOSITION

Introductory Remarks

I return now to a description of the telecourses in question, first, the Pima Community College courses that I have developed and produced, and second, A Writer's Exchange, produced and distributed by the LeCroy Center of the Dallas County Community College District. Students enrolled in these telecourses do their schoolwork at home. Instead of visiting a classroom and talking about reading and writing with a teacher and fellow students, they watch the teacher on television—or, more accurately, watch the series of cathode and electrical waves that replace the living teacher with the appearance of a teacher. Contrary to the English classes based on theories of collaborative learning and critical pedagogy, there are no weekly peer workshops in the telecourses I teach, no consistent interactions between student and teacher, and no community of writers constructing a communal base of knowledge. Instead, it's just the solitary student at home, viewing the televised image of the educational authority. In this way, the telecourse employs the banking concept of education, by depositing information into the receptacle of the television technology, which in turn deposits that information into the living room of the observer. Furthermore, much of that information can be categorized as a combination of current-traditional and expressionist rhetoric that emphasizes the formal qualities of standard written English. Although they utilize some of the latest composition theories regarding discourse communities and expressionism, the
composition telecourses rarely offer the cultural critique called for by the advocates of liberatory and cultural materialist pedagogy. For example, when I began to develop the telecourses for PCC, I was told by my administration to avoid inflammatory topics, and so I began to moderate my own teaching methods. When teaching classroom composition courses I have included units on HIV and AIDS, as well as units that interrogate the way MTV videos construct gender roles.\textsuperscript{1} In developing the telecourses, however, I avoided all such potentially inflammatory topics, and instead focused my teaching efforts on current-traditional concerns of usage and correctness. Because of its wide visibility, the telecourse needs to appeal to a much broader audience than a given classroom course, and I simplified my course material so that I would have less chance of offending students and non-enrolled viewers of the televised material.

I

\textbf{Writing 100 and Writing 101}

In the Writing 100 telecourse that I developed for Pima Community College, students are expected to view the fifteen two-hour videotapes and read essays in the textbook, the Fourth Edition of \textit{Evergreen With Readings} (Fawcett and Sandberg). Their grades are based on the following assignments: six two to three page essays; two in-class, timed essays; one twenty-five-entry journal; and a final portfolio of three four page essays that are substantial revisions of earlier graded essays. Each telecourse student is asked to submit over 5,000 graded words of writing a semester and over 4,000 additional, informal, journal-entry words—almost twice as many words as recommended by the
Pima Community College *Handbook* and roughly 2,000 more words than required in English 100 at the University of Arizona.

The essay assignments follow the rhetorical modes emphasized in current-traditional pedagogy: narrative, description, process, compare and contrast, definition, and persuasion. The syllabus establishes expectations for these papers:

Each assignment will increase in expectation and length, until finally you are writing intriguing and grammatically correct short essays of between three and four pages in length. Each assignment will be given two grades. The first will be for content; the second will be for mechanics.

A more detailed grading rubric is explained on television and included in the syllabus.²

To guard against plagiarism and to encourage the writing process, I require students to include all pre-writing and rough drafts with their final drafts. They either mail their completed assignments to our support staff at the campus, drop them off, or fax them in. The support staff put the essays in the teacher's mailbox; the teacher then visits the campus, picks up the papers, grades them, and returns them to the support staff, who mail the essays back to the students.³ It generally takes between seven and fourteen days for a student to receive a graded essay.

The portfolio is an integral component of the course. In a classroom course that uses collaborative learning, students are consistently exposed to the responses of different readers, and they can revise and edit according to such responses. However, in a telecourse the students write in isolation, without any feedback from the teacher or fellow students. The portfolio is designed to provide them with an opportunity to revise their work based not only on the material they learn throughout the semester but on the particular comments made earlier in the semester.
The following is an excerpt from a letter that I mailed to students in November, 1994. The letter reiterates the purpose of the portfolio, and repeats information previously presented on television and in the syllabus.

You will select three (3) of the papers that you have turned in for a grade. You will revise and rewrite them, and the grade you get on each essay will replace the previous grade you received. The expectations for the portfolio rewrite are much greater than for the earlier assignment. I expect that each essay will be substantially rewritten to incorporate both my previous suggestions, and the skills you have learned over the course of the semester. Thus, each of the three essays should have an interesting and clear introduction, fully developed paragraphs that offer specific details and examples in support of your general views, and a conclusion that makes a point and offers the reader something of value. I also expect that each portfolio essay will have no grammar or punctuation mistakes [. . .].

The final portfolio thus becomes the only way that students can revise their material based on feedback. The course grading is designed so that the grade for the revised portfolio essays replaces the grade on the earlier version. As this letter indicates, the grading criterion for the essays is strictly current-traditional with its emphasis on a clear thesis, coherent and unified support, and correct standard English.

Writing 101

The course material in Writing 101 was designed to develop the essential elements of Writing 100, providing students with a deeper and more thorough understanding of various elements of written communication and the writing process. The syllabus course description reads,

We will cover the basics of sentence-level construction, defining and practicing parts of speech, and common punctuation. We will cover paragraph organization, unity, and coherence [. . .]. By the end of the semester, you will be writing lengthy essays employing different rhetorical modes, with no major sentence-level errors.
Based on the PCC *Handbook*, the course emphasis is on clarity and unity at the sentence, paragraph, and full essay level. Similar to the expectations of Writing 100, Writing 101 was initially designed so that students are graded on these assignments: five three to four page essays; twenty-five journal entries; two timed, in-class essays; and a final portfolio of two four to five page revised essays. Although in many ways given free reign to design the course, I was required to use two textbooks, *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing* (eds. Rise B. Axelrod and Charles R. Cooper, St. Martin's Press) and *The Short Handbook for Writers* (eds. Gerald J. Schifferst and John F. Schell, McGraw Hill Press), a usage textbook.

The essay assignments in Writing 101 are taken from *The St. Martin's Guide* and are designed to complement the material learned in Writing 100. For instance, the first assignment is a three-to-four page essay based on a deep description of a person: "Write an essay about a person who has been important in your life. Strive to present a vivid portrait of this person, one that will let your readers see his or her character and the significance to you of the relationship" (Axelrod and Cooper 91). This assignment makes use of three of the conventional rhetorical modes learned in Writing 100, narration, description, and persuasion. It is expressionist in nature, requiring the students to draw upon their individual experience, rooting their text in material gathered strictly from personal methods for discovery (such as brainstorming, clustering, and prewriting), rather than in material gathered from research.

Two later assignments, Taking a Position and Proposing Solutions, build on one other. In the first assignment, students are required in three to four pages to "Write a
position paper on a controversial issue. Examine the issue critically, take a position, and develop a reasoned argument in support of your position" (234). In the next assignment, students "Write an essay proposing a solution to a problem. Choose a problem faced by a community or group to which you belong, and address your proposal either to one or more members of the group or to an outsider who might help solve the problem" (279). For each essay assignment, The St. Martin's Guide leads the reader through a series of steps rooted in the process approach. The editors claim a goal of offering "commonsensical and easy to follow [...] writing guides [that] teach students to assess a rhetorical situation, identify the kinds of information they will need, ask probing questions and find answers, and organize their writing to achieve their purpose" (v).

To help students draw from their personal experience, the textbook provides section breaks and sub-headings that walk the reader through the various stages of the writing process. For instance, in the Remembering People chapter, under the section break "Invention" are sub-headings such as Choosing a Person to Write About and Describing the Person. As another example, under the section break "Getting Critical Comments," the editors provide information stemming from sub-headings such as "Reading with a Critical Eye." After addressing global issues of revision, each chapter offers the reader specific editing skills within sub-headings, such as "Identifying Problems," "Solving the Problems," and "Editing and Proofreading."

These latter sections on sentence-level writing address specific topics that will help the student writer communicate effectively in various discourse communities. The advice given is both prescriptive and suggestive. For example, each chapter includes a short
section entitled "A Common ESL Problem" in which the authors provide brief information on usage rules that are important to students whose original language is not English. In establishing for such students the rules of English, the authors write prescriptions: "Unlike some languages, English does not allow a subject to be repeated by a pronoun (he, she, it, you, we, they)" (102). They then offer a number of examples to illustrate the rule, with the pronoun (e.g., "she") crossed out in red: "My Great-Aunt Sonia she taught me to pick mushrooms" (102). Not all usage matters are as prescriptive, though. For example, in a description of how to use hyphens, the authors discuss the conventions for using hyphens with ethnic designations: "Not everyone hyphenates compound adjectives that designate race or ethnicity[...]. In general, though, you won't be 'wrong' to follow traditional practice by hyphenating such compound adjectives when they precede a noun" (102). They offer a specific example, "Asian-American literature" (102).

As my brief summary of this process-driven textbook with its emphasis on usage makes clear, the material in the textbook complements the approach to the writing process started in my telecourse, Writing 100, particularly the metaphorical Six Hats of the Writer. In addition, the sections that guide students toward better sentence-level writing provide the sort of functionalist teaching championed by Noguchi, Pattison, and the current-traditionalist perspective. Like all textbooks, the St. Martin's Guide elicits varied responses from students. In response to a question asking students to list and describe the teaching methods they found most effective, one student wrote, the "textbook is monotonous and boring." However, other students have written that the
"textbook reinforces the notes from television" and the textbook "essay assignments are fun." When I started using the textbook, I did not know that the *St. Martin's Guide* was the most influential writing textbook on the market; nor did I know that it is criticized by some scholars for being too prescriptive. For example, John Clifford is sharply critical of the textbook because it does not "foreground the ideological and cultural" examination that provides student with "the critical consciousness necessary for committed writing" (47).

Writing out of the liberatory, cultural materialist, and post-modern sensibility which I discussed in the previous chapter, Clifford's critique rests on the presumption that "teachers who ask students to rehearse particular composing rituals in the classroom impose an ideological agenda, admitted or not " (45). Just as Richard France follows Richard Ohmann's lead in criticizing current-traditional pedagogies, John Clifford draws on Ohmann to validate his own attack on the *St. Martin's Guide*:

Ohmann cites numerous writing textbooks that almost universally affirm the need for a balanced, judicious, and authoritatively informed persona for the writer to argue effectively. That position still holds in the recent, best-selling *St. Martin's Guide to Writing* (Axelrod and Cooper), perhaps the most well received of the new process rhetorics. (43)

Clifford is especially critical of the *St. Martin's Guide* for its claim that "careful writers seek to influence their readers with each choice of a word, each choice of a sentence" (44). He argues that in its emphasis on the expressionist-rooted process approach, the textbook makes no attempt to put writers or readers in a concrete social situation, considers none of the overdetermined complexity governing the motivations of a writer trying to persuade, and pays no attention at all to how race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, or material interests might prevent readers from objectively following a
logical sequence of facts and reasons. [...] I can just imagine my students using cogent reasons and cold facts to persuade Jesse Helms to support abortion rights or funding for AIDS patients. (44)

Not surprisingly, I disagree with much of Clifford’s critique. In the first place, as I demonstrated in Chapter 1, it is very difficult for writing teachers to avoid prescription. To learn the language of the desired discourse community, the student must learn what is accepted practice and what isn’t. Just as it is naïve to think that a dance student can master dance steps without specific instruction, it is naïve to think that a writer can master the desired discourse without specific do’s and don’t’s. In the second place, Clifford’s argument regarding Jesse Helms is a red-herring. Clifford dismisses a rationalist approach to teaching writing with sarcasm: “I can just imagine my students using cogent reasons and cold facts to persuade Jesse Helms to support abortion rights or funding for AIDS patients” (44). No rhetorical method could get Jesse Helms to change his positions—not crying, not screaming, not sweet-talking, and not analysis. Clifford’s exaggeration should not diminish the fact that students need some level or prescription to guide them through the difficult terrain of written language.

Clifford articulates a growing dissatisfaction with teaching pedagogies that emphasize traditional form and style, whether those pedagogies come from expressionist or current-traditionalist background. Clifford paraphrases Freire and says that in such a pedagogy, "Students submit, teachers dominate;” he argues, with the consequence that “students have very little to show for their great effort" (47). In contrast, Clifford advocates epistemic transactional rhetoric and argues that teachers of writing should acknowledge the liminal quality of writing: "Instructors can help students become inquisitive writers
by avoiding rigid rules, constant evaluation, and an obsession with socializing students into the conventions of 'normal' academic writing" (46). Clifford's perspective breaks from the notion of "discourse community" that Bruffee and Bizzell have advocated, and his perspective calls into question the sort of telecourse teaching that I have described.

**Interaction**

The sort of telecourse that I have been describing is generally called a one-way, non-interactive telecourse, but that is actually a misnomer. Although telecourse students and teachers may not interact in the ways we have come to expect classroom students and teachers to interact, they do, in fact, interact. As of this writing, interaction between telecourse students and faculty is limited to four primary methods: the televised sessions; office hours and classroom review sessions; telephone contact; and written communication, including the student essays.  

**(1) Televised Sessions**

I designed my telecourses so that the televised material would be fundamental to the students' learning process; therefore, students in each of the two PCC Writing telecourses are expected to watch thirty hours of televised material in fifteen, two-hour televised sessions. According to Ron Brey's national study on telecourses, the thirty hours of televised viewing that I ask my students to view is significantly greater than the national average. Brey reports that only three percent (3%) of the telecourses nationwide require students to observe more than seventeen hours of video.  

Thus, the PCC telecourses are
an anomaly requiring greater "seat time" of their students than other courses around the country. Each week's session is cable-cast at least three separate times throughout the week, and students can view any videotapes at all three PCC libraries. Students enrolled in an independent study can check out videos from the Community Campus video library, as can those enrolled students who live in areas of Southern Arizona and Northern Mexico out of range of the cable network.

The televised material in my telecourses may be classified according to five categories of academic and practical information, each of which I will now describe in some detail:

(a) **Introductions, conclusions, and general class reminders.**

In the first few moments of every televised session, I re-introduce myself and re-introduce the course. I offer a quick review of material from the previous televised session and a quick preview of material that will be addressed during the present session. Then I comment on upcoming assignments, essays that are due, review sessions, and portfolio revising. Because the televised material is canned and used year after year, none of these comments is date-specific; that is, I don't say, "On October 10th your second essay is due." Rather, I offer generic directions that apply throughout the semester, such as, "You have an essay due soon, so you should be doing the pre-writing exercises we talked about. And don't forget to plan for the exam review session. Students who attend the sessions generally do significantly better on the exams, and you want to do well, don't you?"
At the end of each televised session, I present a brief review of the material I presented during that session. For instance, I conclude the class with which I introduced this chapter by providing a brief reminder of the main themes in the class: the question of literacy, the writing process and the six hats, descriptive writing, verbs, and strategies for setting and achieving goals. Out of roughly one hundred minutes of each televised session, ten or fifteen minutes is devoted to these sorts of introductory and concluding remarks that review previous material and preview upcoming lessons.

(b) Lessons in how to write essays.

About 40% of each session is devoted to the study of the students’ writing assignments. As I said above, in Writing 100, the emphasis is on the rhetorical modes taught in current-traditional pedagogy, such as description, narrative, compare and contrast, cause and effect, process, definition, and persuasion, while the televised lessons in Writing 101 include reviews of these conventional rhetorical modes, as well as new material on remembering people, profile writing, taking a position, proposing solutions, making evaluations, and interpreting fiction. Roughly 60% of the students’ grade is based on how well they handle these assignments, so it is important to help them master the writing methods.

One of the difficulties of preparing televised lessons is the problem of how to provide students with an experience similar to the collaborative writing experience found in classroom classes that utilize the sorts of learning activities advocated by Kenneth Bruffee, Ann Ruggles-Gere, or Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff. For example, when teaching descriptive writing in the classroom, students can be placed into groups of three
to five. Each group then engages in the steps of the writing process. After one person verbally describes a specific object that he or she intends to write about, listeners ask questions to get the writer to elaborate or specify. Group questioning and feedback continues throughout the composing process, and students put words on the page with the help of a community of learners. In a telecourse where the students sit at home, removed not only from their peers but from a live instructor, this communal conversation in a workshop setting cannot happen.

As a teacher who advocates group learning activities and the communal construction of knowledge, then, my goal in the telecourse is to approximate a collective conversation by imitating the sort of conversations that happen in writing workshops. The primary strategy I've used in the telecourses is the following four-step pattern, anchored around what I call the Five-Minute Writing.6

*Step 1*) Introduce the rhetorical topic—for instance, descriptive writing. This introductory lecture makes use of computer slides that define and explain the terms, offering brief examples from literary works or the popular media. After observing the lecture, the television viewers are asked to describe in writing a material object, in this case, a Tyrannosaurus Rex. Ten inches tall, the green plastic dinosaur with the glowing teeth catches students' attention—an important consideration for a telecourse because students are conditioned by popular culture to expect their viewing experience to be visually stimulating.

*Step 2*) After I introduce the rhetorical topic, the next step is for students to practice various writing strategies focusing on that topic. I first broadcast a computer-generated
slide announcing a Five-Minute Writing exercise. A PowerPoint slide then instructs the students to brainstorm the physical details of the dinosaur and the next televised image shows the dinosaur from varying angles. While the students write, pleasant background music plays. During the students’ writing time, I offer verbal encouragement and advice; in this instance, for example, I’ll remind them to make use of the senses by describing how the hard, knobby plastic would feel or what sort of smell it might have. I've found that between three and five minutes is enough time for students to gather thoughts and write but short enough to avoid too much "dead" TV time. Students report that early in the semester they find it difficult to write much in this short time period, but that as the semester progresses they become more adept at such spontaneous writing.

Step 3) After the students have written a series of responses to the televised prompts, I then analyze a few examples of other writers grappling with the same rhetorical mode. I try to offer three types of writers so that the students are exposed to a variety of writing styles and efforts: (1) my own writing efforts, either in handwriting or on the computer slides; (2) writings from previous students; and (3) examples from published, professional writers--often taken from composition anthologies, imaginative literature, or journalism. For example, I will provide an assortment of introductory paragraphs to demonstrate how one author might start with an anecdote that leads to a delayed thesis, while another might begin by stating the thesis directly and then provide a context for the description that follows. Besides revealing various writing strategies, this analysis helps students realize they are part of a larger community of writers wrestling with similar
concerns. One goal of this modeling exercise is to offer the students a variety of writing role models and to illustrate that they are not alone in grappling with language.

*Step 4)* After the students have been exposed to a deeper analysis of the material, they are asked to do another series of timed writings. Thus, by the end of the particular lesson, students will have written on the topic two separate times: first with very little guidance, then with the benefit of significantly more information.

The Five-Minute Writings are meant both to give students a chance to practice the skills introduced in the lecture and to offer models on which students can measure their own work. During this process, students are pushed not only to write, but to engage in a critical analysis of the writings of others. Although students do not participate in face-to-face collaborative analysis as they would in a classroom, this method at least exposes them to a range of other writers.

*(c)* *Lessons in sentence-level usage, including punctuation, mechanics, and grammar.*

As indicated in the opening description, the televised material includes lessons on such current-traditional concerns as grammatical terms, parts of speech, and the conventions for using punctuation marks. These lessons also provide information in sentence combining and transitions. About 20% of each televised session is devoted to some form of these lessons transmitted in lecture format. Students are not asked to do grammar drills, although occasionally students are asked to do at-home writings in their notebooks, such as revising awkward sentences. For example, following the lead of Joseph Williams's *Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, I explain the concept of old and
new information, and I teach cohesive ties based on M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan's *Cohesion in English*. Teaching the concepts of reference, repetition, and elision, the telecourse emphasizes the importance of writers repeating the key terms and ideas as they move from one major concept to the next.

It is worth noting here that John Clifford, who criticizes *The St. Martin's Guide* for lacking an awareness of the writer's and reader's "social situatedness" (44), also disparages Halliday and Hasan. He rebukes a colleague "down the hall" for using "dozens of discrete steps and scores of self-interrogating, self-purifying questions about coherence devices and structuring techniques that M. A. K. Halliday and Rugaiya [sic] Hasan would be proud of" (48). Presumably, Clifford would also disparage the telecourse, not only for using such linguistic tools as cohesive ties to teach students proven methods for guiding their readers through the transitional points of an essay, but for transmitting this "self-purifying" information to students in the banking mode.

(d) *Miscellaneous academic lessons.*

In addition to focusing strictly on writing methods, televised lectures dispense a wide range of material that students may find helpful in their academic careers. This information is geared particularly toward the returning, adult student who typically registers for a telecourse. Such lessons include strategies for taking timed writing exams, advice on study habits, information on annotation and other active reading skills, and suggestions regarding local and national financial aid opportunities and other student services offered by Pima Community College. This material is transmitted in lecture format and accounts for about 20% of each session.
(e) Motivational anecdotes regarding studying, school, and life.

About ten minutes of each session are devoted to stories similar to the calculus story that I presented earlier. Given that the students are isolated from one another and the teacher, one goal of these anecdotes is to help the students feel less intimidated by the impersonal course structure. Just as in that self-deprecating tale of the time I failed college-level calculus, I use these stories to motivate students by revealing the troubles I’ve had as a student and a teacher. Through these anecdotes I try to provide a more human feel to the disembodied television images that the students view. Furthermore, in these anecdotes and in the lessons I’ve described in section (d) above, I try to help students enter into the academic discourse community. The lessons on study habits, for instance, are especially important for students who generally have not succeeded at educational endeavors. These students are further disadvantaged by doing their academic work at home, removed from a ready classroom network of fellow students with whom they can share information.

In addition to the impersonal and one-way interaction characterized by the televisied material, students and teacher interact in other ways, primarily by office hours and classroom review sessions, telephone contact, and written communication, including the student essays. As I’ve said before, PCC has not developed an on-line component to the telecourses; when they do, however, course communications can be conducted by electronic mail, a class listserv, or a course web page. Such electronic communication will provide students with significantly more direct access to each other and to the instructor.
(2) **Office hours and classroom review sessions**

Although students are not required to attend classroom sessions, instructors are encouraged to hold at least three evening classroom sessions per semester at the Community Campus. Traditionally, one is an introductory session and the other two are mid-term and final exam reviews. The introductory session is designed to allow students to meet the teacher and resolve any early concerns regarding assignments, schedules, or class expectations, and the exam review sessions address concerns specific to the upcoming exams.

Telecourse teachers at PCC rarely hold formal office hours, though they do make themselves available to students. One math instructor I know meets his students at the Community Campus at their convenience. In contrast, I don’t hold office hours but I have held extra meetings in cafes throughout sprawling Tucson, often on a Sunday afternoon or evening in order to afford working adults a better opportunity to attend. I’ve held as many as seven classroom and cafe sessions in a single semester, but students rarely attend them. For example, in one semester, over twenty students out of sixty attended the first two review sessions, but only a total of three students attended the other five review sessions.

Below are student responses to a survey question asking how many review sessions the students attended and whether they found them helpful or not:

- *I attended none of them. My physical limitations and lack of transportation kept me from doing so.*  
  —A.
• I only knew about 2 review sessions, but I did attend one. It helped me out because I had several questions answered. —L.

• I attended the final one because my trig test was short and I had time to get there. If the time had presented itself, I would have been to all four. —J.

• None—unfortunately the review sessions were always on a night when I had to do something else.

  —anonymous

• Home responsibility (children, husband, etc) prevented me from attending. But I inquired about every one. —P.

• I had psychology class on Thursdays [. . .] and on Tuesday November 14th that was my father’s birthday. —D.

• [Zero]. I know it’s a poor excuse, but I work full-time at nights. —Al.

As these student comments suggest, few students take advantage of these opportunities to interact personally with the teacher or fellow students. It seems that most students feel too burdened by family, occupational, and other academic obligations to make the time for such meetings. The phrasing of some of these comments is instructive, though. For example, P. writes, “But I inquired about every one,” as if to suggest that the teacher should recognize that her intentions were good. Likewise, A. suggests that he feels a certain amount of guilt when he writes, “I know it’s a poor excuse, but I work full-time at nights.” A’s comment also points to the fact that not all students work typical day-time jobs. Many work night shifts, swing shifts, or multiple jobs that keep them from attending the conventional evening review sessions. In sum, these student comments
indicate that telecourse students are faced with a range of competing responsibilities that hinder their abilities to focus exclusively on schooling.

(3) Telephone contact, including voice mail

Because Pima Community Campus adjunct instructors do not have individual office space, the institution provides each of the 300+ adjuncts access to a voice-mail system. Students are encouraged to call faculty with any class concerns, and faculty are asked to check their voice mail on a daily basis. Nonetheless, there may be a significant lag time between when the student has a concern or question and when the instructor can respond. One student suggests that this lag time is actually beneficial: "In order to have a question answered, a student must actively look for the answer [. . .]. Instead of having the answer fed to them by the teacher, they went out and earned the food themselves, making it more worthwhile." This level of self-initiative is, of course, the ideal situation. Other students are daunted by the phone system and never contact the instructor. Consequently, as the instructor I feel an imperative both to offer my home phone number to students and to telephone each student at least three times during the semester. These calls have proved to be an excellent opportunity to talk with students about their class experience and the academic material (as I write this, I recall countless hours spent on my portable phone, wandering my house and my backyard while chatting with students). With upwards of forty-five students in each section of Writing 100 and 30 students in each section of Writing 101, such phone contact requires a significant time commitment from the instructor—a commitment not always given. One writing instructor has said that she
never initiates phone calls to students, preferring instead to respond to their messages to her.

(4) **Written Communication.**

Each semester's thirty hours of televised lectures are pre-recorded. Therefore, no time-specific comments are televised. Consequently, teachers must rely on written communication to provide all the students in the class with information regarding the semester's schedule and requirements. The three primary forms of written communication between the teacher and the students are the course syllabus, personal correspondence, and the student work.

(a) **Syllabus.**

Because there is very little personal interaction between student and teacher, a clear syllabus is even more crucial in a telecourse than in a classroom course. In a classroom course, the teacher can make numerous modifications to the schedule, adjusting assignments depending on the needs of the particular group of students. For example, in an effort to create a student-centered classroom, Ira Shor suggests that teachers should provide students with opportunities to give written and oral feedback regarding the course material. Accordingly, students should be encouraged to question the syllabus and revise it throughout the semester based on their specific needs and desires. Even if a teacher does not use such liberatory teaching strategies, a teacher in a classroom may simply wish to adjust the schedule to better serve her students. For example, if the students are
having trouble grasping a particular assignment, the teacher may push back the essay due date or add additional days to a classroom conversation.

In contrast, it is difficult to modify the telecourse syllabi that are timed to coincide with the pre-arranged schedule for television programming. The students have no opportunity to alter the schedule, and the teacher of record is kept to the rigid televised schedule. The potential problems are magnified by the fact that the teacher cannot make a simple class announcement to change class curriculum. For instance, a few years ago I modified the syllabus in an effort to get students to turn in their first essay earlier in the semester. However, because I forgot to take the broadcast schedule into account, my students were then faced with writing a narrative paper without having seen the televised lesson on narrative writing. The resulting papers were significantly weaker than the same papers in previous semesters.

The consequence of this difference is that the telecourse class becomes a rigid entity, unchanging and incapable of modification. Not only does this prevent spontaneity, but it prevents the teacher from adjusting the course content to the needs of the given group of students.

(b) Personal Correspondence

For now, traditional mail service is the most convenient means of communicating important course information to all PCC students. Examples of such letters include announcements for the review sessions, descriptions of assignments due, and letters of encouragement. The following paragraph is excerpted from a letter I mailed to students
in the Summer of 1995. The goal was to motivate them and to remind them to call me for assistance.

I believe that you will be rewarded for perseverance, both in terms of grades and in terms of knowledge gained. So, even if you feel overwhelmed by the amount of work, keep plugging ahead. Success is sure to follow. And remember, if you have any problems or concerns, feel free to call me. My voice mail phone number is on the syllabus: use it and call me if you ever have any questions.

As I have indicated, Pima Community College has not yet aligned the telecourse with computer-assisted instruction. Students and instructors do not regularly correspond via electronic mail, nor are they linked together via an electronic listserv (never mind the more complex computerized interaction methods, such as on-line courseware systems or Multi-User Domains). Although I have developed and teach an on-line Writing 101 course for PCC, the administration has not yet linked the two telecourses with the on-line course. This is an important thread to unravel, and I shall return to it in Chapter 4.

(c) Student essays

The teacher's written responses to student essays are perhaps the most important aspect of the interaction between student and faculty. Although some composition theorists argue that in a classroom course the teacher should comment on the series of drafts that students produce, the telecourse was developed so that teachers do not comment on rough drafts, reserving their responses to student papers until after a full final draft has been completed. In this case, the end of the semester portfolio becomes a crucial tool, offering the students an opportunity to make use of the teacher's comments
in rewriting. Consequently, I believe that the teacher has a responsibility to make extensive comments on the first graded version.

It is easy for the students to lose motivation when their primary contact with a teacher is the television set; accordingly perhaps the hardest part of teaching a writing telecourse is helping the students stay involved with the course. Thus the teacher needs not only to critique the students' work candidly, but to nurture the positives. Comments should be complete, pleasant, and forthright; even if quite critical of much of the paper, it is important for a television teacher to act as a motivator, offering points of success on which students can build a revision. This kindness should be the rule for conventional classroom grading, of course, but because of the special needs of the telecourse students, it is imperative that telecourse teachers be particularly thorough. For example, in a conventional class, the teacher may scrawl "see me after class" on top of a paper and then talk the student through the difficult lesson. The telecourse, though, offers little opportunity for such personal teaching and the teacher needs to write clear and concise directions to the student. Because of this need for clear written comments, grading the telecourse essays is more time and energy consuming than grading for a classroom course. One PCC teacher has told me in a hallway conversation that she finds herself "spending an inordinate amount of time grading papers," up to three times as much as in a traditional classroom course.

Because there is little contact between student and teacher, clear evaluation criteria must be established for the students. To that end, the first televised session goes through the criteria thoroughly, and throughout the semester televised segments are devoted to
examples of successful and unsuccessful student papers. As I said above, the course is designed so that students are graded on two separate aspects for each essay. The first is content: how well the student addresses the essay topic; the second is usage and mechanics of standard written English. The course syllabus explains the grading scheme in some detail:

On each paper you will receive two grades, the content grade over the mechanical grade. It will look like this on your paper: A/A. The content grade will follow the rubric listed below. The mechanical grade will be based on the number of grammatical and punctuation errors you make. In the right hand margin of your paper I will list the chapter number in the course textbook where that problem is discussed. By looking up and reading about the problem, you should be able to overcome your early mistakes.

I generally mark most if not all usage errors; I rarely edit the mistakes, but instead place the number of the appropriate handbook chapter alongside the error. By indicating where the students can go to learn the material that can improve their written communication, I seek to place the responsibility on the students to strengthen their own particular weaknesses. For example, if a student writes on an essay, "The plastic dinosaur is green it's tail curls upward's at its end [sic]." I then mark in the margins the appropriate numbers of the handbook chapter, such as 34 for a comma splice and 37 for apostrophe mis-use.

This grading method is squarely in line with the current-traditional pedagogy advocated by the PCC Writing Instructor's Handbook. On the one hand, students are judged by how well they achieve the sort of detailed, logical, and persuasive expository essay privileged in current-traditional pedagogy. On the other hand, they are judged by how well they follow the form of standard written English, "catch[ing] mistakes and
awkward places" as the Writing 100 syllabus says. The grading system is coordinated with the televised material that teaches usage, mechanics, and punctuation. Students have indicated that they return to tapes of previous classes to address their particular weaknesses. In response to a question about the value of the televised material, one student indicates this particular strength of a telecourse: "You can't rewind a teacher, but I can go back and listen over and over until I get it."

On being asked their opinion of the grading methods, students for the most part responded affirmatively to the dual grading system:

- *I thought all the comments on my papers were helpful because I could go back and check my mistakes when I had to do other assignments and my grades did improve. I do like the double grade because then I knew exactly what I needed to work on. In the beginning my mechanics were not as strong as my content and it really would of dropped my grade. —L.*

- *The double graded paper is ideal, it lets me know exactly where my weak points are [...] I would go straight to my "red book" [the Short Handbook for Writers] and try to rectify my mistake—usually 60 [a chapter on apostrophes]—S.*

- *The grammar feedback wasn't too helpful, but the actual content of my paper feedback was very helpful. I don't really understand how the grammar grade is figured out. I think it is very helpful to have the double grade because it's gives us more points which I think it helps our grade. —E.*

- *The instructional feedback was helpful, but it would have been better to be able to compare with other students. —J.*
• That way I could tell where I was going wrong. And my grammar is my downfall. I looked [the chapter number] up in text read over where I had gone wrong and corrected it. —P.

• I do think it is helpful to have separate grades. It helps to know more specifically what I need to work on and in what area. [...] I found any and all comments and directions helpful. --anonymous

These final two comments are instructive. The final, anonymous comment suggests a concern with overall improvement in communication skills. The phrase “what I need to work on” suggests that this student seems not as concerned with correctness as some of the other students. For example, P’s comments are similar to many others in that he uses such phrases of judgement as, “I was going wrong,” “my downfall,” and “where I had gone wrong.” In this respect, P. seems to have internalized the current-traditional perspective that privileges correctness in form. Given that one major goal of the course is to teach students to write in conventional standard written English, this result suggests that the course accomplishes its goals.

II

A Writer’s Exchange

I am interested now in comparing the PCC telecourse with A Writer’s Exchange, perhaps the most influential national telecourse that teaches English. To that end, I turn to A Writer’s Exchange, a transfer-level composition telecourse produced by Dallas Telecourses and distributed nationally by PBS Adult Learning Service in cooperation
with Harper-Collins College Publishers. The telecourse was developed and produced at the R. Jan LeCroy Center for Educational Telecommunications, the distance learning arm of the Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD), an acknowledged leader in distance education in the United States. Since its inception in 1972, Dallas Telecourses at the LeCroy Center has produced over thirty telecourses and received over two hundred video, film, and educational awards. Since 1981, Dallas Telecourses has been a leading supplier to PBS, with a potential viewing audience of 161 million people globally. Its courses have been used in all fifty states and over forty countries; in addition to being aired nationally on the popular cable television program, Mind Extension University, Dallas Telecourses are included in U.S. naval programs around the world and distributed in Australia, Asia, Canada, and Europe.

In the United States, Dallas Telecourses accounts for 39% of all college telecourse enrollments. While I was developing the two PCC telecourses during the academic year of 1993-94, over 84,000 students at more than 1,200 educational institutions were enrolled in Dallas Telecourses. Fifty percent of students enrolled in the Dallas Telecourses are over thirty-five years old, over 90% are employed, 50% are married, and 68% are female. Twenty-two percent of enrolled telecourse students are involved in workforce retraining, and 78% are seeking degrees. In fact, DCCCD allows students to earn their Associate degree through distance education courses delivered through telecourses, on-line computer courses, and interactive teleclasses. Although national statistics are not available, in Dallas County, with a population of roughly two million
people, over 4,500 students per year enroll in DCCCD telecourses, and over one thousand students per year take the *Writer's Exchange* telecourse.\footnote{11}

In addition to the televised broadcast, enrolled students are supported by a number of services: voice mail allowing access to instructors; a student hotline that provides answers to student questions; a tape leasing service; testing centers; and "OLLIE," an acronym for a computer system that provides "On-Line Learning, Interaction, and Exchange" via electronic bulletin boards and on-line discussions. Distance learners also have access to library services, study skills assistance, and academic advising services in person, by telephone, fax, mail, or a Web site. In Dallas, the LeCroy Center leases air time for the telecourses on the local PBS affiliate, making their courses available to over 97% of the homes in Dallas County. According to the promotional material, 97% of DCCCD's distance learning enrollment is in telecourses, although on-line computer courses are beginning to grow in popularity.

According to the DCCCD publication, *Successful Practices in Telecourse Implementation*, written by Jacquelyn Tulloch, a faculty member at the LeCroy Center, a typical course produced by Dallas Telecourses requires an average production time of two years and costs over one million dollars. Each telecourse is developed by a production team that includes a content specialist, academic advisors, instructional designers, scriptwriters, and video directors and producers. Tulloch describes three phases of telecourse production:

Pre-production is a program planning phase in which the [production] team formulates the basic concepts of the telecourse, identifies course goals and objectives, and determines the best instructional strategies to achieve those goals and objectives. In this phase, the team also consults with the local and national advisory committees.
In the production stage, professional scriptwriters translate the instructional goals into the visual medium, the content specialist and instructional designer review the scripts for instructional validity, and the production team films the video on location. In post-production, the final programs are assembled and the content specialist completes the student and instructor guides. (Tulloch 3-4)

It is safe to say that producing a DCCCD Telecourse is significantly more complicated than producing the PCC courses. Each of the two PCC Writing telecourses courses took about six months to develop and produce with a production team of three people. One technical engineer was responsible for handling all aspects of the filming, including the camera work, sound, and the limited post-production editing. A part-time student employee helped me design the PowerPoint computer graphics. It fell upon me to do the bulk of the work in developing and preparing the course for production: in addition to being the on-screen personality, I was the academic advisor, instructional designer, scriptwriter, and content specialist.¹² As I outlined in the Introduction, the telecourses are a profit-center for the college: an inexpensively produced course that is owned by the college can bring in a significant income after the start-up costs have been amortized. Based on my salary of $1,495 (the equivalent of teaching one course for one semester), the $5.95 hourly wage of the student worker who did the computer graphics, and the estimated salary of the technical engineer, I estimate that the personnel cost for producing each of the Writing telecourses at PCC was less than $7,000. Even taking into account the capital outlay for the production equipment, this sum is a far cry from the million-dollar budget for A Writer's Exchange and helps explain why PCC has chosen to develop many of its own telecourses.
Course Materials

*A Writer's Exchange* is designed to be a comprehensive package of a study guide, a textbook, and video programs. Computer programs on CD-ROM and the Internet-based on-line courses are currently being developed by DCCCD, but in 1998 the primary course textbook is the study guide designed for by Harryette Brown. Brown, a faculty member at DCCCD and a content specialist for *A Writer's Exchange*, was one of the first in the field of English to study the efficacy of teaching via telecourse.\(^{13}\) According to Brown, the study guide that the students receive is the most important tool for the student:

The study guide acts as the student's daily instructor. Each lesson begins with a brief introduction that provides them with an overview and a context for the material presented in that lesson. The introduction ends with specific goals for the lesson. Following the introduction, the section on Resources directs them to the video program (for the 22 lessons that include a video program), the text assignments, the readings, and the handbook reference for the lesson. Focus questions keyed to the reading assignment in the text are designed to help the students get the most from their reading. In the lessons that include a video, focus questions will help them learn from the video presentation. For your information, the video program expert is identified in the lesson. The four lessons that do not include a video suggest writing activities that will be helpful to the students at the point in the course in which the lesson occurs. If they follow the study guide recommendations for each lesson carefully, the students should successfully accomplish all of the requirements for this course. (5-6)

The Dallas Telecourses are arranged so that a study guide prepared in-house acts as "the student's daily instructor," as Brown says.\(^{14}\) In some respects, this form of information dissemination differs little from a conventional large lecture classes, where the textbook is the primary carrier of information and the student's goal is to gather and repeat the ancillary information provided in the lecture hall. However, according to Brown's description, the telecourse teacher's job is much simpler than a classroom teacher's job. The teacher does not need to be an expert in the field—the "video program
expert” can dispense the appropriate academic material. Furthermore, the telecourse
teacher does not need to help the students: “the study guide recommendations” are all that
is necessary for students to “successfully accomplish” the course.

The assignments in *A Writer's Exchange* come from the textbook *A Writer's
Repertoire* compiled by Gwendolyn Gong and Sam Dragga. The PCC televised material
provides lessons and activities designed for the student's specific course assignments; in
contrast, the *Writer's Exchange* assignments are neither announced in the television
lessons, nor addressed specifically. The televised material in *A Writer's Exchange* offers
only generic information on such rhetorical topics as writing narration, writing
description, writing an explanatory papers, writing an analytical paper, and writing with a
persuasive aim (Brown 20-21). According to Brown, the textbook "explains rhetorical
principles and suggests specific writing strategies. It includes many examples of student
essays as well as professional essays from a variety of fields” (12). Brown continues, the
"readings in the text, both students and professional, represent diverse academic
disciplines, and their authors represent a variety of cultures” (12). Reference chapters
highlight research techniques, test-taking strategies, and commonly used style and usage
information. The text includes directions for writing assignments that grow from the
rhetorical theories in the text” (6). This textbook replicates many of the efforts made by
*The St. Martin's Guide*, which presents "nine different essay assignments, all reflecting
actual writing situations that students may encounter both in and out of college," and
offers "heuristic tools for invention and reading" as well as a "range of essential writing
strategies," and research and test-taking strategies (iv). Both books incorporate a mixture
of the current-traditional emphasis on a completed, unified, and correct final product and the expressionist emphasis on the individual composing process.

**Course Management**

According to Brown, "Clarity and consistency in procedures are even more important with distance learners than they are in the traditional classroom. The time spent prior to the beginning of the term making decisions about course design, requirements, paper topics, and evaluation is time very well spent" (8). In addressing the elements a teacher must take into account, Brown divides course management into discrete sections: the lessons, the writing assignments, collaboration, instructor comments, evaluation, and accompanying software.¹⁵

*The lessons:* Each weekly lesson unit includes not only the televised material, but readings and exercises in the textbook and the study guide. According to Brown, "the video and text complement each other, with each medium doing what it does best, while the study guide ties the two together for the students" (8). The lessons are designed so that individual teachers can rearrange the order.

*A Writer's Exchange* consists of twenty-two video lessons of thirty minutes apiece. Students are thus required to observe only eleven hours of televised programming, nineteen hours less than the PCC courses. According to Brey's study (mentioned above), the eleven televised hours are about average for telecourses nationally. Content specialist Harryette Brown based her rationale for only eleven hours of televised material on the premise that "writing teachers know that what writing students need to be doing most of
the time is writing. The course materials in a writing course can serve only as supports for this activity" (11). Thus, by not requiring students to watch television, the telecourse provides students "some 'breathing' space to allow what they have been learning about writing to soak in and to give them time to do what they need to be doing most of all—writing" (11). According to Brown, "The last two lessons have no videos because it is unnecessary to present new information the last week of a writing course" (11). Instead of watching videos, students work in their study guide "to prepare for the end of semester evaluation of their work" (11).

In this respect, *A Writer's Exchange* differs from the PCC Writing courses because when I developed the PCC courses, I felt that all 30 hours of televised instruction were a valuable resource for the students. To that end, a portion of the final televised segments was designed specifically to provide personalized motivation—an exhortation to keep working hard, for instance, or advice on how to handle mid-semester doldrums. Furthermore, I do not agree that it is unnecessary to offer new information at the end of the semester. On the assumption that all information is potentially helpful, the final televised sessions in my course include not only a review of the semester's primary themes, but, as I mentioned earlier, lessons on forms of writing not addressed in the textbook, including evaluative and summative abstracts, grant and business proposals, business correspondence, and aspects of creative writing. However, a significant omission in my courses is web-based writing. Although I acknowledge the fact that most contemporary writing takes place on a personal computer or word-processor, my courses were developed before the explosion of on-line, web-based writing. Consequently, I
never address web-based writing, such as web page development, on-line interactions, and email professional or personal correspondence.

The writing assignments: Brown's suggested syllabus asks students to write four major papers between three and six pages in length; complete two, on-campus timed writings; and complete twelve brief written responses to readings. As I've mentioned, the specific writing assignments are taken from the Gong and Dragga textbook, which provides lessons on how to write the assignments. These "assignments are not made or discussed on the video programs, although students are taught the skills required to write various kinds of papers" (8). A portfolio rewrite of two of the papers counts as 60% of the final grade, and the in-class essay exams count for 40%. As at Pima, the on-campus, timed writings provide a check against plagiarism and the portfolio provides students an opportunity to incorporate faculty comments from previous work in the revised versions.

Collaboration: In the PCC telecourses, although I tell the students that writing is often a communal process and that they need to collaborate with others, the student writers don't have much opportunity to work with one another. Although some PCC students share their writing with family, friends, and the occasional tutor, the teacher of record is the primary collaborator--and only inasmuch as the student uses the teacher's comments to revise papers for the portfolio. In contrast, Brown indicates that student-student collaboration is an integral aspect of the DCCCD telecourse: according to the syllabus, "students who do not participate in the writing group exchanges will not pass the course"
Brown writes in the *Preview* booklet, "Collaboration is taught directly in two of the videos, in a chapter in the text, and in several study guide lessons and is modeled extensively in all the videos and encouraged throughout the print materials" (2). She elaborates:

Both the text and videos encourage writing multiple drafts of papers, so instructors may wish to make sure that distance students have the opportunity to share their drafts with their peers as well as with the instructor. Collaborative efforts may be organized and supported in a variety of ways, depending upon the type and level of technical support available to your distance learners. (8)

According to the sample syllabus, students are assigned to work in groups of three or four, generally based on their access to computers and modems. For those without home computers and modems, the college provides free access to a computer bulletin board, a computer lab, and lab assistants, and students are "strongly advised to use the computer bulletin board to leave and receive papers" (17).

Regardless of the individual student's access to computer technology, there are other methods for telecourse students to interact with fellow students. Brown suggests transmitting papers to one another in person, or by electronic mail, fax, or postal service. In addition, students can meet on campus or away from the college, conference by telephone or electronic mail, or use a voice mail system "to leave comments to individuals or a group" (9). Brown further indicates that "in a course where there is uneven access to different forms of technology, students should be grouped on the basis of the method by which they will share papers" (9). Brown presents the following schema of collaborative methods in the *Preview* booklet:

The Basic: Students and teacher may use the U.S. mail or fax to exchange papers and responses. Because of the turnaround time involved with the U.S. mail, teachers may
wish to ask for some papers to be exchanged with peers while others are commented on only by the teacher. Limiting the number of major papers to four will also allow for specific turnaround time for students to exchange papers with each other. Institutions with a voice mail system or with telephone conferencing capacity available to students could use that to facilitate student interaction. (13)

Mid-level: If the institution has an electronic bulletin board system available to students, those students who have access to a computer with a modem could send their papers to their classmates and instructor by leaving them on the bulletin board. Discussions may take place in 'real time' or asynchronistically. Other students may use fax or mail. (13)

Upscale: If all students have access to computer with modems and to an electronic bulletin board, the possibilities for collaboration are, of course, almost endless. Students can send and receive comments on drafts of papers to each other and to their teachers quickly and easily. They may use an alias if they wish to remain anonymous. The major difference between the distance learner and the more traditional classroom student in this setting is that distance learners will seldom be able to converse electronically in real time (although some groups may be able to arrange to do so). (13-14)

There are a number of points to be made about this system. First, it does an admirable job of trying to get students to interact. As I've said about my experience in the PCC telecourses, the main drawback is that students are isolated from one another. Our classes would be placed in the "Basic" category, and the DCCCD efforts at getting students to work together in mid-level and upscale methods have the potential to assist students significantly. Second, the differences between these three forms of collaboration are technological. That is, the students' ability to complete the course curriculum depends on whether or not they have access to computers. If they do, they can do more work—"the possibilities for collaboration are, of course, almost endless." If they do not have access to computers, they may be required to do fewer assignments: "Because of the turnaround time involved with the U.S. mail," Brown writes, "[l]imiting the number of major papers to four will also allow for specific turnaround time for students to exchange
papers with each other." In this scenario, the academic curriculum is guided by access to technology, and students are given academic credit for doing less work. The third point to make is that education thus becomes a function of financial abilities. Economic access to technological systems is a precondition for "the almost endless" educational possibilities allowed by computer-based interaction. Indeed, the term "Upscale" reveals the economic underpinnings of these categories. Only those with money can learn this way, and those institutions and those individuals without the resources to purchase computer systems appear to be at a distinct educational disadvantage. (I shall return to these points in significant depth in Chapters 4 and 5.)

**Instructor's comments:** I wrote earlier that grading papers in an English telecourse is a difficult, time-consuming task, a point with which Brown concurs: "Commenting on papers is always the most labor-intensive part of a composition instructor's job, and teaching distance students intensifies the task even more. Distance students need fast, direct, and full comments on their drafts" (9).

**Evaluation:** According to Brown, *A Writer's Exchange* is geared to traditional evaluative methods as well as to portfolio evaluation. Many distance education instructors like to have their students do at least one or two writings on campus in a controlled environment to preserve the integrity of the course. [...] if possible on-campus writings should be done in the testing center" (9). Just as the PCC televised material and the syllabus provide additional information on how to take timed writings
and complete the portfolio, the DCCCD course provides similar lessons in the study guide and the videos.

**Accompanying software:** Brown writes that

the course responds to the growing use of computers in the teaching of college writing— from simple word processing to more complicated uses such as network collaborative interaction among faculty and students. The optional software component, available from the textbook publisher, HarperCollins, provides institutions with a computer-networked, integrated writing environment. (10)

In the future, the course may offer students a CD-ROM for use on compressed digital multimedia networks. In addition, according to Ted Pohrte from the marketing department of the LeCroy Center, DCCCD is planning on providing Internet-based web pages for the course.

**III**

*A Writer's Exchange: The Televised Material*

The televised material in *A Writer's Exchange* follows a consistent and specific pattern. As Brown describes,

Each video in *A Writer's Exchange* consists of three or four brief case studies, documentaries, interviews, or scenarios in which a specific rhetorical principle is taught. At the end of each case study, the host and program expert discuss the case study in order to clarify and to enhance the learning objectives. (14)

One of the fundamental strengths of the televised portion of *A Writer's Exchange* is its use of academic experts. As Brown writes,

The program experts are professors of rhetoric from universities and colleges around the country. Some, such as Victor Villanueva and Andrea Lunsford, have long been associated with the teaching of rhetoric and composition; others, such as Drema
Lipscomb and Kermit Campbell, bring more recent training to the programs. The experts represent diversity of thought as well as diversity of ethnicity and geography. They were not given pre-packaged answers to the host's questions, but rather were asked to bring to bear their own research interests, and teaching experiences on the case studies. (14)

This notion of "diversity of thought" is especially important. One drawback of the single-teacher telecourse of the sort that I produced is an almost unavoidable intellectual parochialism in which the primary transmitter of information is never challenged. Recall the PCC student who wrote, You're a much more logical writer and probably thinker than I am. You always seem to write about the logical and obvious aspects. I on the other hand, write about the emotions or senses. In contrast to my telecourses, a classroom course benefits from multiple voices, either in harmony or discord. Likewise, in its emphasis on multiple television personalities, the DCCCD telecourse exposes students to what Brown says is "a variety of ways of analyzing rhetorical problems and to a variety of personalities" (14).

To better understand the televised material, I would like to look more closely at two of the televised sessions of A Writer's Exchange. The second session in the course is entitled "Psychology of Writing." Whereas the televised sessions of the PCC courses begin with a background graphic of flying seagulls over which is written "Writing I" and "Randy Accetta, M.A." with the Pima Community College logo in the lower left-hand corner, the Writer's Exchange begins with the well-known PBS/Annenberg logo. Just as the PCC logo assures the local viewer of the program's educational credibility, the PBS logo implies that the program will live up to the traditional PBS standards of intellectual integrity.
The program proper invokes a tradition of artistry and literacy by beginning with a collage of black and white still photographs of Gertrude Stein, including photos of her with William James and other contemporaries. After a few moments, the image cuts to the moderator of the program. Like the other twenty-two televised sessions of *A Writer's Exchange*, "The Psychology of Writing" is hosted by John McCaa, an African-American man who looks to be in his mid-thirties. Wearing a dark blue suit with a white shirt and conservative tie, he sits in a comfortable leather chair facing a table that has a green potted plant in the center. Across from McCaa is an African-American man, perhaps in his early sixties, dressed in slacks, dark blazer, and tie. In the background is a blue wall with *A Writer's Exchange* scripted in white across it. A large television screen perched on a table separates the men from the back wall.

McCaa introduces his guest as William Jones, from Rutgers University, and they quickly begin a conversation regarding the various reasons people write. Whereas the PCC telecourses look similar to a newscast with one televised authority transmitting information, *A Writer's Exchange* looks more like a talk show, with a congenial and knowledgeable host who asks leading questions to prompt his more knowledgeable guest. Obviously interested in their topic, both men speak slowly and gravely. They are cordial, but not light-hearted; earnest, but not dour.

The topic is the composing process of writers, and the conversation is peppered with such phrases as "breakthrough work" and "important findings." At one point, Jones says that "new scientific research [...] helps us understand the composing process." Such phrases lend a certain urgency to the topic, and the references to the scientific method
establish the speakers' credibility as seemingly objective and methodical scholars. At another point, Jones directs his comment to the camera (and thus to the student directly): "It's fair to say that what students are taught now is not what students were taught some time ago, but I want to remind you that teachers are not always explicit about the theoretical assumptions that drive their courses." McCaa interjects with his own observations, concluding, "It used to be that process was three lockstep steps: prewriting, writing, and revising." He develops the point that the writing process is more complicated than traditionally thought and ends his observation by describing the field of composition studies as a rigorous, scientific field: "Thanks to extensive study and research we now know that writing is a complex process." Again, this scene invokes the scientific method to provide credibility to the field of composition studies.

After about seven minutes of such conversation, McCaa then suggests that he and Jones (and by extension, the viewers) observe some examples of the recursive writing process. The camera then zooms past them to the large-screen television set in the background. A televised image appears of an Anglo man in his mid-thirties sitting in some sort of professional office. Books and papers are scattered on his desk and a computer flickers in the background. Although we are not given his name, his professional status is established when he says he is a lawyer. He provides answers to an interviewer whom the viewer neither sees nor hears. The lawyer says his goal with all legal writing is to "persuade my reader." He continues, "In verbal communication you always wish you had said something more [. . . ] In writing you have the chance to do it right." In discussing the composing process, he provides students with some reassuring
words about his own process. For example, he says that his first drafts often include "stuff not central to my purpose." In this televised segment, the lawyer not only reiterates the main point made by McCaa and Jones that writing is a recursive process, but he also emphasizes the elements of the rhetorical triangle (writer, audience, text) that are so important to transactional rhetoric.

After a few minutes, the image fades, then cuts to a well-dressed African-American woman in her thirties. A professor, she discusses the various sorts of writing that she does, including office memos, email, and academic essays. Reiterating the point made by the lawyer, she says that it is "very important to me to understand my audience." She reflects on her writing process: "I seldom use a pencil for getting my thoughts down. The computer is my primary tool [. . . for] editing, rewriting, modifying." As with the interview with the lawyer, the questioner is off-screen, allowing the viewer to observe only the expert's responses, never the question.

The televised image cuts back to McCaa and Jones, who begin a conversation that reiterates the main points introduced by the televised interviews. For instance, in response to McCaa's comment that people write for a variety of purposes, Jones replies that "The more complex the writing, the more recursive the process. A letter to a friend need not be as complex as an important memo to a boss." One of McCaa's roles in this conversation is to prompt Jones to offer specific information rooted in academic research. McCaa will offer leading questions, such as, "It is my understanding that researchers are learning more about the composing process. What are some of the findings?" Following the lead, Jones then presents a conversational explanation of current composition theory.
These seemingly casual conversations accord with Harryette Brown's assertion that the academic experts "were not given pre-packaged answers to the host's questions, but rather were asked to bring to bear their own research interests, and teaching experiences on the case studies" (14).

Their conversation touches on a variety of topics related to the composing process. At one point, McCaa shows Jones a page of his own writing and asks Jones if the page looks like a typical writer's page. The camera offers a close-in shot of a computer print-out covered with scrawled writing in the margins and other handwritten marks, such as arrows from one section to the other and circles around paragraphs. In one of the few light-hearted moments, Jones laughs, and claims that his pages are often a lot messier.

Jones then turns the conversation back to the student writer: "It is important for beginning writers to understand their writing process." The camera cuts to McCaa who says to the camera, "It is important to write for the reader." The two men spend another six or seven minutes discussing the need to write to a specific audience. McCaa concludes the conversation by articulating the main threads of their discussion: "All writing is meant to be reader-based" and "Process-focused writing courses approach this better than other sorts of courses." He segues into the next series of vignettes by turning to the television set behind him and saying, "Let's watch a job hunter move through this process as she composes a letter to a prospective employer."

By this point, the televised material has offered a nutshell accounting of two rhetorical theories: the process approach and the communication triangle of writer, audience, and text. Having drawn on both the academic expertise of William Jones and
the experiences of people who write in their profession, the televised material then cuts to a vignette that is meant to represent a typical adult student in a typical writing situation.

In this instance, the viewer watches as Lena, an Hispanic woman in her mid-twenties, drafts a letter of application for a job as a secretary in a law firm. Lena is tutored by a fifty-ish Anglo woman with a heavy southern drawl. Sitting, both women face a computer as Lena reads the beginning of her letter out loud in clear standard English. The letter starts with a rambling personal anecdote about how Lena wants a job at the law firm because she loves law but hasn't been able to finish college and attend law school because of financial difficulties and raising two children. In response to Lena's reading, the tutor initially offers positive feedback, then questions Lena regarding the audience and the purpose of the letter. "That's a very good start, Lena," she says. "But let's consider the person you are sending it to: what would they want to know?" She proceeds to talk Lena out of the anecdote on the grounds that her potential reading audience may think Lena is desperate for a job. Their conversation echoes the two primary points made by McCaa and Jones: the writer must take into account her purpose and her audience; and writing is a recursive process that takes time and effort.

The conversation between Lena and her tutor continues, with such exchanges as the following:

Tutor: "That's great, that's concrete. I think that would be important to the employer, don't you?"

Lena: "Yes, more detail--."

Tutor: "Exactly! Why don't you take another pass at this."
After working on the computer, Lena reads another version out loud.

Tutor: "I think it's great and I think if I were the employer I would want to interview you. Good work, Lena."

The scene dissolves and we return to our hosts who are watching the end of the interchange between Lena and her tutor on the set's big-screen television. I am especially interested in this televised interaction because it well represents the methodology and epistemology of the telecourse. I will return to this example briefly at the end of this chapter and in more detail in Chapter 5, where I will present an extensive analysis of the cultural work of this vignette.

The tenth televised lesson of A Writer's Exchange, Introductory Explanatory Writing, follows a similar format. McCaa shares his talk-show set with another academic expert, this time Victor Villanueva. The Chair of the 1998 Conference on College Composition and Communication, Villanueva is an active and leading scholar in composition studies. Just as in the previous session on the psychology of writing, McCaa and Villanueva emphasize the rhetorical triangle, teaching the television audience the importance of crafting writing for the audience. Villanueva describes the rhetorical triangle of author, reader, and text, and he describes what he calls the "given-new contract": writers need to "think about the sorts of information that the audience already has in order to decide what new information to give them." Throughout the session, McCaa and Villanueva emphasize the importance of taking into account the reader. For example, they agree on a number of points: that the writer should avoid jargon; that if the writer demonstrates his
or her interest in the topic, then the reader will be similarly interested; that the reader will believe the writer if the writer establishes knowledge of the topic.

To illustrate the necessity of writing for an audience, McCaa and Villanueva address the importance of explanatory writing. To exemplify their points, three vignettes are shown addressing practical forms of writing. In one vignette, an African-American woman from the human resources division of an un-named organization explains that all employees need a well-written employee manual that provides updated information organized for easy reference. "It's hard [for employees] to absorb all the information," she says. "And we like to have something they can take back with them." In the second vignette, an Anglo woman explains that she writes a community newsletter to provide handy access to information affecting families, their children, and the neighborhood in general. In the final vignette, an Asian teenaged girl explains that she needs a clearly written college catalogue in order to sort through all of her requirements and options; this interview is followed by the Anglo editor for the university catalogue describing how she attempts to address such student needs. On the heels of these and other vignettes, McCaa and Villanueva talk about "why we are such consumers of explanatory writing."

Villanueva concludes that as a writer, you need "to know what you're talking about and know who you're talking to." The session ends with McCaa providing a more thorough summary of the main lesson: write with your audience in mind. Once again, Brown's claim in the faculty guide is borne out: "At the end of each case study, the host and program expert discuss the case study in order to clarify and to enhance the learning objectives" (14).
IV

Points for Discussion

At this juncture, a few points are important to note. First, in contrast to the PCC courses where the viewer is consistently exposed to written words scrawled on a page and typed on a computer screen, the viewer of *A Writer's Exchange* rarely sees the actual writing on the page. We viewers hear the writer read her work out loud, but we don't observe the actual composing process on the computer screen or the marks on the page. We see McCaa's printed page with his written editing marks, but we do not view his writing attempts. The lessons in *A Writer's Exchange* appear to be more global in nature—not focused on specific writing passages or writing methods (like sentence combining, for example), but focused rather on general concepts (like the importance of audience) and the practical applications of those concepts.

Second, these particular televised sessions are typical of all the televised sessions in that they begin with an interview between McCaa and an academic expert and then incorporate vignettes featuring a number of functional writing situations. The viewer is exposed to working adults who write in their jobs; to students who write in both occupational and academic settings; and to professional writers, such as teachers and tutors. What students do not see is someone crafting a poem, struggling over a short story, or working on some other form of creative writing. Nor do they see someone writing political slogans or position statements. In other words, the televised examples
are based on what can be considered pragmatic and functional forms of writing for
everyday use.\textsuperscript{17}

Third, the televised images are designed to appeal to a racially and ethnically diverse
student body. According to Brown's \textit{Preview} booklet,

More than half of the videos have minority professors as program experts; more than
half of the role models in the case studies are minorities, and the characters in the
acting scenarios represent the diversity of distance learners in age, gender, and
ethnicity. The videos include documentaries on well-known writers such as poet and
novelist Rolando Hinojosa and economist Ravi Batra, as well as representatives of
minority-owned businesses. (12)

The vignettes I described above well represent the variety of ethnicities, ages, and
class backgrounds portrayed on television. To reach the wide range of students who
register for telecourses, it seems advantageous to expose students to such a wide range of
writing role models. The DCCCD courses do an admirable job of exposing students to
such exemplary scholars. For example, both William Jones and Victor Villanueva have
been leaders in the continuing efforts to apply composition theory to the practice of
educating all segments of society, particularly the disadvantaged. Among Jones's work
are articles addressing the debilitating effect of writing programs on African-American
and Latino students, while Villanueva has written a prolific amount, including a book that
offers himself as a role model for the working class and people of color. He is also the
editor of a 743-page collection of essays, \textit{Cross-Talk in Composition}, which details the
past thirty years of composition theory and practice.\textsuperscript{18} The scholars presented on
television present valuable material to the viewer. Classroom courses cannot
approximate such a diverse group of role models, and neither do the PCC composition
telecourses. Indeed, with one exception, the televised material in my courses emphasizes my talking head.

The one exception comes in the eleventh week of Writing 101. One of the journal assignments in both Writing 100 and Writing 101 is to comment on an editorial from a local, national, daily, or weekly newspaper; to demystify such public writings, this televised session features a free-wheeling, forty-minute roundtable conversation among the editorial page writers at Tucson's morning newspaper, *The Arizona Daily Star*. Prompted by a series of my questions, these professional writers discuss their research and writing strategies, including specific habits that are beneficial to their writing, and the bad habits they fall into that hurt their writing. The televised segment concludes with a one-on-one interview with columnist Bryn Bailey, who discusses her particular writing strategies in more depth. Aside from brief comments by one of the other editorial writers, Ms. Bailey's is the only woman's voice in the telecourse. The rest of the time, students view only my image on the television screen.

One benefit of having such a localized and consistent on-screen image is that the televised teacher can create more intimacy with his or her students. For instance, on camera I talk directly at the camera, shaking my fist and addressing the viewer directly with such phrases as, "When writing, we need to set aside time for ourselves," or "When you get stuck in a paper, do what I do: take a break--go eat some ice cream or brush your teeth or feed your goldfish, then come back to it." The repetition of such personal pronouns as "I" and "you" and "we" brings the observer into the conversation, making them complicit with the televised material. In contrast, by using such phrases as "the
"writer" and "a student," A Writer's Exchange puts the student observer in the more passive position of being talked about rather than being talked to.

In response to a question about what they liked most about the telecourse, PCC students report that this personalized aspect of the televised sessions create a sense of community and thereby lend credence to the course material:

- The positive attitude you promote by telling us to stick with the course is very encouraging. Your self-disclosures about not always being good at writing also helps to encourage.

- The teacher is cool and makes this fun. His funnyness--his personality comes across onscreen.

- The most effective aspect of this course is [. . . ] listening to instructor talking about writing, while acknowledging that it can be difficult. I also like the humor.

- I like it when you give examples of your own writing. It helps me to see what I could have done different. I like teaching that is not just verbal, but also visual. I like things written out for me so I have notes.

Student responses such as, "the positive attitude you promote by telling us to stick with the course" indicate that students feel a personal connection with the televised portion of the PCC telecourses. The students report that the course emphasizes the individual, and they feel as if the course speaks directly to their own particular needs.

Thus, if we can say that the PCC telecourses emphasize the individual, then we can say that the Dallas Telecourses emphasize the representative. That is, The Writer's Exchange connects with its audience, not by speaking directly to the viewer, but by using
characters and vignettes that represent the situations in which actual students find themselves. For instance, in one vignette, an Indian woman with the traditional Hindu bindi forehead dot says that she goes through the composing process for her essays in her car on the way to work. In a second vignette, an Anglo man in his thirties sits at a drafting table studying architecture and discusses the difficulties of going to school full-time while also caring for his two-year-old son: the "telecourse allows me a certain amount of freedom," he says. "But often times it comes down to giving up something."

In a third vignette, a young Anglo woman sits at a computer while a narrator's voice-over proclaims, "With a full-time job and a family, she also has difficulty finding time to write." The young woman is then interviewed about her composing process, and she says that her most productive time to write is Sunday morning when her family is still asleep. These sorts of examples are chosen for their representational qualities. The academic and life situations of the televised characters represent the same sorts of situations the students are in; the material is presented not in the theoretical abstract, but in specifically functional terms. These vignettes may, on the one hand, address rhetorical strategies, but on the other hand, they also present viewers with an underlying message that education, specifically learning to write in clear standard English, will answer their career and emotional needs. In doing so, the course emphasizes occupational literacy over the sort of critical literacy advocated by cultural materialists and epistemic transactionalists.

Take, for example, the televised interchange between Lena and her tutor. If we consider the demographics of telecourse students (more than 73% of distance students are over 23 years old, 68% are female, and over 50% are married with family
responsibilities), then we can see that Lena's economic and educational needs stand in for the needs of the typical telecourse student. This televised character of a working, minority mother who is struggling financially while attending school is a symbolic rendering of a conventional telecourse student. As such, she is meant to appeal to the typical television viewer who would naturally see herself in Lena. When Lena takes the tentative steps toward achieving her professional and emotional goal of entering the legal field, she represents the viewer who is also taking steps toward a professional and emotional goal simply by enrolling in the telecourse.

This form of representation helps us understand the telecourse's role as an educational tool. Unlike the community of classroom students, in which students demonstrate their personality traits and unique qualities, the telecourse creates an anonymous community, in which students are at best reduced to student identification numbers or mere names on a list and at worst silent and invisible. In such a case, the imaginative images on television stand in for the real-life, flesh-and-blood student who is never manifest in a classroom. In other words, the televised material replaces the real person who has real struggles with an imaginative representation of that person. This sense of representation, in which the imaginative character acts as a surrogate for the real-life student, takes on a greater importance when we consider that in addition to being displaced from the conventional communal space of learning, the typical telecourse student is also marginalized academically, culturally, and economically. The televised representation enacts a way for the student to leave the economic fringe and enter what can be considered the mainstream. For example, Lena's phrase, "I have been fascinated
by the law," indicates that in addition to seeking a job that makes more money, she also seeks to fulfill a long-unattainable intellectual and professional goal. In this respect, the telecourse addresses the sorts of comments made by one of my students: *I am taking this course [. . . because] it's an important form of communication. It can literally open or shut doors.* In both the vignette and this student’s words, we hear echoes of Robert Pattison's claim, "The manipulation of language is a means of controlling the world [. . .]. Literacy of this sort is power" (209). In *A Writer's Exchange*, when the tutor responds to Lena, "I think if I were the employer I would want to interview you. Good work, Lena," the telecourse establishes the political and practical position that effective writing in standard written English opens the door to productive and happy employment.

V

To Conclude: Subjects for Further Analysis

These descriptions of the PCC and DCCCD courses demonstrate that there are a number of advantages to teaching composition via telecourse. I shall develop more fully my discussion of the benefits of telecourse instruction in the first part of Chapter 4, but among the advantages are the following: First and foremost, such courses provide a solid educational experience to students who may not otherwise have access to a college-level education. The sorts of students taking such telecourses often have much to gain by understanding how to use standard written English in both the classroom and the job setting, and both the PCC and DCCCD courses present useful instruction in academic writing across the curriculum and in a variety of occupational writing. A second benefit
of the telecourses is found in the DCCCD courses, where students have the valuable opportunity to see and hear many of today's leading scholars in English studies and composition. Third, the DCCCD televised material provides students with role models from both genders and a wide range of ages and ethnicities. Fourth, the material in both courses is presented in an interesting format that keeps the viewers' interest.

There are, however, a number of disadvantages to teaching writing via telecourses. Simply put: I am not convinced that such courses teach students to think critically, either about language or their place in a democratic society. More specifically, I suggest the following as starting points for the later analysis of the implications of telecourses:

1. Even though most scholars and teachers agree that writing instruction is a communal activity, these courses rely on a foundational/banking system of education that neglects collaborative learning.

2. Students in these telecourses are taught prescriptions for effective writing, but they are not given instruction in what many consider a primary goal of college-level composition courses: to learn how to do a cultural critique of the wide range of texts with which we are all confronted daily, including film, television, academic prose, imaginative literature, radio, and commercial and political advertisements.

3. Because the courses, particularly the DCCCD courses, focus significantly on occupational writing, they reify existing social relations that prepare students to be unquestioning and uncritical producers and consumers of commodities. The
telecourses do not provide opportunities for students to learn to interrogate the methods by which the media, mass education, and capitalist ventures enmesh them. As I will argue more fully in Chapter 5, these telecourses, rather than providing an opportunity to interrogate contemporary cultural, political, and social relations, instead re-inscribe the American trope of the self-reliant individual, whose economic, social, and political disadvantages are merely his or her private, individual concern and not a result of prevailing cultural and material forces.

4. Finally, as I suggested in Chapter One, the system of teaching English studies via telecourse may very well lead to the further exploitation of teachers, a point to which I shall return in the Epilogue.

NOTES

1 For a review of my teaching methodologies, see the following articles: “Teaching Note: Dreamworlds.” (Radical Teacher 46 1995: 53-4); “Journal Response Groups.” (California English Winter 1993: 13-15+); and “We Think Walls: Public Writing in the Composition Classroom.” (Innovation Abstracts Winter 1993).

2 Below is a portion of the syllabus for Writing 100:

Mid-Term and Final Exam: These tests will have two parts. One part will be similar to the workbook exercises and will test your knowledge of mechanics and punctuation. The second part will be a timed, in-class writings. You will be given a choice of topics on which to write, and you will have a set amount of time to create developed and complete written responses. These are designed to prepare you for pressure writing situations, as well as test your ability to incorporate elements of the previous lessons.

Portfolio: At the end of the semester, you will turn in three re-written versions of three early assignments turned in for a grade. These re-written versions are meant to be substantially revised versions of papers that you were not happy with earlier in the semester. Each portfolio paper must be between three and four pages in length.

The goal of the portfolio is to incorporate the skills you learn throughout the semester with the writing you did early in the course. You will select three of the papers you’ve written during the semester, and revise them according to the skills you’ve learned in the course and the comments I’ve written on your papers. Each of the three portfolio papers will have stapled to it the previous graded draft. The grade you get on the final portfolio version will replace the grade on the earlier version. I expect that each portfolio essay will have an interesting and informative introduction, an appropriate conclusion, and a series of fully developed paragraphs. Each portfolio paper must be between three and four pages in length.
In addition to your graded assignments, you will write in a journal three times a week. Each entry should take at least fifteen minutes and should be about a handwritten page long. The journal is not a diary—that is, it is not a simple record of what you did that day or how you feel about what you had for breakfast. It is meant to be a building block for your essays. I will collect journals twice during the semester, and you will be graded on how much effort you put in your journal.

Each week, then, you are required to write on three topics:

1) A response to the reading assigned from the Evergreen text for that week. Write brief but thoughtful answers to at least two of the questions at the end of every essay you read. (Note that you do not have an assigned reading for every week. You are only required to write responses to what I have assigned).
2) A response to a front-page newspaper article or an editorial;
3) A self-reflective response to how you handled your most recent writing assignments.

NOTE: Even though I would like a consistent pattern of writing, I know that writing on the same things all the time gets pretty boring. If you want, you can substitute a free-write on any topic of your choice for any of the assigned topics ten times throughout the semester.

I suggest further that you use your journal as a place to take notes from class, take notes from the texts, and to practice your writing.

The support staff consist of a handful of full-time and part-time temporary workers supervised by a member of the administration. Their responsibilities include coordinating all mailings between students and instructors for the thirty-plus telecourses, scheduling and administering exams, and handling student inquiries.

It should be noted that advances in computer-assisted instruction and lower price points for computer systems will enable greater access to the many forms of interaction capable with computer networks. I discuss some of these methodologies at some length in Chapter Four.

Thirty-nine percent (39%) of telecourses used fifteen to sixteen hours; thirty-nine percent (39%) used eleven to fourteen hours, and sixteen percent (16%) used seven to ten hours. Three percent (3%) of courses require less than seven hours of video (Brey, table 3.6, page 19).

See my essay, "How do Theories of Collaborative Learning Apply to Teaching Writing via Television?" The Distance Educator. Winter. (1996): 13-16.

I shall return to this point in Chapter 4, when I present solutions to some of the problems endemic to telecourses.

See Shor, particularly 167, 181, and 207.

In this respect, teaching via telecourse is similar to teaching on-line. On-line, the written word is paramount and the teacher must be accurate and thorough in commenting on student work. See Chapter 4 for a more involved discussion of on-line teaching.

The facts and statistics about Dallas Telecourses in this section are taken from an un-attributed promotional package disseminated by the Dallas County Community College District's R. Jan LeCroy Center for Educational Telecommunications.

The DCCCD English courses enroll about four times the number of students that the PCC courses enroll, perhaps of consequence of Dallas County's significantly larger population base. In contrast to the more populated Dallas County, Pima County has a population of roughly 758,000. For more detailed information on the population of Dallas County, see http://www-txsdc.tamu.edu/txpop96.html. February 15, 1999. For more information on Pima County's population, see http://dizzy.library.arizona.edu/users/kollen/popesht.htm. February 15, 1999.

I hasten to add that although only three people were directly involved with the production, other individuals did assist. Particularly helpful was Dan Davidson, a tenured PCC mathematics teacher who has developed and taught a number of math and computer science telecourses and Internet courses.

See, for instance, her article published under the name Harryette Stover, "Teaching Writing by Television" (Teaching English in the Two-Year College 13 1986, 267-72) in which she describes the benefits and problems of telecourse instruction. See also "Educating Rita: American Style" (Teaching English in the Two-Year College 13 1986, 46-50).
It should be noted that The Writer's Exchange study guide is more directive than any material we use at Pima. In contrast to the DCCCD courses, the PCC courses have no course-specific study guide. Instead, the syllabus announces the schedule, and the televised material provides the students with information that enables them to work through the specific lessons presented in the course textbook, The St. Martin's Guide. The fact that the Writing telecourses do not have a course-specific study guide may be related to economics: PCC will not offer any funding for such a product. Consequently, any teacher who creates a special study guide must do so on his or her own time.

I thank Ken McAllister for pointing out that the term “course management” is itself a valuable term to interrogate. On the one hand, the term “management” implies the need to manage (to discipline, to regulate) teachers so that they can in turn regulate and discipline their students. The term also suggests a Fordist, corporate model for education: instead of having individual teachers leading students through an individualized educational process, the telecourse system must rely on an efficient and well-maintained management system that creates structure.

As is the case with all the quotations from the telecourses, the quotations are my transcriptions from the televised material; they are not taken from a script.

Just as in my courses, a glaring omission is web-based writing. While many of the writing situations depicted in the DCCCD telecourse reflect the fact that most writing is done via word-processing and personal computers, none of the writing situations address web-based writing.


Of course, such an interview would really fit much better earlier in the semester, but I had not developed the idea earlier. Because of budget constraints, there is no opportunity to edit earlier televised sessions. Consequently, the Writing 100 students do not view this interview, and the Writing 101 students do not see it until the final third of the semester.
CHAPTER 3

USING TELECOURSES TO TEACH AMERICAN LITERATURE

Introductory Remarks

I concluded the previous chapter with the assertion that the composition telecourses are rooted in a pedagogy that both emphasizes the writing process and champions a functional view of literacy and academic discourse. The courses that I have developed address correctness of standard written English, error elimination, and writing across the curriculum; the nationally distributed course emphasizes occupational writing and the social dynamics of audience, author, and purpose. I will return to these courses in Chapter 4 to offer solutions to the problems that arise from the lack of interaction in such courses. In this chapter, I turn my attention to telecourses that teach literature, specifically two telecourses that emphasize American literature, *Literary Visions* and *Voices and Visions*.

This chapter is designed, first, to provide a comprehensive description of how the televised material presents the literary lessons and, second, to demonstrate the advantages and disadvantages of the material. On the positive side, both *Literary Visions* and *Voices and Visions* provide excellent introductions to the authors and the imaginative literature, presenting a range of critical responses to the literature. These courses successfully model for the viewer certain reading skills and interpretive methods for appreciating and understanding literature. On the negative side, I believe that the televised material should not be considered a replacement for traditional classroom literary studies because it is
fundamentally flawed: it becomes immediately outdated, it cannot provide for the sort of interpersonal interaction that comprehensive literary study requires, and it presents a perspective on the literature that is rooted in biographical and New Critical methodology, often at the expense of examining the cultural work of the text.¹

_Literary Visions—Reading and Writing About Literature_ is an introduction to short fiction, poetry, and drama that utilizes twenty-six thirty-minute television programs. _Literary Visions_ focuses primarily on American authors, secondarily on British and Irish writers, with a sprinkling of classical texts, such as Sophocles' _Oedipus the King_. Developed by INTELECOM, a producer and distributor of telecourses in a variety of disciplines, in association with the Instructional Telecommunications Council, _Literary Visions_ was produced by Maryland Public Television. Production was completed on _Literary Visions_ in 1992, and the first PBS release was in the autumn of that year.² Students in _Literary Visions_ are exposed to three primary texts: the televised material and two books, a literature anthology and a study guide. The recommended anthology is _Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing_, Fifth Edition, edited by Edgar V. Roberts and Henry E. Jacobs (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997). The study guide is Elizabeth Penfield's _Study Guide: Literary Visions_, Third Edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998). Faculty who teach _Literary Visions_ are given the _Literary Visions Faculty Manual_, published (with no author attribution) by INTELECOM in 1997.

The other telecourse on which I will focus, _Voices and Visions: A Television Course in Modern American Poetry_, uses thirteen, one-hour films on thirteen American poets.
According to the PBS/Annenberg web page for *Voices and Visions*, the telecourse was produced jointly by (the now-defunct) New York Center for Visual History and the South Carolina Educational Television Network. The project co-directors were Lawrence Pitkethly, the Executive Producer for the series and the Director of The New York Center for Visual History, and Ruth Christenson Sproat, the Director of Higher Education for South Carolina ETV Network. The New York Center for Visual History supplied the Senior Producer (Jill Janows) and the Series Executive (Robert Chapman). The senior literary consultant was Helen Vendler of Harvard University. Perhaps in an effort to establish her authority with a non-academic audience, the web page announces that Ms. Vendler is also the poetry critic for *The New Yorker*. Production on the course was completed in 1987, and the course was first released in 1988.

In 1997, according to the PBS/Adult Learning Service Catalog, the *Literary Visions* curriculum package cost an institution $500 plus $20 per student. This cost includes taping and duplication rights for the videocassettes, as well as the faculty manual and study guide. Test items and answer keys are available on diskette at $25 per set. An Off-Satellite Taping License, which allows institutions to record the series of programs as they are fed via satellite, costs the Adult Learning Service members $200 and non-members $300; an Off-Air Taping License, which allows institutions to record the programs as they are broadcast or cablecast, costs $200. However, by September 1999, the *Literary Visions* web page announced $389 as the cost for the curriculum package, which includes twenty-six half-hour programs on thirteen cassettes, the teacher's guide, and the right to duplicate one set of videos. The video series alone, consisting of twenty-
six half-hour programs on seven cassettes, costs $199. (The updated web page makes no mention of the test diskette, or of the fees for recording via satellite.) The course textbook costs $58.95, the study guide costs $35, and the teacher’s guide costs $15. Thus, a student is expected to spend almost $95 for the study guide and textbook. In addition, students at many schools must pay an additional technology fee for distance education courses. For example, David R. Kasso, associate vice-president for technology for the University of Colorado System, is quoted in a Chronicle of Higher Education article on distance education as saying that distance education students are willing to pay a tuition surcharge: "They were willing to pay the $100 for the convenience of not having to go downtown, park, and pay baby sitters."5

The Voices and Visions curriculum package costs an institution $389 and includes all thirteen, one-hour cassettes, a faculty guide, and the right to duplicate one set of videos. Each one-hour program costs $39.95 when sold separately, and four one-hour programs on one cassette costs $69.95. If an institution purchases the satellite feed instead of the cassettes, the cost is $500 per term and $20 per student. The course textbook costs $43, the study guide costs $20, and the Faculty/Administrator's Manual costs $15. In addition, the material is available on CD-ROM for $199.95. As the Voices and Visions web page says, "This new CD-ROM version of Voices & Visions includes all 13 video programs, interactive exercises, and tests. An additional CD-ROM contains software for tracking students' progress through the lessons."6

Teachers of Voices and Visions are given a Faculty/Administrator's Manual, published in 1987, that describes the course components. One such component is the
Voices and Visions Study Guide for students and faculty, edited by Alice Rabi

Lichtenstein (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1987). According to the Faculty Manual, the Study Guide begins with a preliminary unit on reading and appreciation of poetry. Each of the following 13 units focuses on the individual poet featured in the corresponding television program.

Each of these units includes: background information on the poet and his work, a guided reading of a key poem, journal writing and other activities for before, during and after viewing the film, other activities and assignments, and a self test. (3)

The Faculty Manual also suggests that the telecourse teachers use two textbooks:

In addition to the many anthologies of American poetry that might be coordinated with the series, a newly published text/anthology reprints most of the poems quoted or discussed: Modern American Poets: Their Voices and Visions, by Robert DiYanni, New York, Random House, 1987 [. . .]. This volume also contains an essay on reading verse and a brief review of such fundamentals as voice, diction, imagery, figures of speech, symbols, sounds, rhythms and structures. In addition to works by the featured poets, it includes selections by contemporary writers influenced by one or more of them. (3).

A new collection of critical essays has been published as a companion to the television series: Voices and Visions: The Poet in America, edited by Helen Vendler, New York: Random House, 1988 [. . .]. This volume--lavishly illustrated with photographs, artwork and manuscript facsimiles—is recommended as a text for advanced-level undergraduates, graduate students and faculty, or as an introduction to the use of secondary sources in literary studies. Its more than 160 illustrations provide further material for exercises and discussion. (3-4)

Students in both Voices and Visions and Literary Visions are thus exposed to a range of texts: an anthology containing the imaginative literature; a study guide containing lessons, exercises, and answers; advanced critical essays; and the televised material.

Annenberg/CPB Multimedia Collection and PBS Adult Learning Services distribute both literature telecourses to schools and colleges across the country.  In a private email
exchange with me, Sylvia Scinta of PBS/Adult Learner Services writes that “Literary Visions is one of our top 15 telecourses,” reaching “over 150” two- and four-year colleges. Detailed information is treated with privacy, Scinta says, but “Literary Visions is used primarily by 2 year institutions as an English 102 course” and “Voices and Visions is usually taught as a 200-300 level english [sic] course.”

According to Scinta, then, *Voices and Visions* is generally used in advanced courses at four-year schools, while *Literary Visions* is taught primarily in two-year schools.

Although there are some differences in the structure of the televised material in both courses, these courses share several fundamental qualities. I turn now to a description of the televised material in order to examine these qualities.

I

*Literary Visions*

The PBS Adult Learning Services Telecourse Catalog provides a clear description of the televised material in *Literary Visions*:

Organized around three major genres of literature--short fiction, poetry, and drama--the television programs examine literary elements such as character, plot, and symbolism. Host, Shakespearean actress Fran Dorn, identifies these elements within dramatizations of literary works. Commentary from noted critics contributes the multiple perspectives that would be found in classroom discussion. Contemporary authors James Dickey, August Wilson, Maxine Hong Kingston and Tillie Olsen, among others, discuss their inspiration and the craft of creative writing. (np)

Before continuing with the description of the telecourse, I would like to pause to consider this passage, for it holds implications for both of the literature telecourses.
The catalog suggests that the "noted critics" provide the "multiple perspectives that would be found in classroom discussion." This statement implies that the importance of a "classroom discussion" is that students talk amongst themselves, offering various points of view and different takes on the topic at hand. As I have tried to make clear throughout this dissertation, the single biggest difference between a telecourse and a classroom course is that students in a telecourse are isolated from their peers, their teachers, and the larger educational institution. In contrast to classroom students, telecourse students do not have the opportunity to engage in either the good-natured fellowship of a classroom community or the intellectual debates that occur in classrooms. This is particularly true in literature telecourses where students cannot share interpretations, argue amongst themselves about the various meanings of a given literary text, or provide either each other or the teacher with alternative perspectives. In a composition telecourse, at least, students can write and rewrite in an effort to manipulate their own texts to their own satisfaction. In a literature telecourse, by contrast, students are reduced to the much more passive role of reading the imaginative literature, watching other people talk about it, and reading a study guide that leads them to a "correct" interpretation. Regardless of the number of experts who offer "multiple perspectives" on television, the fact is that the students are not the ones creating these differing perspectives. Students do not converse with each other; they do not conflict with each other. They do not negotiate language, they do not negotiate personalities, and they do not practice the essential skills of dialogic discourse. Instead, the telecourse merely transmits these "multiple perspectives" to the passive viewer. Consequently, telecourse students are made into the receptacles that
Paulo Freire disparages and that some television theorists claim is the lot of all television viewers.

Having criticized the nature of the telecourse, I hasten to add that both *Literary Visions* and *Voices and Visions* make good faith efforts to simulate the multiple perspectives that may be found in the ideal classroom. The televised material in these national courses does indeed feature a wide range of men and women. In this respect, the courses, like the composition course *A Writer's Exchange* (and unlike the telecourses I have developed), represent a significant portion of the many ethnic, religious, and racial groups that comprise the United States. In my opinion, this effort at inclusion is laudable: not only will many students find in the televised figures role models, both artistic and professional, but students are afforded cultural perspectives with which they may not otherwise have contact.  

**The Televised Material**

In terms of the televised format itself, *Literary Visions* utilizes a single host to lead the viewer through each televised session. The opening credits for each show end with a young, Anglo child flying a kite against a bright blue sky, suggesting, perhaps, limitless possibilities and the exuberance of innocence. The kite scene cuts to the program proper, which begins with the program host, Fran Dorn, speaking to the camera from a studio set that looks like an upper-middle-class home. Throughout the open floor-plan, carpeted floors harmonize with the tastefully decorated walls, while an assortment of books lie scattered on top of fine wood tables and in bookcases. Dorn, a soft-spoken African-
American woman who wears finely tailored clothing and glittering jewelry, acts as the viewer's guide through each segment. At times she simulates a classroom teacher, presenting brief lectures on important literary terms and offering examples and interpretations. The ALS Telecourse Catalog seeks to establish Dorn's credibility by describing her as a Shakespearean actress, and, indeed, Dorn comes across as well-read and fully informed about the course material, equally comfortable defining literary terms, introducing biographical information about the authors, or offering personal comments on the imaginative literature. As a viewer, I find her presence soothing. In her kindness and solicitude, she appears almost stereotypically maternal, overseeing not only the televised material, but also my own reaction to that material. For example, when the video presents Dorn in reaction shots, such as when she chuckles at a humorous scene in a given dramatization, I feel as if I am supposed to react to the televised material in the same way. In this respect, her viewing experience stands in for the viewer's viewing experience in much the way a laugh-track of a situation comedy is designed to stimulate a viewer's own laughter.

At the beginning of a typical televised lesson, Dorn tells an anecdote that revolves around the up-coming lesson, and then she introduces the major literary devices to be taught. She offers terse definitions of the devices (such as symbolism, allegory, plot, and character) while the televised images parallel her points. After discussing the main literary terms, Dorn introduces the next stage of the televised lesson, a dramatization of the literary piece. As we shall see below, these skillful dramatizations are generally broken into a number of segments, with each segment interrupted by interviews with
literary scholars who offer interpretations of the text. After the final segment of the
dramatization, Dorn returns on-screen and reiterates the main points of the lesson, after
which she demonstrates how a contemporary writer makes use of the same literary
devices. The contemporary author is then interviewed against contemporary footage that
parallels the topic in question. (For instance, during an interview with the noted Native
American author N. Scott Momaday, Momaday speaks off-camera while panning shots
of the southwestern desert fill the screen. The image of the desert appears to accord not
only with the conventional, even stereotypical, depictions of Native Americans but with
the subject of Momaday's conversation, his book, *House Made of Dawn.*) The guest
scholars offer their impressions, and then Dorn concludes the session by reiterating the
main points.

At the beginning of each televised lesson, Dorn acquaints the viewer with a literary
term. For example, in Lesson 9, "Suggested Meanings: Symbolism and Allegory in Short
Fiction," Dorn tells a story about her childhood relationship to a glass of water. She
comments that a glass of water has become her "private symbol of frustration" and she
moves her private observation to a larger lesson on symbolism: "When I see an object
that appears at significant moments, I ask, does this thing represent an essential part of
the story? Symbols are remarkably compact. Think about how many things an author
can convey simply by exploring the symbol of water." She sits on a sofa, and the
camera closes in on her earnest face: "We all begin in a sea of life-giving water, and we
owe our continued existence to its presence," she says, as the video image cuts from the
close-up of her to a montage sequence involving water: first, an image of a fetus
suspended in amniotic fluid, then a rushing stream, and a person bending low to sip from the water, and, finally, more footage of the fast-flowing stream. "We have come to see water as a universal symbol of life itself because it is so intimately connected to our survival [...] and we can explore that life through the symbol of water." She continues this extended essay on water as a literary device. Sometimes it sweeps us along, she says, sometimes it is stagnant, even muddied as we search to see what lies below the surface. All the while, the viewer sees video footage of various bodies of water that accord with Dorn's descriptions, such as a roiling wooded stream or a brackish and muddy pool. The goal is to introduce the viewers to the literary term symbolism by engaging their attention with both Dorn's story and the televised images.

As a viewer, I find these sorts of introductions compelling. However, I also find the pace somewhat slow; this may be accounted for by my knowledge of literary symbolism, though it may also be because I am conditioned to the rapid pace of contemporary television. Nonetheless, the pattern has proved successful. Literary Visions received the 1993 Golden Eagle Award from the Council on International Nontheatrical Events "Cine," and the film, "Lesson 5--The Story's Blueprint: Plot and Structure in Short Fiction," received both the 1992 Silver Plaque Award at the Chicago International Film Festival and the 1992 Bronze Plaque Award at the Columbus International Film and Video Awards. Because Literary Visions advertises Lesson 5 as a significant achievement, it will provide us with a representative sample of the way the telecourse teaches literature.
II

*Literary Visions: Lesson 5—The Story's Blueprint: Plot and Structure in Short Fiction*

According to the *Study Guide*, the goal of the lesson is to "understand how plot arises from action, brings out conflict, and relates to structure in the short story" (Penfield 66). The *Study Guide* tells students how to approach the televised material and prescribes a series of assignments to be completed before, during, and after viewing the video. In an effort to make the viewing experience an active one, the students are required to do a significant amount of work to prepare for each televised lesson. Before viewing, students are asked to review the textbook's material, "paying particular attention to a number of literary terms, such as exposition, complication, crisis, climax, and resolution" (Penfield 73, italics original). They should read Steven Crane's "The Blue Hotel" in order to "follow the dramatization more analytically" (73), and they are asked to list all the conflicts that appear in the story. When students watch the televised material, they are asked to "look for the kind of predictable conflict [found] in various types of formula fiction" (73) and to look for the levels of conflict in the dramatization of Crane's story. As in all the telecourse sessions, students are supposed to take notes while the academic experts talk about the story.

In many ways, the course simulates a typical lecture course, with the expert on stage, performing for the observing student whose task is to record as much of the lecture material as possible. Of course, one difference is that the telecourse student has no access to these lecturers. In a lecture hall, the student can raise a hand, ask a question,
receive clarification, and in some way contribute to the intellectual encounter. Even a shy student can approach the lecturer afterwards, or at least discuss the lecture with fellow students. On many campuses, such lectures are augmented by weekly breakout sections, in which a graduate student Teaching Assistant engages in seminar discussions. In the telecourse, by contrast, the student is left simply to receive the information, with no opportunity to interact with the "noted critics" or "contemporary authors" who are advertised as offering valuable "multiple perspectives." In this setting, there is no communal construction of knowledge, just a one-sided transmission of information.

After working on Crane, students are asked to review "Andre Dubus' 'The Curse' to increase [their] understanding of the interview on the video" (73). In addition, they are asked to listen for "mention of the different techniques a writer can use to provide a story's structure." Students are also required to read Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path" and Tom Whitecloud's "Blue Winds Dancing," although neither of these two short stories are part of the televised material. Finally, they are asked to summarize what the televised critics say about Crane's story and then list the major points made by Andre Dubus.

According to the Study Guide, after watching the televised session, the students are asked to complete a series of writing assignments, as well as a self-test consisting of multiple-choice questions and three short essay questions on three of the four short stories in the chapter. As these assignments indicate, the telecourse is designed so that students are required to utilize a number of learning styles: they have to read the textbook, they have to view the video, they have to listen to the video, and they have to write summaries of the televised material. Although the basic act of watching television is primarily a
passive experience, the course requirements are structured so that the telecourse becomes
more of an active experience in which the students engage with the texts using a variety of methods.

After Dorn introduces the main terms in each televised lesson, she establishes a context for the up-coming lesson. For instance, in Lesson 5, in order to demonstrate that many genres have structural conventions she narrates in voice-over a series of clips from black-and-white Western films. In the case of a Western, she points out, a formula is established by the use of black and white hats, the saloons, the horses, and the guns. According to the study guide, this lesson is designed for students to learn how to "discriminate among action, plot, and conflict"; "differentiate among levels of conflict"; and "define exposition, complication, crisis, climax, and resolution" (Penfield 66). To this end, Dorn defines these terms, while the interviewed experts further explain the terms in relation to the stories under consideration.

In order to define "plot" and "structure" and prepare the students for Crane's short story, Dorn says that Western films grew out of the "melodramatic dime novels" where characters were "supposed to get in and out of as many scrapes as possible." While she talks, the viewer sees a well-worn copy of the title page to Owen Wister's 1902 novel, The Virginian. Dorn says that Wister's novel "depicted the American West as a frontier where American dreams can be born again." The image cuts from a close-up of Dorn to a panning shot of an empty saloon, poker chips and playing cards scattered on a green felt gambling table. The camera pans slowly from a still-smoking cigar resting in an ash tray to a cowboy hat perched on a chair-back, finally ending in close-up of a colt revolver that
lies on the circular table top. All the while, a voice-over reads a passage from early in the novel, ending with a drawling rendition of Wister's well-remembered line, "When you call me that, smile."

The image cuts to a reaction shot of Dorn in her nice living room as she begins to explain conventional patterns in storytelling: the exposition which establishes the storyline, the complication which begins the major conflict, the crisis, the climax, and, finally, the resolution. "Most narratives vary the order to add excitement," she says. She then introduces Crane's short story, "The Blue Hotel," saying that it provides a good example of these terms at work. She tells the viewer that Crane's sources for the story are a barroom fight he witnessed while in Nebraska and a blue hotel that he saw while passing by train through Kearney, Nebraska. She offers this biographical material as fact; she does not say that this material is taken from Crane's first biographer, Thomas Beer, nor does she tell the viewer that the specifics of Beer's account are under question by contemporary scholars.¹³

The next televised image is the first of four separate dramatizations of portions from Crane's story. This first scene begins with a master shot of four men playing cards in the cramped front room of the Nebraska hotel: a Swede, travelling west for the first time; an Easterner, balding, with glasses and a business suit; a cowboy, a stock western character with tall Stetson and rugged outdoor wear; and young Scully, the hotel proprietor's son. A heavy snow falls outside the windows, making the tiny room seem claustrophobic. As in the printed version of Crane's story, the Swede slowly unravels during the game, accusing the cowboy and young Scully of wanting to kill him. The Swede stalks upstairs,
and the scene ends with the Easterner explaining to young Scully that the Swede has been influenced by dime-store novels so much that he believes he is now in the wild West of those fictions. The dramatization ends, and while the film lingers on the Easterner's face for a few seconds, a voice-over from Dorn contextualizes this portion of the film: "Stephen Crane offers us little exposition. Some characters don't even have names." She then transitions to the interviews with academic experts: "For Benjamin DeMott of Amherst College, this lack of motivation leads to an unbelievable plot." The televised image cuts from the still of young Scully to an interview with an older Anglo man who sits in a conventional academic office, with books on a shelf in the background and papers scattered on a desk in the foreground. DeMott's presence begins the televised conversation between the academic experts, whose disparate comments have been edited to make it appear that the speakers are in dialogue with each other. The viewer is left outside the conversation, and Dorn becomes the viewer's surrogate as she attempts to make sense of the various comments by the experts.

For example, DeMott says, "The problem of the plot--you haven't got anything in the way of motivation. You don't know what's going on with the Swede." When DeMott finishes speaking, the image cuts to critic Mary Poovey, a familiar face in the Literary Visions material. In a voice-over, Dorn reintroduces Poovey to the viewer and says that Poovey disagrees with DeMott: "But Mary Poovey of Johns Hopkins thinks 'The Blue Hotel' is successful in creating a plot with minimal character development." After Dorn's introduction, Poovey develops her own argument: "Well, part of the expectations that the Swede brings stem from dime-store novels [. . .]." She continues, and when she finishes,
the camera lingers on Poovey for just a moment while Dorn’s voice-over introduces the
next academic expert: "For Gregory Ulmer of the University of Florida, Crane twists the
typical more than dime store novels." The image then cuts to Ulmer in his book-lined
office. "The Swede's behavior is very much a critique of something which happens
today, where our stereotypes [... ] govern our behavior.

After Ulmer, we return to the dramatization: the group plays cards and the Swede
accuses young Scully of cheating. The characters file through the hotel door, presumably
to fight in the snow. The camera fades out, then back in to a dramatic, low-angled shot of
a pair of snow-covered boots as they step into a bar. The camera tracks upwards, ending
in a close-up of the bruised face of the triumphant Swede. He tramps to the bar and gets
a drink, then picks a fight with the gambler. The Swede is stabbed, falling dead to the
ground. Even knowing the story, the viewer is shocked by the suddenness of his death.
The dramatization is well done: watching the film, I was swept along by the narrative
action—I stopped taking notes and simply followed along to see what would happen. In
this respect, the dramatization provided an excellent example of the literary terms in
question: the televised material moved briskly from initial conflict to complication, crisis,
then climax.

At the conclusion of the climactic fight scene, the camera lingers on the dead Swede
lying on the barroom floor, his features portraying a puzzled innocence at the swiftness of
his death, while Dorn's voice-over introduces the next series of interviews with the
experts: “Although the Swede may imagine the insults, the conflicts of the story are
certainly real and the conflicts and the plot itself are interwoven with the themes of the
story." During the next four minutes, the video cuts between Ulmer and Poovey as they each explain elements of the story. Ulmer offers an analysis that addresses the lesson's main theme of character and plot: "A manifest body of conflict [. . .] embodies a more abstract body of conflict that has to do with the theme of the story. I mean the conflict is so obvious, men go out and they fight, you can't miss it [. . .]. It's really the conflict of a community to an outsider." Following Ulmer, Poovey comments, "Once inside the hotel the men strike up a quintessential, stereotypically male relationship to each other [. . .]. What I find interesting is the way Crane shows us how empty their relationships to each other are." Then Ulmer again: "We can see certain values about, say, masculine relationships, that is, how do men get along together. There are these kinds of codes of behavior that the culture is concerned about, these are categories we think with [. . .] and by embodying these categories (Swedes, Cowboys, Easterners), by using these stereotypes, the story can with great efficiency take us through a complicated argument [. . .] that this culture is thinking about: how to be a man."

In these comments, Poovey and Ulmer move the analysis away from an explanation of literary terms and toward an interrogation of gender roles. Ulmer and Poovey locate the interpretive framework not in the formalist concern with the structure of the plot, which is the announced topic of the televised lesson, but within a framework of the power dynamics of social relations. They acknowledge that the Swede's actions stem from the dime-novel tradition, but they also emphasize that Crane's story is concerned with cultural expectations of masculinity. In this respect, the interpretive conversations in *Literary Visions* emphasize the cultural work of the literary text considerably more than
do the conversations in the poetry telecourse, *Voices and Visions*. The viewer is taught that Crane's story makes use of these stereotypical characters to convey a theme. For Poovey, that theme is "the emptiness of the male-male relationship." For Ulmer, it is that the story presents "how to be a man." Thus, in its insistence on what Ulmer calls the "codes of behavior that culture is concerned about," this segment of the critical conversation seems to move beyond the stated goals of the course—that is, to address plot and structure—and into a cultural critique that examines the way the text portrays masculinity.

After the critical discussion of masculinity, the televised scene cuts to the final dramatization of Crane's story. The Easterner and the cowboy hold a conversation that provides resolution to the story. The Easterner tells the skeptical cowboy that Johnny Scully had been cheating in the card game. He adamantly declares that "every sin is the result of collaboration—you, I, Scully, Old Scully—that fool of a gambler." After accusing himself of being a coward and the cowboy of being a fool, the Easterner stalks out, leaving the cowboy (and the viewer) to contemplate his words.

At the end of the dramatization, the image fades out and then fades in to Dorn's reaction shot. She is somber, seemingly sad at the unnecessary death of the Swede. It is as if she, and by extension the viewer, is implicated in the Easterner's indictment. We viewers are meant to feel as guilty as the Easterner feels. In this respect, the dramatized enactment conveys what has become a standard interpretation of the ending of the story. Fredson Bowers, in his Introduction to the definitive University of Virginia edition of "The Blue Hotel," comments that the Easterner's accusation reveals the "sin of
collaboration” that “unites men [in] their dark complicity” (xcvii). Although the viewers of the dramatization do not ever learn that critics make a similar point with regularity, the dramatization convincingly leads the viewers toward this feeling of shameful complicity and shared culpability. Indeed, as I’ve indicated, as a viewer I found the film so compelling that I stopped taking notes and leaned forward in my seat to watch the scene unfold almost as if I were a witness sitting in the room. After watching the fight scenes and the final conversation between the Easterner and the Cowboy, I stopped the tape; I was emotionally drained from my relationship to the film’s characters and needed to step away from the VCR and television at the story’s ending.

Nonetheless, the academic lesson does continue. Dorn begins a brief review of the literary terms (plot, character, exposition, complication, crisis, climax, and resolution), then picks up a book written by the next author to be studied. While Dorn tells in a voice-over how contemporary writer Andre Dubus manipulates the literary conventions of plot and character, the video cuts to footage of people doing everyday activities on a contemporary city street, then to a man wheeling down an apartment’s hallway in a wheelchair. It is Andre Dubus, who is then interviewed about how he uses characters and situations. The video ends with Dorn providing a summary of the key lessons of this session. This televised session is typical of how the telecourse weaves together canonical literature, contemporary writers, and the commentary of current academic professionals.
Conclusion

I think the televised material does an excellent job of providing the viewer with an engaging analysis of the literature. Fran Dorn provides valuable information regarding the literary lesson, the academic experts are engaging and informative, and the filmed depictions of the imaginative literature are stimulating and provoking. As this example illustrates, the critics move the critical discussion toward cultural critique, in my opinion a strong move, especially for an introductory-level course designed to introduce students to the elements of literary study.

It is important to note, however, that the intellectual lesson relies heavily on the televised re-creation of the imaginative literature. Although students are required to read the literature in the course textbook, the televised re-creation of the literature becomes the central text. In other words, the imaginative literature is replaced as the primary text by the dramatic reproductions. Consequently, the telecourse viewer becomes a student, not of a written text in all its subtleties of language, but of dramatized, enacted language, and the exercise of critical analysis becomes not a literary analysis, but a film study, a very different project than close reading of a literary text.

Consider the telecourse’s presentation of Stephen Crane’s “The Blue Hotel.” I’ve said that I found the dramatization of “The Blue Hotel” stimulating and engaging. However, viewing the scenes provides a very different intellectual experience than reading the story and grappling with Crane’s own prose. For example, the film opens with the characters already in the enclosed space of the hotel’s front room. This immediate intimacy is quite different than the broader opening that Crane offers the
reader. Crane’s story begins with a description of the hotel’s color set against the harsh Nebraska winter:

The Palace Hotel at Fort Romper was painted a light blue, a shade that is on the legs of a kind of heron, causing the bird to declare its position against any background. The Palace Hotel, then, was always screaming and howling in a way that made the dazzling winter landscape of Nebraska seem a swampish hush. (142)

There are a number of points to make about this short passage. Although the film does provide the viewer with a range of details not provided by Crane (a much clearer physical description of the characters, for instance), the filmed representation does not—indeed, cannot—provide the viewer with the depth of meaning provided by Crane in the written text. For example, because the telecourse viewer never sees the blue hotel declaring itself against the “dazzling winter landscape,” the viewer misses the importance of this description. In contrast, the close reader recognizes that Crane’s opening lines locate the story within the tension that exists between the natural world (invoked by the images of heron and winter storm) and the encroaching world of eastern sensibility (as represented by the garishly colored hotel and its association with custom and hospitality). Moreover, the attentive reader will spot the exaggerated understatement in naming the lonesome clap-board the “Palace Hotel.” After all, the simple building on the desolate prairie represents the common and universal, not the palatial and aristocratic that is implied in the name. The reader who recognizes the understatement is situated immediately within an ironic world where not only do the familiar concerns of everyday life occur, but imagination outruns reality.

Take as another example the use of the “light blue” color in the first line of the story. Although the televised images fail to emphasize the importance of this color, critics have
long commented on the color symbolism in the story. In his Introduction to "The Blue Hotel," Fredson Bowers comments on these opening lines thusly:

Though visibility can be snuffed out by a change of weather, the vaunt of color commands the attention of every traveler, whether entering Fort Romper or merely passing through on the train. The proprietor who picked that color 'had performed a feat' which the reader may consider from the admiring Western or the condescending Eastern point of view or which he may judge a mere coxcomb show against the engulfing blizzard. (xcv)

For Bowers, the color blue is important because it forces the reader to negotiate the various interpretive possibilities. Such negotiation, it seems to me, forces the reader to deal immediately with the nature of complicity that drives the story. As Bowers says to conclude his comment on the color of the hotel, "Instead of a straightforward plot of discovery, Crane presented a narrative in which characters and narrator attain to partial truths about an event, but only the reader is able to comprehend its multiplicity" (xcvi). Only a reader's close attention to Crane's detail will recognize why the light blue color resonates throughout the story; the filmic version does not provide the viewer that sort of attention to interpretive detail.17

As yet another example of the fact that the filmic images elide important interpretive possibilities, we read that the hotel "was always screaming and howling"—that is, the hotel was a place where passion and anger were the norm. A few paragraphs later Crane reiterates the hotel's tendency toward conflict rather emphatically when he describes young Scully and the old farmer as they played cards. "They were quarreling," Crane writes. A moment later, fed up with the loud argument between his son and the farmer, old Scully "With a loud flourish of words [. . .] destroyed the game of cards" (143). In these passages, Crane reveals to the reader that the hotel and its inhabitants are
accustomed to conflict but that the conflicts themselves are insubstantial and transitory. Because the reader recognizes this lesson, the tension in the story is heightened when the Swede’s imagination outruns reality during the card game and later at the bar with the gambler. After all, the details provided by Crane in the story’s opening provide the reader with clues enough to recognize that a flourish of words—and not a cold blade—is all it takes to resolve the cause of the animosity.

When watching the filmed representation, we viewers know nothing of the screaming and howling endemic to the hotel, nor do we know the ironic name of the hotel, nor do we recognize Crane’s invocation of the tension between the natural world of the western plains and the growing expansion from the East. Such details add a layer of psychological pressure to the Swede’s reaction to the card game that the film does not provide. To be sure, the film is certainly engaging—recall that on two occasions I stopped taking notes and simply watched the story unfold. However, the experience of watching the film does not allow for the careful inspection of language that is so fundamental to the reading experience.

Film study is certainly a valuable undertaking, but literary analysis, particularly in a teaching moment that is meant to focus on imaginative literature, should be concerned with understanding the writer’s descriptions, not the filmmaker’s depictions of those descriptions. As we seek to understand the implications of teaching literature via telecourse, we must recognize that the televised material teaches the viewer to perform a kind of film study, and not literary analysis.
III

Voices and Visions

I turn now to the telecourse that focuses on American poets, *Voices and Visions*. I will focus first on three written texts: the PBS Adult Learning Service Telecourse Catalog, the *Voices and Visions* internet home page, and the *Voices and Visions* Faculty Manual. Because these three texts are meant to market the course, they provide an important avenue for exploring the implications arising from teaching with the videos.

The PBS Adult Learning Service Telecourse Catalog presents the following description of the televised material:

In every program, careers are richly documented; analysis and visualization abound. Nevertheless, the emphasis in this series is always on the poetry itself. Key works are performed and discussed, their texts displayed by ingenious use of image processors, character generators, computer graphics, and optical animation. Imagery and sound are added, but never permitted to dominate the language. This insistence on poetry as verbal experience is aimed at developing in students a greater enjoyment and understanding of poetry. (np)

Three points are important to note about the rhetoric in this passage. First, this description is designed to appeal to the reader's appreciation of technology. Even if the audience doesn't recognize such terms as "image processors, character generators, computer graphics, and optical animation," the catalog description seeks to assure the potential customers that the technology is cutting-edge, thereby appealing to administrators and faculty who wish their institutions to move to the forefront of educational technology. Second, lest the audience be afraid that the technology will override the poetry, PBS assures the reader that "imagery and sound" are "never permitted to dominate the language." This statement accords with the PBS/ALS
telecourse catalog's stated goal for the course, to develop "in students a greater enjoyment and understanding of poetry." In this respect, the catalog woos the lover of poetry with phrases like, "insistence on poetry as verbal experience" and an "emphasis [...] always on the poetry itself." Such phrases situate the course squarely in the camp of traditional New Criticism and its emphasis on practical criticism. For example, the phrase, "emphasis always on the poetry itself," echoes Cleanth Brooks in *The Well Wrought Urn*, in which he sets forth his agenda of "making the closest possible examination of what the poem says as a poem" (xi). Third, the phrase, "richly documented careers," also situates the poetry within the author's professional life, thereby opening the way for the additional form biographical criticism that takes into account the author's historical time and place. According to this catalog, then, we can conclude that the televised material will emphasize a New Critical attention to form and style, while also focusing on the author's biography and the cultural and historical context of the literature.

This conclusion is born out by the short summaries of each televised session that are presented on the *Voices and Visions* home page, just one of the hundreds of links within the PBS Adult Learning Systems web pages. Because these descriptions are designed to sell the course to faculty and administrators, they help us understand the methods that are valued by the telecourses developers and distributors:

1. **Elizabeth Bishop**
   From childhood in Nova Scotia to travels in Brazil, this program illustrates the geographic spirit of Bishop's life and works with scenes from her poems.

2. **Hart Crane**
   Diverse locations and dramatizations of his life illustrate Crane's poetry and his greatest work "The Bridge."
3. **Emily Dickinson**  
Dramatic scenarios and New England landscapes illuminate the passionate genius of Dickinson, whose poems represent a broad range of imaginative experience.

4. **T.S. Eliot**  
Eliot's life, influence, and poetry from the bold originality of "Prufrock" to the probing, meditative style of "Four Quartets" are explored with photos, archival footage, and discussion with friends, critics, and scholars.

5. **Robert Frost**  
Frost's image as elder statesman is vividly contrasted with his vigorous, poetic exploration of the darker forces of nature and the human condition. Readings and interviews with the poet reveal compelling insights into his work.

6. **Langston Hughes**  
Hughes wrote of the beauty, dignity, and heritage of blacks in America. Interviews, music, and dance performances convey his work and influence, discussed by James Baldwin and biographer Arnold Rampersad.

7. **Robert Lowell**  
Lowell's political passion encompasses much of his greatest poetry. Lowell himself reads from his work. Elizabeth Hardwick, Robert Hass, and others discuss his development and style as illustrated by "Lord Weary's Castle" and "Life Studies."

8. **Marianne Moore**  
Funny and formidable, the paradoxes of the poet and her work are analyzed by critics and friends, including Monroe Wheeler, Grace Shulman, and Patricia Willis. Her most memorable poems display her power of observation and moral force.

9. **Sylvia Plath**  
Friends recall the gifted poet's life and help separate Plath the woman and poet from the mythic figure that has arisen since her death, often obscuring the art and symbolic intent of her powerful poetry.

10. **Ezra Pound**  
The most controversial of American poets, artistic catalyst, legendary confidant, and author of brilliant cantos, Ezra Pound and his poetry and role in the modernist movement are explored by friends and critics.

11. **Wallace Stevens**  
Stevens's flamboyant verbal technique and philosophical vision of American life are beautifully illustrated by archival footage.

12. **Walt Whitman**  
Brilliant readings of Whitman's poems demonstrate his American vision and style and vividly convey their poignance and sheer power. Whitman's sources, including Emerson, the King James Bible, opera, and political oratory, are revealed.

13. **William Carlos Williams**  
"No ideas but in things," Williams's aesthetic dictum sought to capture, not
analyze. A collage of documentary footage, interviews, animation, and
dramatization capture the poet's often visual work and intense life.

Although a few of these summaries address the historical context of the author, most of
them offer general statements on the poet's form and craft. Presumably, then, we viewers
will be exposed to such objective concerns as the "verbal technique" of Stevens, the "art"
of Plath, the "bold originality" and "probing, meditative style" of Eliot, "Williams's
aesthetic dictum," and Whitman's "American vision and style."

Such an emphasis on technique, style, and form is reiterated in the

*Faculty/Administrator's Manual*, which claims the following as goals of the course:

- To introduce students to the life and work of 13 American poets in their historical
  and cultural contexts so that students may see the distinctiveness of each poet as
  well as the connections among the 13;
- To help students read poetry in many distinct styles and voices;
- To provide students with the critical terminology to explore a poet's craft;
- To encourage students to read on their own more poems by these and other poets;
- To enable students to explore their own responses to a variety of poets and to
  explain what in the poem and what in themselves as readers elicits the particular
  response. (3)

Although the course advertises an interpretive methodology weighted towards New
Criticism, the phrase "to enable students to explore their own responses," suggests that
the telecourse will also emphasize a reader-response approach to the imaginative
literature in which the student learns to enjoy the poetry; ideally, the student will leave
the course and continue to read "more poems by these and other poets." In this respect,
the course seems designed to introduce students to the joys of so-called "high art."
However, this reader appreciation is mediated primarily through two interpretive
methods: the first, a formalist emphasis on prosody and, the second, an emphasis on
biographical criticism. Students will learn to enjoy reading poetry when they learn the
"critical terminology" that is necessary "to explore a poet's craft"—the "aesthetic dictum" of William Carlos Williams, and so on. More than a simple focus on prosody, however, the emphasis on "historical and cultural contexts" suggests a range of interpretive possibilities, including such post-structural concerns as feminist analysis, Marxist cultural materialism, deconstruction, and queer theory.

Viewers are exposed to the televised comments of academic experts. The program advisors for *Voices and Visions* are an extraordinary collection of eminent scholars: Clive Driver (Moore), Justin Kaplan (Whitman), Frank Kermode (Eliot), James Laughlin (Pound), Herbert Leibowitz (Lowell), Fran McCullough (Plath), Howard Moss (Bishop), Marjorie Perloff (Williams), Richard Poirer (Frost), Arnold Rampersad (Hughes), Grace Shulman (Moore), Richard Sewall (Dickinson), and Derek Walcott (Crane). In addition to the academic advisors who consult on each featured author, the televised material features academic and literary figures, among whom are Kermode, Perloff, and Rampersad, as well as Sandra Gilbert, Joseph Brodskey, William Pritchard, Hugh Kenner, Amiri Baraka, Gwendolyn Brooks, James Baldwin, Adrienne Rich, Joyce Carol Oates, Kenneth Burke, and Harold Bloom. These people are clearly experts in their field. They are contributors to their disciplines, leading scholars and writers who think and care deeply about their areas of specialty. Without a doubt, they offer valuable information to the viewer.
I turn now to the fourth program of *Voices and Visions*, *Walt Whitman*, in order to examine more closely the ways in which the televised material presents the poetry of Walt Whitman.

**IV**

*Voices and Visions— Program 4: Walt Whitman*

In contrast to *Literary Visions, A Writer's Exchange*, and the two courses that I created, there is no single expert to host *Voices and Visions*. Instead, each video stands alone as a documentary on the authors and their artistry, without a common televised figure to draw connections between the videos. The format for each program is familiar to those who have seen the programming on cable programs like The History Channel, The Learning Channel, or The Discovery Channel. Each video is narrated by an off-camera, seemingly omniscient host who guides us from televised moment to televised moment. As I have indicated, the presentation method in these videos is a mixture of photographic, textual, and video images, coupled with voice-overs and interviews. Where possible, the videos feature footage of the poets themselves. For example, a white-haired, regal-looking Robert Frost is interviewed at his New Hampshire farm, while in another video, Langston Hughes, pipe in hand, chats with an interviewer while sitting at a desk strewn with books and papers. Many of the notable intellectuals and writers who are interviewed have had a personal relationship with the poets. For example, Joseph Brodskey and the Irish poet Seamus Henry are featured in the Frost video, while those interviewed in the Ezra Pound video include Olga Rudge, Ezra
Pound's life-long companion; Mary de Rachewiltz, Pound's daughter; and Basil Bunting, a close friend of Pound's. The Hart Crane video includes interviews with Malcolm Cowley and his wife Peggy Cowley, who had an affair with Crane the same year he committed suicide.

According to the *Voices and Visions Faculty Manual*, the televised segment on Whitman makes extensive use of biographer Justin Kaplan; literary critic Harold Bloom; and poets Galway Kinnell, Allen Ginsberg, and Donald Hall:

Justin Kaplan and Harold Bloom analyze the discrepancies and discontinuities between Walter Whitman, the man, and Walt Whitman, the poet-hero of *Leaves of Grass* [. . .]. Galway Kinnell gives a brilliant reading of several Whitman poems, conveying equally well the exuberance of 'Song of Myself' and the poignance of 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.' Along with Allen Ginsberg, he discusses Whitman's style and shows his language at work. (Purvey 11)

These interviews are embedded in the sort of material traditionally associated with documentaries, including footage of historical and contemporary scenes, period photographs by Matthew Brady and others, several paintings by Thomas Eakins and other artists of the Luminist and Hudson River schools, and footage from John Huston's film, *The Red Badge of Courage* (Purves 11). An actor, Louis Turenne, portrays an elderly Whitman. In addition, the viewer observes videographic presentations of Whitman's verse that are read aloud by Galway Kinnell, including passages from "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," "Song of Myself," "When Lilacs Last in the Doorway Bloom'd," and a portion of his Civil War poetry. The program producers should be commended for exposing the viewer to such an impressive array of American art forms.

As in the *Literary Visions* telecourses, each of the *Voices and Visions* programs begins with a voice-over announcing the primary financial sponsors coupled with the
image of the corresponding corporate and foundation logo. In the Whitman film, the voice-over announces that funding is provided by the Annenberg/CPB project and the National Endowment for the Humanities, with additional funding by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities, and the New York Times Company Foundation. Just as the goal of many beer commercials or automobile advertisements is to equate the given product with certain social values, one effect of the opening montage is to suggest that if we viewers watch the sponsored program, we will be a part of the national cultural elite. These logos and titles afford a certain credibility to the program, asserting an intellectual authority that identifies the program with intellectual leaders who are well-connected and in the economic upper class. According to their web page, for instance, the Vining Davis Foundations “are interested in public television as an educational medium” and provide up to S500,000 in funding for a wide range of secondary and higher education programs.21 Even without this detailed information, the viewer of both Literary Visions and Voices and Visions knows immediately upon seeing the corporate and foundation logos that the following television program is far removed from the conventional TV shows sponsored by lité beer and pick-up trucks.

After the introductory logos announcing the program sponsors comes the Voices and Visions telecourse logo, after which the program proper begins. The televised material cuts to a panning, black-and-white, bird's-eye view of a peaceful river—although unnamed, the river appears to be the Hudson River just north of Manhattan. The filmic
image shifts to a photograph of the original copy of *Leaves of Grass*. The voice of the narrator, Peter MacNicoll, intones: "In 1855 a book appeared that changed the face of world literature." The image shifts again, and the book opens and the leaves are turned as if by a gentle breeze. The voice-over continues as new images fill the screen, this time a panning shot from an airplane flying low over a forest, then over a shoreline, and finally over the thick grass of the ocean beach. "It was unlike any other book that had ever been published. It was a new species, organic, like its title, *Leaves of Grass.*" As the nature images fill the screen, the opening lines of "Song of Myself" are videographically scripted across the screen in white letters, while poet Galway Kinnell reads the words aloud in the voice of an elderly but still strong man: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself./ And what I assume you shall assume,/ for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you." The next lines of the poem appear on screen while Kinnell reads along: "I loaf and invite my soul,/ I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass." Kinnell's voice-over continues reading from "Song of Myself" as the televised image of green grass fades out and is replaced by an establishing shot of a balding and middle-aged white man sitting cross-legged on a wooden dock in Brooklyn, the Empire State Building looming tall across the East River. Text on the screen announces that this is Alan Ginsberg, a poet, but does not tell the audience of his fame as a Beat poet and generational spokesperson. He speaks to the viewer in a casual, conversational tone, relating an anecdote from his high school days, in which his 300-pound teacher read the Whitman line, "I find no fat sweeter than that which sticks to my bones." According to Ginsberg, at that long-ago moment he "realized the enormous
humanity and charm of Whitman, his complete appeal." This appearance by Ginsberg marks the beginning of the interviews with academic experts.

The film continues in this manner, offering short sections of written and spoken passages from Whitman's poetry that are interspersed with commentary and discussion by various experts. Just as in Literary Visions, each expert has been interviewed separately, and their interviews have been spliced together as if they were engaged in a conversation regarding Whitman's biography, his genealogical relationship to American poets, and the sources for the style and content of his poetry. As an example of how the film utilizes this sort of conversation among experts, at one point, poet Galway Kinnell begins speaking about Whitman's influence on American letters. Kinnell's ruggedly handsome face is in close-up, though we can see that he wears a flannel shirt opened at the neck. Indeed, the viewer is struck by how Kinnell's televised image is similar to the flamboyant and rough image that Whitman chose for himself on the title page of the first edition of Leaves of Grass. Kinnell's approximation of that image inspires the audience's trust—we are inclined to believe the contemporary poet who seems to have a certain affinity for Whitman. Kinnell says that while "some people were affected by Whitman, notably Hart Crane [...] it really wasn't until the 1950s that Whitman returned to our poetry. To me, the decisive work was Allen Ginsberg's howl." Following Kinnell's mention of "howl," the image cuts to a black and white still photo of a young Ginsberg while the viewer hears a few lines from the poem: "I saw the best minds of my generation [...]" The image soon cuts to the by-now-familiar face of a bearded Ginsberg, sitting on a dock on the East River. Ginsberg says, "After I wrote howl, I went back to Whitman because I
was interested in how he handled the long line.” The filmed image cuts from Ginsberg to
an image of the first page of *Song of Myself*, then fades to an image of the first page of
*howl*, while Ginsberg says in a voice-over: “He broke open the line so he could talk with
unobstructed breath.” Then comes a quick cut to Kinnell again, who takes Ginsburg’s
point in another direction, “The longer the line, the more the music can build up.”

Kinnell’s comment provides a transitional element, and the film proceeds to a segment on
the ways that the popular operas of the time shaped Whitman’s “chanting.”

These spliced comments offer the illusion that the experts are speaking to one
another. The effect is very much like Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical parlor:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have
long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too
heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the
discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one
present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You
listen for a while, until you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in
your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense;
another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of
your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally’s assistance. However,
the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you
do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.24

The telecourse makes it appear as if the experts are engaged in the conversation,
coming to the defense of one another at one moment, and challenging each other at
another. The problem for the telecourse viewer is that instead of chatting (however
quietly) in the parlor, she is left outside, eavesdropping under an open window while the
selected experts hold forth. Using Burke’s metaphor, the viewer has no oar to dip in the
water, no way to paddle in the waters of intellectual discourse. After all, the viewers of a
one-way, non-interactive telecourse cannot talk back to the televised conversationalists—
nor can they talk amongst each other. In Chapter Four, I shall discuss ways to engage telecourse students in the intellectual conversation by using new computer technologies, such as computer chat rooms and on-line, virtual classrooms. For now, though, it is important to recognize that most telecourse students are relegated to their homes, where they sit alone and try to put together the pieces of the edited conversations among the critics.

Such critical conversations address various dimensions of Whitman's poetic persona, his personal life, and his influence on American letters. For example, at one point Kinnell compares Whitman to both Emily Dickinson and Edgar Alan Poe, arguing that all three were blind to the daily world, with "imaginings of the world somewhere else." The scene cuts to Ginsberg, who claims that Dickinson shared Whitman's emphasis on what Ginsberg calls "intelligent metaphysical detail" but that Dickinson's verse was in "a smaller form" than the more grandiose form of Whitman. In another instance, Kinnell claims that "The King James Bible was the greatest influence on Whitman's prosody," in part because of the Bible's "long flowing cadences of the prose" and the "parallel structure" of repetition and variation. Likewise, we learn from the narrator's voice-over that "political oratory was another great influence." Finally, we viewers are taught that Whitman was influenced the most by the common life of Long Island.

As evidence to support this final claim, the film juxtaposes images from nineteenth-century life with images from the late twentieth century. While the voice-over presents one of Whitman's passages that celebrates the working class of New York, at the same time the video footage segues from a wood-cut engraving of a pig at the butcher's market
to video images of New York City street life in the 1970s. That is, while the narrator reads aloud from section twelve of *Song of Myself* ("The butcher-boy puts off his killing-clothes, or sharpens his knife at/ the stall in the market,/ I loiter enjoying his repartee and his shuffle and break-down./ Blacksmiths with grimed and hairy chests environ the anvil,/ Each has his man-sledge, they are all out, there is a great heat in the fire"), the filmic image is of similar scenes from late twentieth-century New York: a close-up of hands slicing meat at an open-air market, a bearded man working with what looks like telephone cable, and then another bearded rough welding with an acetylene torch. Such matching of Whitman’s poetic descriptions of nineteenth-century New York life with the filmed images of late twentieth-century New York life are common in the telecourse. They appear meant to convince the reader of a timeless quality to Whitman’s work, and, as such, they imply that Whitman is an influential and important spokesman for America.

I use the terms "appear" and "imply" because here the telecourse offers no critical analysis of these lines and instead relies upon the film footage to carry the weight of interpretation. We solitary viewers neither see nor hear the academic experts discuss the meaning of the poem. Moreover, as the case with all telecourses, we viewers have little or no opportunity to discuss the film with either classmates or teacher. Consequently, the telecourse students are led into an interpretation of the literary text by a mixture of voices, videographic text, and filmic images chosen for them by the telecourse developers. Because the televised material offers a mere snippet of Whitman’s verse and provides neither time nor opportunity for any detailed exploration of the poem, our experience of the imaginative literature is limited to what the course provides us: a
collection of people (the Whitman actor and the critics, Bloom, Kinnell, Ginsberg, Kaplan, and Hall); a collection of voices (the narrator’s authoritative voice-over, Hall’s poetic readings, the arguing critics); and the collection of visual images (the still photographs of Whitman, the contemporary video footage of New York life, the close-ups of nineteenth-century paintings, and the pieces of Whitman’s poems videographically scripted across the screen). Indeed, the television program doesn’t even always tell the viewer the poems from which the quotations are taken. If you know Whitman’s poetry well enough, you will recognize the poem—or at least, in the case of “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” you can use the images of the ferries as a clue that guides you to the poem proper. Consequently, just as in the Literary Visions course, it is not the words on a page that provide the reader with interpretive possibilities but the collective power of the televised images that guides our interpretation of the poetry.

Although I am critical of the fact that the telecourses end up teaching a form of film study more than literary study, this is not my primary criticism of telecourse instruction. My primary criticism rests on the point that the televised material presents outdated intellectual material that is often, though not always, parochial in its selectivity. As a way of understanding this issue, I propose that we look more closely at the way the video presents Whitman’s important poem, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.”

The narrator reads the following lines from stanzas two and three of “Crossing” while at the same time the film depicts footage (some in early-century black and white and some in 1970s color) of passengers riding New York ferry boats:

Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to shore, Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,
Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west, and the heights of Brooklyn to the south and east; Others will see the islands, large and small; Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross, the sun half an hour high, A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years hence, others will see them, Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the falling-back to the sea of the ebb-tide [...]

It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not, I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence, Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt, Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd, Just as you are refresh’d by the gladness of the river and the bright flow, I was refresh’d. (116)

The narrator’s voice-over complements the filmed material, particularly the footage of contemporary commuters taking the Staten Island ferry on their early morning way to work. (I say contemporary, but based on the passengers’ clothing and hairstyles, the footage appears to be from the mid- to late-1970s—as I write this, close to a generation ago.)

What are we viewers meant to gain by this scene in the film? How do we use the televised images to help us understand Whitman’s verse? We might say that this clip intends for us to focus on the familiarity Whitman establishes with the reader. As Annette Kolodny points out, the quoted passage, like much of Whitman’s verse, emphasizes the shared experience of poet and reader and produces an intimacy between reader and poet which allows the poet to speak for the reader. The televised material emphasizes Whitman’s linked repetition of the four phrases, “Others will enter,” “Others will watch,” “Others will feel,” and “Others will see,” with the three phrases that close
the quoted section, “Just as you feel,” “Just as any of you is one of a living crowd,” and “Just as you are refresh’d.” Whitman here draws a connection between the “you” who is the reader and the “others” who are of the future. This is yet another version of his claim that begins “Leaves of Grass”: “I celebrate myself, and sing myself;/ And what I assume you shall assume,/ For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you” (25). Even though D.H. Lawrence teases Whitman for his tendency toward what Lawrence calls “uncomfortable universalization” (163), this ability to enter himself into the reader’s spirit and to merge his observations with the reader’s own, has long been recognized as Whitman’s genius.

However, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” contains many more important interpretive possibilities than this particular point—possibilities that the televised reading does not develop for the viewer. For example, even though the telecourse advertises itself as emphasizing the “historical and cultural contexts” of the poetry, we viewers are given no historical context for the poem, nor are we provided with any other hints at interpretation than the simple juxtaposition of contemporary and historical footage. We are not given even the practical information provided by Betsy Erkkila in Whitman the Political Poet that “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” originally appeared as “Sun-Down Poem” in the 1856 edition of Leaves. Furthermore, although the telecourse claims that the televised material focuses on the biographies of the poets, in this scene we are not given any hints that, as Erkkila claims, “the catalyst for the poem was not these rides [the commute Whitman made from Brooklyn to New York across the East River] but a fit of depression he experienced in the mid-1850’s” (142). Consequently, we know nothing about Whitman’s
depression, occasioned, as Erkkila suggests, by both his growing awareness of the implications of his own sexuality and his growing concern with the burgeoning economic expansionism that threatened the nation's stability.  

The televised material seems content to present the poem as evidence of Whitman's universal appeal; however, Erkkila provides a reading that opens the way to a significantly deeper understanding of the biographical and cultural contexts for the poem. "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," according to Erkkila, "marks a turn in Whitman's work [. . .] toward an increasing focus on the problem of social union" (143) and at the same time addresses Whitman's deep personal anxieties regarding his sexuality. Erkkila defends her reading by quoting from a lengthy passage that has been excluded from this televised moment.

In the midst of the passage that Erkkila quotes, in the sixth stanza, Whitman writes,

I am he who knew what it was like to be evil,
I too knitted the old knot of contrariety,
Blabbed, blushed, resented, lied, stole, grudg'd,
Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak" (Whitman 118).

Erkkila concludes that this specific passage is Whitman's admission of "his personal complicity in the evils of his time" (144), namely, the assault upon republican ideology by "robbers, malignants, conspirators, fancy-men, infidels, blowers, brawlers, and bribers" (144). As the question of slavery divided the country and as the nation expanded west, Erkkila contends, Whitman was increasingly concerned that the United States would fracture, split by the competing claims on its newly acquired territory: "By admitting his personal complicity in the evils of his time and by naming them in the
visionary economy of his poem, Whitman seeks to come to terms with the ‘old knot of contrariety’ in body and body politic” (144).

Erkkila further argues that these lines of “confessional verse” (145) reveal the “‘dark patches’ of his sexual feelings for men” (145). “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” Erkkila writes, was occasioned by “Whitman’s sense of himself as part of a marginal, dissembling, and (by the standards of his time) abnormal order of loving men” (145). We viewers are exposed to none of this provocative thinking. Instead, in its emphasis on the shared intimacy between the reader and the poet, the film seems content to reproduce the claim made by many critics, including D.H. Lawrence and F.O. Matthiessen, who argued in 1941 that Whitman “thought of himself as the poet of the city” whose voice fulfills the “romanticism of the future” (543).

Of course, a one-hour film can hardly accommodate all critical claims about an author or his poetry. Indeed, critics may even debate Erkkila’s claims, even though as one reviewer has said, her book has “become a standard reference for those who wish to observe Whitman at work in the political context.”28 Nonetheless, in my opinion, Erkkila provides a much more provocative reading of the poem than the film, focusing as she does on the poem’s concern with the double issues of the expanding nation’s fragility and Whitman’s sexual anxieties.

Although the lengthy televised material regarding this particular poem does not address Erkkila’s claims regarding either American expansionism or homosexuality, my point is not to criticize the film for these omissions. After all, even though Erkkila had made similar assertions in a 1983 article, five years before the telecourse was produced in
1988, her more complete analysis was not published in book form until 1989. However, the fact that the telecourse cannot make use of information presented by Erkkila demonstrates the disadvantage of relying on a telecourse to transmit accurate and timely intellectual material. A conventional classroom teacher can bring Erkkila's material to bear on any discussion of Whitman; in the telecourse, however, the more recent scholarship is omitted. My point is simply this: the telecourse marketing material indicates that the film will address the author's biography as well as the cultural and historical contexts; nonetheless, as this one example indicates, the televised material on Whitman misses opportunities to focus on the political implications of these biographical and cultural contexts for Whitman's poetry. In this respect, the literature telecourse fails to take advantage of the opportunity to examine the text's cultural work that critics like Jane Tompkins find so valuable.

The Treatment of Whitman's Sexuality

I do not wish to suggest that the *Voices and Visions* telecourse elides the very important issue of Whitman's sexuality: it does not. In fact, the televised material discusses the topic quite candidly, and this discussion is one of the few places in the film in which a close textual reading is presented. This segment moves beyond a conversation about the sources for Whitman's style and into a discussion—even an argument—about Whitman's sexuality. A description of that discussion will reveal the ways in which the telecourse utilizes the academic experts to reveal differing accounts of Whitman's life.
and poetry. In addition, a description of this critical conversation will illustrate a number of the general advantages and disadvantages to teaching literature via telecourse.

About half-way into the video, Ginsberg, still sitting on the East River dock with the Empire State Building tall in the background, opens the filmed conversation about Whitman’s sexuality by claiming not only a poetic but an erotic genealogy with Whitman:

He loved his fellows, that was universal. Whether it was genital was another matter. Likely it was, as I know, I’ve slept with Neil Cassidy who slept with Gavin Arthur who slept with Edward Carpenter who described sleeping with Whitman to Arthur, so there was perhaps some possible genital directness there.

The scene cuts to a medium range shot of Harold Bloom, standing in a pleasant study at home, wearing an open-collared dress shirt, with piano and books in the background. Bloom disagrees with Ginsberg’s assertion: "I doubt very much whether Whitman had ever allowed himself to have sexual contact with another human being." Again, the scene cuts, this time to the familiar close-up of Galway Kinnell, who claims:

Probably not until the 1850s did he ever realize he was homosexual. Probably not until then did he have some kind of experience, some kind of sexual contact which must have been extremely powerful for him […] and yet I can’t imagine that he, umm, freely pursued a homosexual life. I imagine on the contrary that he lived in a kind of dread of discovery and humiliation and so repressed himself to a rather extraordinary degree.

As soon as Kinnell concludes, the film cuts back to Bloom who quotes from Whitman.

“There is a crucial line in Song of Myself which reads, ‘to touch my body to someone else’s is about as much as I can bear’.” We viewers barely have time to process Bloom’s implied point that Whitman here declares an aversion to physical touch before the scene cuts quickly to a long-range shot of Ginsberg on the wharf of the East River. Ginsberg waves a copy of Whitman’s poetry as if to buttress his argument against Bloom. The
film picks up Ginsberg in mid-sentence: "‘Earth My Likeness’ in which he finally confesses to anybody who’s reading carefully: ‘I now suspect there is something fierce in you that is eligible to burst forth, for an athlete is enamor’d of me, and I of him.’ There is something fierce and terrible in me, eligible to burst forth, I dare not tell it in words, not even in these songs.’ So there, he’s already told you,” Ginsberg declares passionately as if in personal rebuttal to Bloom.31

The scene cuts yet again, to Kaplan, Whitman’s biographer, sitting at a table in an upscale restaurant. Kaplan’s comments appear to mediate the argument between the dueling critics: “It’s a case of created dramatic identity,” he says.32 The scene cuts once again, to Ginsberg on the dock, who reads another line from the Calamus sequence. Ginsberg’s voice fades out, replaced by a voice-over reading of the poem while the scene cuts to a still photo of an elderly Whitman looking a young man close in the eye. When the poem is concluded, the narrator’s voice-over returns, this time to assert the physical relationship between Whitman and the young man in the photo: “Whitman was romantically involved in the 1860s with Peter Doyle, a horse car conductor, 28 years his junior.” The narrator’s authoritative voice appears to have solved the argument between Kinnell, Bloom, Ginsberg, and Kaplan, and while the video zooms into a close-up on the photograph, lingering first on Whitman’s gaze towards Doyle, then on Doyle’s gaze at Whitman, the closing lines from “When I Heard at the Close of the Day” are read in voice-over (again, though, we viewers are not told which poem this is): “For the one I love most lay sleeping by me under the same cover in/ the cool night,/ In the stillness in the autumn moonbeams his face was inclined toward/ me,/ And his arm lay lightly
around my breast—and that night I was/ happy” (90). The televised sequence ends with these lines. The viewer has never been given the name of the poem, nor has the viewer been told that the poem is part of the forty-five poem *Calamus* sequence from the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Moreover, we are never informed that this poem figures prominently in critical discussions about the importance of Whitman’s sexuality.

On the one hand, then, the film is ambivalent about Whitman’s sexuality. The back-and-forth argument between the critics leads the viewer to believe that there is still a controversy over Whitman’s sexuality. Bloom, in particular, appears quite credible. Whenever we see him in the film, he comes across as articulate, thoughtful, and knowledgeable; for instance, he quotes from memory not only Whitman, but Emerson and others. Thus we trust him when he says, "I doubt very much whether Whitman had ever allowed himself to have sexual contact with another human being." Likewise, we viewers are inclined to believe Kinnell’s claims when he says in a hesitating voice, “I can't imagine that he, umm, freely pursued a homosexual life. I imagine on the contrary that he lived in a kind of dread of discovery and humiliation and so repressed himself to a rather extraordinary degree.”

On the other hand, the film quite clearly situates Whitman as having had male lovers, not only by Ginsberg’s almost boastful claims to an erotic, genealogical connection, but also by asserting that Whitman and Peter Doyle were “romantically involved.” The film provides the close-up shot of the photo of Whitman and a young man looking at one another.33 Although the film never states explicitly that the young man is indeed Doyle, we are meant to infer that the young man was the poet’s lover. Indeed, by emphasizing
that Doyle was significantly younger than Whitman and that he held the rather low-status job of "horse car conductor," the film suggests something sinister in their relationship, as if Whitman was not only a homosexual, but he took advantage of younger, less mature men.

The film does not provide any more specific information about Doyle, nor does it provide specific evidence to support the claims about the relationship between the men. For example, the film does not quote Whitman writing in *Specimen Days* about his winter walks in Washington at the end of the Civil War: "A great recreation, the past three years, has been in taking long walks out from Washington, five, seven, perhaps ten miles and back, generally with my friend, Pete Doyle, who is as fond of it as I am. Fine moonlight walks, over the perfect military roads, hard and smooth—or Sundays—we had these delightful walks, never to be forgotten" (107-08). In this graceful account of a time "never to be forgotten," Whitman presents a much different picture of his relationship with Doyle than the film's insinuation that Whitman was somehow in the wrong to pursue such a younger man. Furthermore, although the film provides the reader with the fact that Whitman had male lovers—at the least, Doyle—the film does not address the deeper and very important implications of this. Indeed, Kaplan's argument that Whitman's use of sexual imagery is simply a function of Whitman's poetic persona elides the fact that Whitman also wrote from an invested, personal position. Instead of addressing the importance of such a love affair for Whitman's poetry and for American culture, it seems as if the film is content merely to provide the Bloom-Ginsberg argument about whether or not Whitman slept with men.
But should that be enough? After all, as Gary Schmidgall reminds us, not only had local and national gossip circulated throughout most of Whitman’s adult years, but the first critical study to assert Whitman’s homosexuality appeared in 1905—a fact Bloom and others would certainly know.34 Shouldn’t students be exposed to the most up-to-date critical conversations? Shouldn’t students—especially students in a 200 or 300-level course—be given accurate information about Whitman and his poetry instead of an out-of-date and prejudiced analysis?

Of course they should. Let us return for a moment to the poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.” As I argued above, by focusing on the images of commuters aboard the New York ferry system, the televised material guides the reader into an interpretation of “Crossing” that emphasizes the historical continuity of Whitman’s observations: just as Whitman was one of the crowd a hundred years past, we today—a hundred years hence—are also but one of a crowd. The televised material does not, however, introduce the reader to passages from the poem that provide the poet’s insight into gender roles and sexuality. Consider the following passages from “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”:

Was called by my highest name by clear, loud voices of young men as they saw me approaching or passing,
Felt their arms on my neck as I stood, or the negligent leaning of their flesh against me as I sat,
Saw many I loved in the street or ferry-boat or public assembly yet/
Never told them a word,
Lived the same life with the rest, the same old laughing, gnawing, sleeping,/ Play’d the part that still looks back on the actor or actress,
The same old role, the role that is what we make it, as great as we/ like,
Or as small as we like, or both great and small. (118)
The section of the poem from which this passage is taken has been cited often in discussions of Whitman’s sexuality. Betsy Erkkila, for instance, quotes this passage to support her claim that Whitman’s “confessional verse [...] points to [...] what he called the ‘perturbance’ of his homoerotic desire for men” (145). Tenney Nathanson calls the sixth section, “troubling” (370) and “tormented” (119) because it reveals the “poet’s anxiety at taking up his place in the process of reproduction with the shaping of sexual identity by cultural constraints” (121). Clearly, this passage, marked by “perturbance” and “anxiety,” is an important passage for critics to discuss.

The question I ask is this: Why does the telecourse not quote this passage? Indeed, why does the telecourse not quote extensively from the “Live Oak” sequence, the sequence that most brazenly discusses Whitman’s love affair with another man?

An Alternative Treatment of Whitman’s Sexuality

Perhaps it is because such verse is deeply erotic. After all, the lines from “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” emphasize the “negligent leanings” of a sexualized body. Whitman’s poetic persona here experiences a sexualized touch by the young men he has “loved in the street.” In another context, such a scene—a solitary man approaching and being approached by other men who offer the physical comfort of sight, touch, and sound—might very well invoke the contemporary notion of cruising, that ritual of some homosexual men who haunt a public space in search of brief physical encounters. Many cities today have such locations—Land’s End in San Francisco, Reid Park in Tucson,
Battery Park in Whitman's own Manhattan—where men seek a physical connection with other men, strangers most often.

A web page produced by NCGLA, North Carolina Gay and Lesbian Attorneys, shed light on the widespread behavior, revealing some of the legal and social ramifications of such behavior: In such encounters, the men—indifferent to each other in the sense that they care not for professions, family background, economic class—seek a brief closeness amongst each other, a sexual satisfaction that is often illegal, and at the least illicit by some conventional cultural standards. According to the NCGLA web site, men engaging in cruising seek to avoid the police and thus speak in a coded, furtive language:

The police tape recordings that were made in the early 1980's provide a valuable record of the way undercover operations are set up. On every such recording that we have heard, the defendant went to great lengths to make sure the officer was truly interested in sex before asking. Some of these tapes showed conversations of 20-30 minutes or more before the defendant mentioned any sexual act. On some tapes the officer was asked directly if he was a policeman and assured the defendant that he was not. On other tapes the officer said things to indicate that he was homosexual, such as mentioning the name of a gay bar or gay newspaper.35

As this summary indicates, the men who engage in cruising today may very well feel similar to the way Whitman describes himself in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry": "I am he who knew what it was to be evil [. . .] I too/ Blabb'd, blush'd, resented, lied, stole, grudg'd/ Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak."

Imagine, if you will, an alternative, up-dated televised moment in the telecourse. That is, imagine a moment in which the telecourse attempts to portray the more erotic lines in the same manner that it portrays the contemporary scene of commuters on the ferry. What would the filmed image include? A cluster of men cruising on an upper
deck of the ferry, perhaps. The lines from the poem would be videographically scripted across the screen while these men walk past one another, seeking the furtive eye contact that marks acceptance, speaking in the coded language of illicit and illegal behavior. The voice-over would read the lines, perhaps emphasizing the phrase, “Felt their arms on my neck as I stood, or the negligent leaning of the flesh against me as I sat.” The telecourse could also include in this scene passages like this one from the Calamus sequence:

“Passing stranger! You do not know how longingly I look upon you” (93).

Of course, I am exaggerating for effect. I am not suggesting that Whitman engaged in the contemporary practice of cruising. Nor am I suggesting that the film needs to provide graphic images of homosexual relations. Nor am I asking the film to use sources that were created after the film was produced. What I am seeking to do is draw out the implications of what the film chooses to emphasize and what it chooses not to emphasize. In the footage of ferry-goers, the film has already claimed repeatedly that Whitman speaks for today’s audience, and yet the film does not draw the connection between past and present sexual practices. One would think that such a connection would be of interest to a viewing audience that has been told that the course will focus on the cultural and historical context of the author and poetry. Indeed, one would think that such a connection would be interest to a viewing audience that surely includes a significant number of gay and lesbian viewers, as well as others who might be questioning their own sexuality.

The Whitman film is not the only place where the telecourse fails to address the politically risky nature of an author’s sexuality. Throughout the *Voices and Visions* film
on Langston Hughes, for example, not a single reference is made to either Hughes’s sexuality or its impact upon his poetry. Arnold Rampersad, one of the primary voices in the Hughes video, writes in his two-volume biography of Hughes that many of Hughes’s associates “confirmed that he was thought to be gay, [but] no one could recall any concrete evidence for his reputation” (2: 336). In the biography, Rampersad at least addresses this issue by locating it within Hughes’s artistic aspirations:

All his life he prized control far too highly for him to surrender it in his most mature years. Control above all meant to him the preservation of his position as the most admired and beloved poet of his race. That position, which he saw as a moral trust, and which ultimately connected his deepest emotional needs to his function as an artist, may have meant too much for him to risk for illicit sex. (2: 336)

In contrast to this biographical and literary analysis that places the poetry within the context of the author’s sexual sensibility, the telecourse does not even address the issue of Hughes’s sexuality.

Moreover, in 1989 a feature film, Looking for Langston, was released that explicitly locates Langston Hughes as homosexual.36 The video jacket declares that “the film attempts to reclaim Langston Hughes as an important black gay voice in American culture,” and throughout this surreal, impressionistic film, Hughes is referenced as an iconic figure whose illicit sexuality is hidden behind a poetic public persona.37 In this respect, the film “outs” Hughes more sharply than either Rampersad’s biography or the Voices and Visions telecourse. The feature film and the telecourse were both produced within the span of a single year, and it is hard to understand why the telecourse does not even address the important elements of Hughes’s sexuality. This is a curious omission,
especially given that the telecourse materials claim repeatedly to address the biographical influences on the artist.\textsuperscript{38}

Perhaps this is because the National Humanities Council and the Public Broadcasting System, the advertised major sponsors, have chosen to stay away from advocating the normalization of male homosexuality. After all, in the United States, depictions of open homosexuality are still often considered taboo, and rightly or wrongly, many audience members might find such a vision inappropriate in a televised literature course—even though much of Whitman's poetry emphasizes the homoerotic. However, we must also locate these educational choices within the practical climate of national politics. During the 1980s when \textit{Voices and Visions} was developed and produced, higher education in general and the humanities in particular were the site of major ideological fighting between the left and right political wings. Moreover, during these Reagan and Bush years, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts (two of the umbrella funding agencies through which the telecourse was funded) were sharply attacked by the political right. According to John Wilson, whose book, \textit{The Myth of Political Correctness}, presents an unabashedly leftist reading of the culture wars of these years, "Under the leadership of William Bennett in the early 1980s and then Lynne Cheney, the NEH became a model conservative agency in Washington, carefully avoiding controversy while systematically preventing leftists from receiving NEH grants" (58).\textsuperscript{39} Certainly a program sponsored under the NEH umbrella that uses Whitman to normalize nontraditional readings of homosexuality in Whitman's verse would be considered too controversial. Writing in December of 1992, Stephen Burd of \textit{The}
*Chronicle of Higher Education* quotes from an interview with Cheney, who argues for the need to uphold academic traditions: ""colleges and universities should be bastions of free expression,"" she says. Such institutions must always remember ""the importance of emphasizing traditional scholarship, and traditional approaches to traditional scholarship."" Cheney's phrase ""traditional approaches"" is not defined, but we can presume that it does not include queer theory. Burd reports that liberal scholars were relieved by Cheney's departure after the election of President Clinton:

Mrs. Cheney politicized the endowment's grant system, they say, in a way that applications from controversial scholars and from those who use non-traditional approaches were routinely rejected. They also charge that the NEH chairman packed her advisory council with critics of multiculturalism and women's studies. (A19+)

Clearly, in such a political climate, it is much safer to make the claims of universality and immortality indicated by those lines of the poem that have been chosen for television than to develop the political and cultural implications of the sexualized lines that have *not* been chosen. (It is worth noting that this is not the first time that Whitman's fully sensualized voice has been silenced because of political maneuverings; after all, Whitman lost his own government job because the Secretary of the Interior, James Harlan, found his verse too graphic.41)

Even without such graphic televised images, what would happen to the televised text, I wonder, if instead of the critical conversation between Bloom, Kinnell, Ginsberg, and Kaplan, the televised material included conversations between contemporary critics who address the sexualized nature of Whitman's poetry? Instead of a conversation devoted to the simple question of whether or not Whitman was attracted to men and instead of the rather tawdry implication that Whitman preyed upon young horse-car drivers, the
telecourse could present an extended conversation about the cultural implications of such
facts. Just as Bloom quotes Whitman's line, "to touch my body to someone else's is
about as much as I can bear," to imply that Whitman never had gay physical relations,
Tenney Nathanson might, as he does in his book *Whitman's Presence*, bring the reader's
attention to "I Hear it was Charged Against Me" from the *Calamus* sequence in order to
argue that "Whitman is simultaneously seeking to establish a tradition of homosexual
ritual and struggling to distinguish it from the entrenched mores and ceremonies of the
dominant heterosexual culture" (417). Likewise, a televised interview with the recent
reviewer of contemporary Whitman criticism, William Vance, might include Vance's
comments in reply to Bloom's claim that Whitman had no physical contact with other
men:

That Whitman's homosexuality was long successfully repressed—even by
homosexual critics most responsible for his elevation into the academic canon,
F.O. Matthiessen and Newton Arvin—is a measure of the homophobia that has
dominated our culture [...] When one reads the several critical histories that
rehearse the denial and outright homophobia in Whitman criticism [...] one can
understand why Whitman's homosexuality should now receive such commanding
attention. Almost no one any longer denies the fact. (44-45)

Following Vance's assertion that "no one any longer denies the fact" that Whitman had
male lovers, Gary Schmidgall might be interviewed.

Because Schmidgall's *Walt Whitman: A Gay Life* provides convincing discussion of
Whitman's love affairs with not only Peter Doyle, but Fred Vaughan and Harry Stafford,
in this new film, Schmidgall could present some of the first-hand accounts and the local
and national gossip regarding Whitman's affairs with younger men. Schmidgall could
also explain from his personal experience why it is politically important for a nationally
distributed telecourse to present accurate and up-to-date information. Schmidgall draws
on Whitman's life as a role model for his own, describing how his Uncle Art Schmidgall
taught him to live the "concealed but substantial life' that gay men had been leading,
with probably not very significant variation, since the time *Leaves of Grass* had
appeared" (262). Schmidgall sees Whitman's experiences as representative of
Schmidgall's own, relating the loss of Whitman's government job to his own personal
and family experience: "Discretion [in public life] was necessary and for good reason:
when I read of Whitman's dismissal from the Interior Department by Secretary Harlan on
account of *Leaves of Grass*, I was immediately reminded of Art losing his job in the post
office" (262). Such a personal testimonial from an academic critic would reinforce one
of the primary points made by the telecourse, namely, that Whitman's verse presents
recurrent truths about what it is like to be an American. Such a testimonial would, that is,
reflect the telecourse's objective to demonstrate that Whitman is an influential and
important spokesman for the particularly American belief in inclusivity.

After Schmidgall, the film might then bring in some of the many other critics who
have addressed Whitman's homosexuality, such as Alan Helms, who argues that "Live
Oak with Moss" is a narrative of Whitman's personal struggles against homosexual
oppression. Helms begins his essay "Whitman's 'Live Oak With Moss'" by explaining
that in the 1950s, Fredson Bowers discovered Whitman's original ordering of the "Live
Oak With Moss" sequence, written in 1859. As Helms describes it, the "Live Oak"
sequence "tells the story of Whitman's unhappy love affair with a man" (185) in the
progression from "infatuation, abandonment, and accommodation" (187). Helms reads
the sequence as Whitman’s acknowledgment that a man loving a man is an unacceptable transgression of cultural boundaries. For Helms, the “Live Oak” sequence reveals “Whitman’s sense of shame and isolation” in his homosexuality, a lesson that is “painfully familiar to most lesbians and gay men as a part of the process of coming out” (190). Indeed, Helms sees the whole “Calamus” sequence as “shot through with a sense of fear and impending danger, the need for caution and seclusion, and again the sense of prohibition against speaking of desire for men” (193-94). Helms’ pessimistic view that “homophobia” was the reason that “after his third edition [of Leaves of Grass] Whitman never again wrote frankly about loving men” (197) is in sharp contrast to the more optimistic view of Herschel Parker, who writes a scathing rebuttal to Helms in his 1996 essay, “The Real ‘Live-Oak, with Moss’: Straight Talk about Whitman’s Gay Manifesto.”

In a rewritten and re-filmed version of the Whitman telecourse segment, the film might cut to Herschel Parker. Because the written marketing material for Voices and Visions indicates that the telecourse is interested in Whitman’s biography, his sources, and his “American vision,” the telecourse would be particularly interested in Parker’s assertions about two different versions of the Calamus sequence. Parker leads the reader through a compelling argument that the original version of “Live Oak, with Moss” (what he considers to be the accurate version places a comma in the title, while the inaccurate version has no comma) had been assembled by Whitman into twelve continuous poems with a specific authorial intent. Parker argues that Helms has misread the sequence. Rather than being a narrative of homophobic oppression, Parker says, the “sequence
traces the course of a man’s love for another man, their happiness together, and the
aftermath of their relationship, which proves to be only a love affair, not the lifelong
union the speaker had hoped for” (146).44 If Parker were to be interviewed for a different
version of the Whitman telecourse, he might claim (as he does in his article) that, “The
choice of copy-text matters—matters profoundly—to every reader [. . .] who is told that
‘Live Oak with Moss’ is about ‘homophobic oppression’ instead of being allowed to
discover that ‘Live Oak, with Moss’ is an ultimately triumphant account of the poet’s
accepting his homosexuality and surviving a thwarted love affair” (157).45

Parker provides us with a practical reason for reading imaginative literature: it affects
the way we readers think and act. If we as readers—especially student readers—are not
provided with accurate critical information about the poetry and the author, then we will
not only miss the significance of the artistry of the poem, but we will miss the
significance of the poem to our personal and political lives. I quote Parker at some length
because his comments not only provide a close reading of the poetry, but they provide
reasons why a telecourse that teaches Whitman must address in significant depth the
implications of Whitman’s sexuality:

The text of “Live Oak, with Moss” matters because so many Americans (and so
many readers worldwide) look to Whitman not only for aesthetic pleasure but for
guidance in living a sane and hopeful life. Helms puts clearly one specific social
significance of the sequence: “Whitman’s sense of shame will be painfully
familiar to most lesbians and gay men as a part of the process of coming out. ‘Is
there even one other like me?’ is a question that gay men and lesbians have asked
themselves by the millions” (p. 190). Now, after gay liberation and after the rise
of queer theory, when sexually pondering and yearning young men and women
ask what Whitman asked in poem VIII (Is there even one another like me?” [I.
69]), they are apt, in this country at least, to seek the answer in Whitman’s poetry,
for any high school student now knows to turn to Whitman as a poet-prophet of
homosexuality. Given the immense difficulties that gay teenagers sometimes face
in coming to terms with their sexuality, it would be tragic if even one young person among "millions" found the same-drenched answer in the no-comma "Live Oak with Moss" instead of finding the frank, resolute answer Whitman wrote [. . .]. It would be tragic if a single teacher treated the no-comma "Live Oak with Moss" as a document dealing with "homophobic oppression" [Helms' term] instead of acknowledging the real "Live Oak, with Moss" as a brave sexual manifesto. Once a spurious text gains currency and receives powerful endorsements, correcting it is always hellishly difficult. Whatever the cost, Whitman scholars and critics simply have to join hands to straighten out this kink in Whitman criticism: Whitman matters too much to let "Live Oak with Moss" drive out "Live Oak, with Moss." (160)

It is wrong, Parker claims, for students and for teachers to be misled about the implications of Whitman's verse. Parker justifies his concern for the correct reading of the "Live Oak" sequence by appealing to his readers' moral sensibility: it is wrong to misread literature because misreadings have deep psychic costs—for specific individuals ("gay teenagers") and for whole generations ("sexually pondering young men and women").

The argument between Helms and Parker is a significant advance from the argument between Bloom and Ginsburg presented by the telecourse. Rather than arguing over whether or not Whitman had male lovers, the critical discussion has moved to the question of what this means in the poetry and to the reader. I argue that a telecourse that advertises itself as rooted in the historical, cultural, and biographical conditions that engender the imaginative literature must address these cutting-edge issues. Sadly, however, the telecourse as it is constructed cannot do this. Just as I was forced to avoid time-bound references when I taped my own telecourses, the literature telecourses are also circumscribed by technological limits: there is no way to add to or revise the televised material once it is produced. Even though the telecourse does an admirable job
of presenting the viewer with a wide range of American art forms and a wide range of Whitman critics, it is wrong to present students an imprecise reading of Whitman’s verse and Whitman’s life.

V

To Conclude: Subjects for Further Analysis

I lean rather heavily on the telecourse’ (mis)treatment of Whitman’s sexuality in order to make two larger points: (1) telecourse material is generally more conservative than contemporary scholarship warrants; and (2) all telecourses become out-of-date as soon as they are made. The telecourses, constrained both by technology and marketing concerns, cannot bring in the latest in historical, literary, or textual scholarship, nor can the telecourses make use of the latest theoretical gains. The students suffer in this situation, compelled as they are to learn outdated and inaccurate material. As Annette Kolodny has written with regard to videotaped lecture series,

Although the lectures may be wonderful as performances, they will never replace professors who impart the very latest discoveries in their fields and who make students partners in the discovery process. Unlike the professor in the classroom or the laboratory, a video won’t engage a student in dialogue about cutting edge research or controversial new concepts. (Failing the Future 36)

My analysis of the telecourse treatment of Whitman’s sexuality reveals the paradoxical nature of telecourses. Although the telecourse is limited in what it can achieve, the material is interesting, accurate in many respects, and, at least from my viewing experience, a provocative entry into the work of Whitman. In this respect, the course reaches its goal of teaching literary appreciation by documenting the careers of the
poets with verbal analysis and visual images. Indeed, the Walt Whitman film
demonstrates several of the benefits of teaching literature via telecourse.

Among the positive aspects of the telecourse are the following: First, the televised
material allows for an extensive range of artistic and literary study. For example,
although the Whitman film concentrates on “Song of Myself,” viewers see and hear a
range of Whitman’s poetry, including his Civil War poems and parts of the Calamus
series, and we are exposed to a range of still photography, music, artwork, and other
important forms of American art. Second, the juxtaposition of the nineteenth-century
poetry with twentieth-century film footage brings Whitman’s concerns to life for a late-
twentieth-century audience in ways that reading alone cannot. Third, the critics often
return to the text to support their opinions, either speaking from memory as Bloom does
or quoting from a well-read copy as Ginsberg does. In this way, the critics model for
telecourse students the necessity of using the primary material for textual evidence to
support a literary interpretation. Fourth, although somewhat slow-moving for an
audience conditioned to the quick jump-cuts of MTV and CNN, the material is made
interesting—the televised experts are earnest and well-informed, and their enthusiasm
carries over to the viewer. Just as in the Literary Visions televised material, interviews
with the critics are inter-spliced such that their comments appear in direct response to one
another, creating a provocative level of disagreement which illustrates for the viewer the
open-ended nature of literary interpretation.

In sum, using the Walt Whitman film and the Stephen Crane segment as
representative samples of the two telecourses, we can conclude on the one hand that the
telecourse provides the viewer with an engaging introduction to the writers and their work, while at the same time providing the telecourse student with thought-provoking critical insights. On the other hand, there are significant troubles with the telecourse presentation. Simply put: many of the interpretive approaches to the literature presented in the films quickly become outdated, leaving the viewer with an incomplete and therefore inaccurate impression of the poetry, the author, and the cultural work of the text. The implications are troubling—for students, teachers, and institutions. More specifically, I suggest that there are five primary disadvantages to relying on a telecourse to teach literature in this way.

**Five Disadvantages of Literature Telecourses**

1. As I said above, telecourse students do not have the opportunity to engage in either the good-natured fellowship of a classroom community or the intellectual debates that occur in classrooms. In this setting, students cannot share interpretations, argue amongst themselves about the various meanings of a given literary text, or provide either each other or the teacher with alternative perspectives. Although the course requires students to keep a journal and notes regarding the televised and printed material, the student is left out of the critical conversation. In its reliance on the transmission of information instead of the construction of knowledge, the telecourse does not teach the craft of social interdependence very well and, instead, enforces a hierarchy in which the sender of a message is intended to be clearly more dominant than the receiver. In the
second section of the next chapter, I offer a series of suggestions that may help solve this problem.

2. More than simply not being able to interact with fellow students, the students of such courses are given no opportunity to construct their own knowledge, nor are they provided opportunities to challenge the transmitted knowledge. Instead, they are asked simply to consume the transmitted material. In contrast to this form of banking education, Gregory Jay advocates including the students in the process of syllabus making. Jay says that “students ought to be brought into the history and terms of the debate about what has been put on the syllabus or in the anthology, and why” (161)—an activity that is impossible in telecourses. In trying to re-define how American literature is taught, Jay argues for dialogic pairings that are not currently standard practices in literary studies; for instance, he suggests “juxtaposing [. . .] Henry Thoreau and Harriet Jacobs” and reading The Great Gatsby against “the prose and poetry of the Harlem Renaissance” (155). If Jay’s advice were heeded in the telecourse, the Whitman film and the Langston Hughes film would have been constructed so that the connections between the two poets are highlighted. As it is, the Hughes film does not emphasize Whitman’s influence on Hughes. Indeed, there is no mention of Hughes’ poem “Old Walt” or of the articles that Hughes wrote praising Whitman.46 Because these telecourses do not utilize the classroom practice of dialogic pairings advocated by Jay, students and viewers are limited in their examination of the subject material.
In addition, because the classroom practice of dialogic pairings goes against
the grain of traditional literary pairings, "it takes time, in class and on the
syllabus" to engage in the communal self-reflection that makes those choices
valuable. Jay's goal of creating dialogue between students and faculty requires
that a faculty member be adept at managing the almost-certain contentiousness of
the debate while still covering the material, and it requires a physical space where
the students and faculty gather. Not only is such a space not available in the
telecourse, but the telecourse' propensity toward conservative scholarship
precludes the opportunity for such advanced pedagogical practices.

3. Because the literary material is often reduced from its rich textual form either to
short snippets of text or to dramatic reproductions, the telecourse viewer becomes
a student, not of a written text in all its subtleties of language, but of dramatized,
enacted language. Not only is the artistry of the original imaginative literature
lost, but the viewer's primary experience with learning the skills of literary
analysis revolves around interpreting renditions of the original, not the original.

4. As the Whitman video makes clear, while pretending to present an even-handed
interpretation of the literature, the outmoded televised material presents a time-
bound interpretation that is freighted with ideological implications. Although the
telecourses present important tools of literary criticism (such as knowledge of
symbolism, prosody and form, words, imagery, setting and character, plot,
conflict, tone and style), they rarely address in significant detail any issues related to the current intellectual debates in literary studies, raising few of the deeper theoretical and political issues present in much contemporary scholarship. The telecourses seem remarkably untouched by the critical movements of recent decades—there is very little deconstruction, no queer theory, no body politics, no Marxist critique. Although the interpretive conversations in *Literary Visions* emphasize the cultural work of the literary text considerably more than do the conversations in the poetry telecourse (for example, in the Crane segment Mary Poovey and Gregory Ulmer at least raise the issue of gender roles), on the whole the televised material does not engage in literary interpretation that employs cultural critique.

Relying on Gregory Jay, again, I argue that the telecourse that does not address the political implications of the text’s production and reception fails in a significant way. As Jay puts it, “literature courses should teach the conflicts between various schools, movements, and critical vocabularies, enabling students to begin the process of testing different critical methods on specific literary works” (167). Moreover, he says, employing different critical methods will enable students to enjoy “some of the finest experiences of aesthetic pleasure and intellectual stimulation available” (171).

5. Finally, according to the written material produced by PBS/ALS, the teacher of record for these courses becomes little more than a tutor and a logistical
coordinator, shepherding the solitary students through the pre-arranged course material. Just as in the composition telecourses, both teachers and students are left out of the critical conversation. They merely view others discussing the texts, and in this respect, neither students nor teachers participate in the act of questioning or constructing knowledge. As I said in the concluding remarks to the chapter on composition telecourses, such a shepherding role has disturbing implications for those who are concerned with the teaching of English, a point to which I shall return in some detail in the Epilogue.

NOTES

1 The term "cultural work" is drawn from Jane Tompkins seminal work. Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860 (New York: Oxford U P, 1985). Tompkins argues that literary texts should be seen as doing a certain kind of cultural work within a specific kind of historical situation [...] . I see their plots and characters as providing society with a means of thinking about itself, defining certain aspects of a social reality which the authors and their readers shared, dramatizing its conflicts, and recommending solutions. It is the notion of literary texts as doing work, expressing and shaping the social context that produced them, that I wish to substitute finally for the critical perspective that sees them as attempts to achieve a timeless, universal ideal of truth and formal coherence. (200)

Following Tompkins' work. I am using the term cultural work as a short hand for an analysis that examines the following sorts of issues: whose interest is at stake in an interpretation of a text? What power relationships are maintained by the text in question? What power relationships are called into question?


Overviews of Programs and Lessons

The following course outline is excerpted from the Literary Visions preview book, published by The Corporation for Community College Television.

Introduction Programs

Lesson 1 -- First Sight: An Introduction to Literature
Lesson 2 -- Ways of Seeing: Responding to Literature
Lesson 3 -- A Personal View: The Art of the Essay
Short Fiction

   Lesson 4 -- Reflected Worlds: The Elements of Short Fiction
   Lesson 5 -- The Story's Blueprint: Plot and Structure in Short Fiction
   Lesson 6 -- Telling Their Tales: Characters in Short Fiction
   Lesson 7 -- In That Time and Place: Setting and Character in Short Fiction
   Lesson 8 -- The Author's Voice: Tone and Style in Short Fiction
   Lesson 9 -- Suggested Meanings: Symbolism and Allegory in Short Fiction
   Lesson 10 -- The Sum of its Parts: Theme in Short Fiction

Poetry

   Lesson 11 -- The Sacred Words: The Elements of Poetry
   Lesson 12 -- A Sense of Place: Setting and Character in Poetry
   Lesson 13 -- Tools of the Trade: Words and Images in Poetry
   Lesson 14 -- Seeing Anew: Rhetorical Figures in Poetry
   Lesson 15 -- An Echo to the Sense: Prosody and Form in Poetry
   Lesson 16 -- Distant Voices: Myth, Symbolism, and Allusion in Poetry
   Lesson 17 -- Artful Resonance: Theme in Poetry

Drama

   Lesson 18 -- Image of Reality: The Elements of Drama
   Lesson 19 -- Playing the Part: Characters and Actors in Drama
   Lesson 20 -- Patterns of Action: Plot and Conflict in Drama
   Lesson 21 -- Perspectives on Illusion: Setting and Staging in Drama
   Lesson 22 -- Speech and Silence: The Language of Drama
   Lesson 23 -- The Vision Quest: Myth and Symbolism in Drama
   Lesson 24 -- A Frame for Meaning: Theme in Drama

Conclusion

   Lesson 25 -- Casting Long Shadows: The Power of Literature
   Lesson 26 -- Continuing Vision: The Uses of Literature

4 See the PBS web site http://www.learner.org/collections/ordering/multimedia/seriesprice95.html
   (September 20, 1999) for additional information on pricing.
5 See Goldie Blumenstyk’s online article “The Marketing Intensifies in Distance Learning.” The Chronicle
7 These are not the only literature telecourses. For example, “Living Literature: The Classics and You” is
   produced by Governors State University and distributed nationally by PBS Adult Learning Service.
   According to an undated Telecourse Preview Kit, “Living Literature” is designed to “introduce students to
   the primary literary texts that have shaped Western culture,” to challenge students “to think critically and
   creatively about that cultural tradition and their place as individuals within it,” and “to demonstrate the
   vitality of classic texts which transcend time and place” (no author 2).
8 Scinta, Sylvia. "Re: information re telecourses." E-mail to the author. 28 Sept. 1998.
9 See Chapter 5, in which I complicate this rosy picture by arguing that the telecourses present a simplistic
   and inaccurate vision of multi-cultural inclusivity.
10 The Annenberg/CPB Projects web site offers this biography of Fran Dorn: “Franchelle (Fran) Dorn is a
   theatrical actress, specializing in Shakespearean roles. She has been a member of the Shakespeare Theatre
   at the Folger Shakespeare Library, portraying such characters as Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra, Maria, Portia,
and Paulina. She has also performed with the Yale Repertory Theatre, the American Conservatory Theatre, and Arena Stage in Washington. She has taught drama courses at Princeton University, Georgetown University, and the University of Maryland. She holds a B.A. in Theatre Arts from Finch College and an M.F.A. from Yale School of Drama."


11 As in all transcriptions of the telecourse dialogue, I draw on my own notes from the televised programs and not from an official transcript.


13 See pages 12-14 in Michael W. Schaefer's A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Stephen Crane. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996. Schaefer argues that "there is a strong possibility that Beer fabricated these biographical details" and prefers to examine "the journalism that Crane produced during his Western trip as a more reliable source of biographical underpinnings" (11-12).

14 See, for example, George Monteiro's "Crane's Coxcomb" in Modern Fiction Studies. 31 Summer, 1985 (295-304). Monteiro argues that "The theory calling for communal guilt and social complicity, if accepted, implies the existence of shared responsibility and the potential for social efficacy" (302).

15 As the Boston College Chronicle Humanities Series web page says, "A renowned author of short stories, Dubus' best-seller Dancing After Hours was published earlier this year, and his other works include Broken Vessels, Adultery and Other Choices, and Separate Flight."


16 I am indebted to Annette Kolodny for her insights regarding the interpretive limitations inherent in the filmic images, especially with regard to the color blue.

17 There is more to say about Crane's use of color throughout the story. For example, critic George Monteiro argues that "It is doubtful that any reader in Crane's day would have failed to see [the blue of the hotel] in the color of the temperance movement" (296). Monteiro suggests that Crane contrasts the "intemperate blue" of the hotel with the "blood-color" snowflakes and the "archetypal [saloon] color" of "indomitable red light" (300) in order to highlight the Swede's transformation from tenderfoot into a bully who courts death (300). And Fredson Bowers, the editor of the definitive editions of Crane's writings, points out that by changing the manuscript spelling of the Easterner's original name, "Mr Blank" to "Blanc," Crane "added one more negative quality—the no-color, as Melville called it, against which the blue of the hotel is Scully's brilliant counter gesture" (ci). For an excellent review of critical studies on "The Blue Hotel," consult Michael W. Schaefer's A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Stephen Crane. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996, particularly pages 10-59.

18 These tools merely allow the television engineers to overlay words and graphics above the primary image on the screen.

19 See the Adult Learning Service Telecourse Catalog. Public Broadcasting Service/Adult Learning Service. March, 1998.


23 Students who read the telecourse Study Guide by Alice Rabi Lichtenstein read that Ginsberg "has been a lively, active force on the American literary scene over the past 30 years. He is the author of Howl, Kaddish, and Mind Breaths, among other works" (65).

24 See Kenneth Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action (Louisiana State University Press, 1941), 110-11.

25 See the conversation on MOOs in Chapter 4.

26 I am indebted to Annette Kolodny for pointing out this interpretation during a conversation in November, 1999.
For a more detailed analysis, see pages 141-146 in Betsy Erkilla’s *Whitman the Political Poet* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989). Although Erkilla’s book was published one year after the *Voices and Visions* telecourse came out, her earlier article, “Walt Whitman: The Politics of Language” (*American Studies* 24 1983, 21-34) contains a similar analysis.


As Annette Kolodny has pointed out in conversation, Bloom’s meaning is open to debate. On the one hand, Bloom may be suggesting that Whitman is celebrating the emotional, spiritual, and physical power of romantic touch. On the other hand, Bloom may be suggesting that Whitman feared that same power, at least insofar as it related to homosexual romantic touch. Clearly, if we are to trust such sensual lines as these from “Song of Myself,” “How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn’d over / upon me/ And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone and plunged your tongue/ to my bare-stript heart,” Whitman celebrated the power of physical contact. Just as clearly, though, Bloom argues in the telecourse interview that such physical contact was never with men.

The edited interviews with these two critics are edited in such a way as to give the impression that they are using the telecourse interviews as a way of arguing with one another. Their physical presence indicates their differences, with Ginsberg standing on a grimy dock with the waters of the East River behind him and Bloom standing in his book-lined home. Implied in this scene is that Ginsberg holds a more earthy connection with Whitman’s verse as compared to Bloom’s more intellectual connection.

This point of poetic persona versus actual man is further addressed in a later segment of conversations between the critics. Kimmell says that Whitman wrote in a “persona that allowed him to speak for an entire America,” and Harold Bloom says that the real-life Walt Whitman “is different from the brawling, bawdy man of the poems.” Gary Hall says that Whitman “created a dramatic identity” and that the reader “cannot confuse the poetic identity with the poet.”

A reproduction of this photograph, taken by M. P. Rice circa 1869, can be found in Gary Schmidgall’s *Walt Whitman: A Gay Life*, 208.

See, in particular, the accounts of public and private utterances regarding Whitman’s devotion to men and boys in Schmidgall’s chapter “Walt & His Boys” (153-219), a chapter tracing Whitman’s “search for a lifelong lover” (155). In addition to providing snippets of gossip, excerpts from letters, and second-hand accounts, Schmidgall claims that “one of the first [academic studies] to aggressively assert [Whitman’s] homosexuality” (208) is Eduard Bertz’s *Walt Whitman: Ein Charakterbild* (1905).


There is an interesting moment in the film which resonates with my earlier discussion of the practice of gay cruising. At one point in the film, two men walk separately through a darkened and silent urban area. They meet, clearly strangers, and begin to engage in sex. During this scene, lines from an unattributed poem describing homosexual sex with strangers are heard in voiceover. This scene reproduces the anxiety inherent in the illicit and public homosexual act.

I want to point out that I am not criticizing the *Voices and Visions* film for failing to address the political nature of Langston Hughes’s poetry. Indeed, the film emphasizes not only Hughes’s writings on the significance of race, but his writings on class relations, including his lengthy flirtation with socialism that led to his appearance before the House Sub-Committee on Un-American Activities. I am merely using the film’s silence on Hughes’ sexuality to illustrate my larger point that the telecourse *by its current nature* is a more conservative vehicle for undergraduate education than I think it ought to be.

I am indebted to John Wilson for providing a thorough accounting of the sources he used in compiling his section on Lynne Cheney’s stewardship of the NEH.

Alan Helms views Whitman’s termination as one of the causes of Whitman’s future poetic silence on homosexuality; see 197-98.


Helms points out that Bowers’ discovery “has been virtually ignored” (185) and certainly not examined for its engagement with homosexuality. See Alan Helm’s, “Whitman’s ‘Live Oak With Moss,’” in Robert Martin’s *The Continuing Presence of Walt Whitman*, 185-205.


I, personally, am inclined to agree with Parker’s more optimistic reading of the “Live Oak” sequence. In interpreting the section in which Whitman describes his feelings of abandonment after the love affair is ended, Helms leans rather heavily on Whitman’s phrase, “I am ashamed—but it is useless—I am what I am” (qtd in Helms 203). Helms reads these lines as Whitman’s declaration that he is ashamed of his own continuing attraction to men, even in the face of the isolation and loneliness. However, I read Whitman’s confession of shame, not as a repudiation of his homosexuality, but as a celebration of the depth of his feeling. It is useless, Whitman declares, to avoid such deep feelings, even though they may lead to the “Sullen and suffering hours . . . hours of torment” (qtd in Helms 203). Such a declaration squares with the Whitman who insists on engaging all the senses of life: “Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power . . . I sing” (5) says Whitman in the opening poem of the deathbed edition, edited by James E. Miller, Jr.

For more information on Whitman’s influence on Hughes, see Arnold Rampersad’s account in Volume II of his biography, pp 224-26.

Jay’s argument is very similar to the arguments presented by James Berlin in defense of social-epistemic rhetoric, as I demonstrated in Chapter 2. If, Jay says, teachers and scholars “acknowledge that the aesthetic power of a text is a function of the distribution of material and cultural power in society” (209), the result will be students who are more fully “equipped with the cultural literacy necessary for democratic citizenship in America” (171).
CHAPTER 4
THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHING ENGLISH WITH TELECOURSES

Introductory Remarks

The late Bart Giamatti, former president of Yale University, argued that higher education’s academic mission should be different from the corporate model that seeks the holy grail of financial efficiency. While acknowledging “the legitimate and difficult chores of [fiscal] management” (36), Giamatti believed that the nature of the university is to “increase a given community’s freedom, intellectual excellence, human dignity” (37). He writes:

A college or university is an institution where financial incentives to excellence are absent, where the product line is not a unit or an object but rather a value-laden and life-long process; where the goal of the enterprise is not growth or market share but intellectual excellence; not profit or proprietary rights but the free good of knowledge; not efficiency of operation but equity of treatment; not increased productivity in economic terms but increased intensity of thinking about who we are and how we live and about the world around us. (36)

Giamatti’s call for an educational institution that forsakes “productivity in economic terms” and instead emphasizes such intangibles as “intellectual excellence” and an “increased intensity of thinking” is in sharp contrast to the rhetoric surrounding telecourse research.

The rhetoric from institutions that produce distance learning (including not only telecourses, but interactive teleclasses and online instruction) is often effusive to the point of fervent in its praise of the possibilities for educational technologies. Take, for example, the following “Fact Sheet” presented by the United States Distance Learning
Association (USDLA), a non-profit association formed in 1987 by a handful of academics in the United States. According to the main web page for the USDLA, "The association's purpose is to promote the development and application of distance learning for education and training. The constituents [sic] we serve include K through 12 education, higher education, continuing education, corporate training, and military and government training." Clearly, the USDLA's target audience is broader than Giamatti's hallowed Yale University, and, just as clearly, the USDLA argues for a different educational mission than does Giamatti. The USDLA web site's "Fact Sheet" appears to substantiate the common claims that distance learning provides access to high-quality educational material in a wide range of educational sites:

- Distance learning is the application of technology of electronic means to education in all areas: K through 12, Higher Education, Continuing Education, Corporate Training, and Military and Government Training, telemedicine and those devoted to the pursuit of life long learning.
- Effectiveness studies have been quite consistent in showing that when used in business, military training, and adult learning, there is no significant difference in effectiveness between distance learning and traditional instruction methods, and student attitudes are generally positive about the experience.
- Providing courses for underserved or advanced students is the principal application of distance learning for K-12 education. However, it is being used for rural and inner city classes, enrichment, staff development and in-service training for teachers and administrators.
- In higher education, distance learning is providing undergraduate and advanced degrees to students in offices, at community colleges and at various receive sites. Students for whom convenience may be a crucial factor in receiving college credit are earning degrees by satellite, audio, or on-line computer.
- Faced with retraining 50 million American workers, corporate America is using distance learning for all aspects of training both internally and externally. Many major corporations such as Hewlett-Packard save millions of dollars each year using distance learning to train employees more effectively and more efficiently than with conventional methods.
- Programming for distance learning provides the receiver many technical and content options. Educational materials are delivered primarily through live and interactive classes where the intent is not necessarily to replicate face-to-face instruction. Interactivity is accomplished via telephone (one-way video and two-way audio), two-way video or graphics interactivity, two-way computer hookups, or response terminals.
- Technology offers many options for delivering and receiving education over a distance. The ability of the teacher and students to see each other may not be a necessary condition for effective distance learning, but audio can be a critical component for interactivity. Teaching strategies based on computer applications are emerging that also effective [sic].
• Research in effectiveness is limited in K-12 applications, but existing research, project evaluation, and anecdotal evidence strongly suggest that distance education is an effective means for delivering instruction just as it has been proven effective in adult learning and training settings.

• Paying for distance education systems can be done through issuing bonds to cover construction costs; legislation to install satellite dishes on every school in the state; state, national and Federal grant programs for local projects; and various other taxes and levies.

• Telecommunications systems that serve education can also benefit the community at large. In rural areas especially, telecommunications systems and services are tied increasingly to economic development and community survival. New uses include the application of information and educational resources for K-12 students, adults, senior citizens, local governments and organization, and business.

According to this enthusiastic review from the USDLA web page (August 23, 1999), distance learning programs instruct “more effectively and more efficiently” saving “millions and millions of dollars” in settings as diverse as K-12, higher education, corporations, and the military. The emphasis on terms such as efficient, economical, and effective is common in the general discourse of education via technology. These “Three E’s”—in such sharp contrast to Bart Giamatti’s call for a “value-laden [educational] experience”—are invoked time and again in telecourse studies as justification for expanding education via telecourse.

Below I offer a review of research into the efficacy of telecourse instruction, particularly in the field of English studies. My hope is to offset the fervent enthusiasm of such distance learning advocates as the USDLA with a more balanced reporting of what the research actually says.
I

The Rhetoric of Telecourse Efficiency: A Research Review

One of the pioneers in the examination of the efficacy of telecourse instruction is Desmond Keegan, whose book, The Foundations of Distance Education, provides a comprehensive overview of the fundamental elements of teaching at a distance, particularly by telecourse. In part because of such significant advances in technology as the Internet and electronic mail, Keegan’s work is somewhat dated; nonetheless, his observations provide an excellent starting point for an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of telecourses. Keegan summarizes the advantages and disadvantages for students who take their education at a distance:

- freedom from the “strait-jacket of the lecture hall”
- ability to study whenever and wherever desired
- freedom inherent in the individuality of the distance student’s situation
- student not bound by the learning pattern of a learning group
- distance students’ needs are not subservient to the needs of a learning group

For Keegan, the main benefit for telecourse students is that they are outside of the conventional academic system. These students are not constrained by the requirement to attend specific classroom sessions at specific times, nor are they forced to follow the learning projectory of the larger learning group.

However, Keegan acknowledges a number of disadvantages to a program in which students are isolated from their instructor and peers:

- no measure of student progress available
- no framework of study for the distance student
- no peer group clarification or pressure
- no benchmarks on progress or failure
I believe Keegan's negative claims are a bit drastic. Instead of the flat-out negative of "no measure," "no framework," and so on, I would substitute the words "less" or "fewer." For example, when compared to classroom courses, telecourses seem to offer less opportunity for students to measure their own performances against each other, but there is certainly opportunity to measure progress. Likewise, the better courses do provide opportunities for "peer group clarification or pressure," even though the opportunities may be fewer than in the traditional classroom community. For instance, instead of weekly classroom meetings where students interact with one another, the telecourse provides occasional and intermittent meeting opportunities. On the whole, though, Keegan's list of advantages and disadvantages accord with the points I have made in the previous chapters—namely that unmotivated or undisciplined students rarely succeed in distance courses, while well-motivated students seem to succeed at higher rates. As Keegan says, "distance systems can either give students the dignity of succeeding by pacing them or the freedom to proceed towards failure without pacing" (102).

In 1986, telecourse researchers DeLayne R. Hudspeth and Ronald G. Brey argued that "Nothing inherent in the medium of television ensures quality. But when sound program design procedures are used and television lessons are developed with that blend of creativity and scholarly rigor that produces good instruction in any setting, the results have been excellent" (x). The conclusion drawn by Hudspeth and Brey is supported by the fifty or so dissertations published since 1980 that address the use of telecourses for educational instruction. Such studies have drawn conclusions similar to that of Richard
Slavich in his 1993 Northern Arizona University dissertation *Traditional versus Passive Telecourse Methodologies*: "The study supports the premise that educational quality of video course instruction was equal to that of the traditional lecture method, and that passive video courses are an effective way to instruct this type of material." Slavich's conclusions are based on a study of the course Basic Plant Science at Butte College in Oroville, CA. A similar result was found in a study of students learning how to play the piano. Allen Giles of Columbia University Teacher's College in 1981 concluded that, "Motivated adult students who are willing to study and practice systematically can complete the first semester of piano study at least as successfully with televised instruction as with more conventional instruction in class or private study." These two studies are representative of the conclusions drawn by present research. Students succeed at the intellectual material, whether in the foundational-based plant-science course in which students are asked to gather and reproduce information or in the piano class in which students are asked not only to gather and reproduce the course material, but to synthesize the material in a skilled manner. The combined results reflect the prevailing conventional wisdom: (1) that students can gather and reproduce information in telecourses as well as they can in traditional classroom courses; and (2) highly motivated telecourse students will succeed at a higher rate than less-motivated students.

These findings accord with a review of telecourse research conducted by William Blanchard at the end of 1989. Blanchard summarizes his findings thusly:

This review of the research literature on the effectiveness of telecourses covers the period from summer 1986 through fall 1989. The major findings are as follows: (1) in general, based on course grades or pre- and posttest measurements of learning, student opinion, and faculty opinion, telecourses have been found to
be as effective as conventional, face-to-face courses; (2) telecourses are superior to correspondence courses; (3) although telecourses do not allow the frequent and spontaneous interaction with faculty and other students that is possible in conventional classrooms, their utilization has facilitated major improvements in the convenience of access; and (4) when well produced, telecourses impose a discipline and organizational rigor on instructors that is not required in the looser structure of the conventional classroom. It is concluded that the major issue with telecourses is not whether or not they are as effective as face-to-face courses per se, but whether telecourses are skillfully planned and delivered, with the same attention to pedagogical and organizational issues that is essential in planning and delivering a conventional course.\textsuperscript{6}

Blanchard reiterates the claim most often advanced to support the use of telecourse instruction: “telecourses have been found to be as effective as conventional, face-to-face courses.” Blanchard summarizes nicely an important theme in the discussion of telecourses: although telecourses are not conducive to interaction between students and faculty and among students, they do provide access to a form of higher education for students who otherwise might not have access.

The conclusions Blanchard draws from his research review square with my own more recent review of ERIC documents regarding telecourses. For instance, Bonny Goodwin writes in her 1993 article, “Perceptions and Attitudes of Faculty and Students in Two Distance Learning Modes of Delivery: Online Computer and Telecourse,” that telecourses were rated highly by students who were more comfortable with the lack of interaction: “Students who did not miss face-to-face interaction gave the online program a significantly higher rating than those who missed the traditional interaction.”\textsuperscript{7} After studying telecourses taught by Coastline Community College, a member of The Telecourse People, one of the leading national production and distribution consortia, Goodwin reports that “Overall results suggest that both faculty and students thought
highly of the ONLINE program and the Telecourse program as academic products. Both students and faculty feel that the programs are comparable to a traditional program” (13). Goodwin’s study demonstrates that both faculty and students utilize new technologies in higher education to positive effect, a point repeated time and again in telecourse research. For instance, a 1993 study by Jafar Alavi et al compares telecourse students and classroom students of a college-level economics telecourse. According to the authors, the pre- and post-test data “demonstrated no significant differences in comprehension of content or in cognitive level, although the video group did do better in the area of implicit application.”

A more recent study by Greenfield Community College examined student perceptions to measure the advantages and disadvantages of telecourses. As The Chronicle of Higher Education reports in its 1998 article, “Survey of Students Finds Mixed Emotions on Distance Learning,” students of six telecourses at Greenfield Community College “overwhelmingly approved of the format.” Just as in the composition and literature telecourses that I have described, the students in these sciences and humanities courses watched lectures on public television or on videotape, communicated with their instructors and classmates by telephone and e-mail, and attended occasional classroom sessions. Authored by Martha Field, the Greenfield Community College (GCC) Report concludes that, “Students really liked the convenience, the flexibility, the freedom, the ability to work at their own pace, and the ability to study around their work and family schedules” (1). On the negative side, however, the GCC telecourse students reported that they missed the interactive nature of traditional classes. As Field writes, “students
missed the interaction with faculty and other students that a classroom course offers on a regular basis and mentioned the need for a high degree of self-discipline and self-motivation to prevent them from falling behind in course work” (1). Field’s findings accord with Blanchard’s research review and Goodwin’s claim regarding the Coastline telecourses: in general, students react negatively to the lack of interaction in telecourses.

Although students may miss interaction, telecourse research indicates that the quality of learning is not diminished by the lack of interaction. Another recent study, by Nora Busby and Steve Alfers of the Dallas County Community College District, focused on the DCCC history course, America in Perspective.11 The researchers examined the results of the course’s comprehensive final with fifty test elements, including short answer and multiple choice. Their findings indicate that there is no difference between Dallas County Community College District telecourse and classroom students studying the same material. The paper, presented at the 1996 Third International Distance Education Conference, repeats the claim that a comparison of student performance and retention rates in telecourse and classroom instruction show "no significant difference in either achievement or retention rates.” The report concludes: “The results of the present investigation suggest that there is no difference in quality between a selected telecourse recently produced at the R. Jan LeCroy Center for Educational Telecommunications and the same course offered in the traditional classroom format as evidenced by student scores on a comprehensive final” (37). The authors offer a caveat to this conclusion, suggesting that the “findings may be generalizable only to the current student classroom and telecourse population from which the students were selected” (37). This final point
notwithstanding, this study reinforces the oft-repeated claim that well-made teleducourses with appropriate student support (such as timely access to faculty and accessible course materials) can indeed be excellent avenues for allowing students to learn and retain information.

I would offer a second caveat for those interested in teleducourses that teach English studies: these results address a test that asks students to repeat transmitted information. In this respect, the teleducourses are similar to a traditional lecture format in which the acknowledged subject specialist conveys information throughout the course of the semester—a questionable methodology regardless of the field. Because such methods are not generally utilized in composition or literature courses, we need to examine studies of teleducourses that teach English. Unfortunately, there have been no studies that focus exclusively on teleducourses that teach literature and only a few studies on teleducourses that teach composition. In fact, despite the growing popularity of teleducourses, a review of research reveals no major study within the past decade on the effectiveness of teleducourses that teach English. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, two studies that focused singularly on composition teleducourses yielded similar results which will help us understand the benefits of English teleducourses.

II

Evaluations of Composition Teleducourses

On behalf of the Dallas County Community College District, Linda Agler conducted a 1976 study of the telecourse, "Writing for a Reason," the precursor to DCCCD’s The
Write Course, itself the precursor to the course I discussed at length in Chapter Two, A Writer's Exchange. Agler sought to determine if the telecourse could provide effective instruction, using the following two definitions of effective: (1) "improved writing skills in the area of content, organization of individual paragraphs, organization of the entire essay, sentences, diction, usage, spelling and mechanics, and overall improvement"; and (2) "improved attitudes toward the subject matter, the method of instruction and the student's own ability as a writer" (5). The first definition--with its emphasis on correctness of form, organization, and style--stresses the sorts of current-traditional pedagogy discussed in Chapter 1; the second definition, on the other hand, stresses the student's enjoyment of the activity of writing.

Based on an examination of a variety of data, including pre- and post-test student composition, student surveys, grade distributions, and a survey of telecourse dropouts, Agler concludes that the

English 101 telecourse 'Writing for a Reason' appears to be providing effective instruction as defined in this study. Students demonstrated improved writing skills and improved writing self-concepts; they also expressed satisfaction with the course components and the teaching methods. (12)

In addition to the quantitative successes, Agler reports that students enjoyed their telecourse experience: "The study of student attitudes demonstrated that the telecourse students achieved statistically significant improvements in their self-concept of their writing ability and maintained a high regard for the method of instruction" (71).

Agler went a step farther than simply studying the telecourse effectiveness and compared both classroom and telecourse English 101 students on their performance in the following sequence course, a classroom course in English 102. Agler reports that the
"mean grade achieved by telecourse students in the English 102 class was 3.0 on a four-point scale; the mean grade of the on-campus students was 2.8" (46). Agler concludes, "The achievement of the telecourse and on campus English 101 students in their English 102 course was comparable. While the telecourse students had a slightly higher grade point average, the percentage of successful students was identical for each group" (48).

In sum, Agler concludes both that telecourse students learned as much if not more about writing than the classroom students and that telecourse students improved their attitude toward writing. To conclude her report, Agler "recommended that the telecourse be continued, and that as the components are revised, further studies be carried out to ensure the effectiveness of the revisions" (73).

Agler's advice in 1976 was heeded, and when DCCCD produced an updated composition telecourse, The Write Course, a comprehensive evaluative study was conducted on behalf of DCCCD in 1985.12 Titled, "An Evaluation of DCCCD's 'The Write Course,'" the study performed "both qualitative and quantitative analyses of different types of data" (1), including demographic and biographic information, pre- and post-test writing samples from both classroom courses and telecourses, self-report data on the composing process, and interviews regarding the students' attitudes towards writing. Based on this array of data, the technical report concludes that The Write Course is "an effective course in freshman composition, whether its students be enrolled at two-year or four-year colleges" (2). The technical report summarizes its findings thusly:

The data also permit a number of more specific conclusions. For example, they indicate that following one semester of composition instruction, the Write Course students generally produce better informative/expository and better argumentative/persuasive written texts than their counterparts in traditional
composition classes. With respect to holistic assessments of student writing, comparisons across groups of classes indicate that the traditional classes vary considerably in the extent to which they promote positive changes in students' writing over the course of a semester, whereas the *Write Course* videos and study guide succeed in (1) getting students to use what for them are new strategies for generating, translating, evaluating, and revising their written texts, (2) developing students' metacognitive awareness of composing processes, (3) teaching students how to control or regulate their own composing processes, and (4) teaching writing as both a rhetorical or communicative act and as a way of learning. The success of the *The Write Course* videos and study guide in teaching these elements of a sound composition curriculum is also suggested by the written evaluative comments of students about *The Write Course*. (2)

Like Agler's study, this report focuses on current-traditional concerns of usage and common rhetorical modes. In addition, though, the report addresses advances made in composition theory by focusing on how well the telecourse utilized the then-recent changes in professional practices (including the composing process championed by expressionists such as Peter Elbow and the higher cognitive functions of written language advanced by such theorists as Linda Flower, John Hayes, and Janet Emig). This thorough study contributes to the overwhelming evidence that a telecourse can provide an excellent opportunity for students to learn the course material.

More specifically, the report argues that "the most notable" of the "many impressive features" of *The Write Course* "is the consistency with which writing is shown to be a rhetorically-based activity" in which the student writer is taught to take the reader into account. For example, the evaluators point out that the telecourse presents the current-traditional emphasis on correct usage by emphasizing the writer’s awareness of the audience: "Viewers are told that grammar and spelling are important because of the effect correctness has on the reader" (B-5). The report claims that "In light of current research
on composing, the commitment to teaching students to be attentive to rhetorical concerns in their own writing is striking” (B-5).

*The Write Course* is the precursor to the DCCCD telecourse *A Writer’s Exchange* that I have discussed at some length in Chapter Two. Although the information contained in the report focuses exclusively on *The Write Course*, we can apply the report’s conclusions to the current version of the telecourse because the two courses were produced by the same institution with many of the same academic advisors. For example, according to the report, another strong aspect of the televised material is the fact that the intellectual material has been developed by a collection of experts: “Current research on composing is informed by many disciplines, and even this is reflected in the telecourse” (B-4). Indeed, just as in *A Writer’s Exchange*, *The Write Course* utilizes to positive effect not only academic professionals but others who use writing in their occupations, ranging from journalists, creative writers, newspaper columnists, police officers, nurses, and business professionals. Academic luminaries such as Linda Flowers, Maxine Hairston, and the late Edward P.J. Corbett and James Kinneavy are featured prominently. Thus the student writer in both courses is exposed to a wide range of academic and non-academic writers, thereby enabling the student to view and to practice a range of writing genres. Finally, the study of *The Write Course* indicates that telecourse students received a more consistent educational experience than the students in classroom courses. The “traditional classes vary considerably in the extent to which they promote positive changes in student’s writing.” Although the report does not describe the ways in which the classroom courses were inconsistent, the report does praise the
televised material for its uniform quality. "Of many impressive features of *The Write Course*, perhaps the most notable is the consistency with which writing is shown to be a rhetorically-based activity" (B-5). In a televised course, the material has been planned, edited, and prepared. Mistakes are cut from the final product, leaving only the most successful teaching moments.\(^{13}\) These moments are repeated time and again in every course.

III

**Summary of Benefits and Disadvantages for Telecourse Students**

Clearly, Dallas County Community College District is to be commended for the thoroughness of their evaluative telecourse studies. DCCCD has conducted three major studies in each of the past three decades, all indicating that a telecourse can be an effective tool for higher education. Although DCCCD has a vested interest in producing such conclusions, I concur with the findings. Their methodologies appear sound, their data seem appropriate, and their results accurate. Consequently, based on my own experience and the conclusions of these various telecourse studies, I stand by the claim that telecourses can indeed be an effective form of English studies education. As I indicated at some length in Chapters 2 and 3, the literature and composition courses I’ve reviewed are exceptionally well-produced, utilizing not only leading academic and intellectual figures but a variety of other role models in order to train the telecourse students in the various skills of literary criticism and functionalist composition.
More specifically, I offer the following list of reasons why telecourses that teach English should be considered beneficial to the enrolled students.

**Summary Of The Benefits Of The Televised Material**

- Provides a consistent educational experience
- Provides a high quality intellectual material
- Presents in-depth academic material in an engaging manner
- The nationally distributed courses offer a variety of academic experts and subject specialists
- The nationally distributed courses offer a variety of professional writers and professional writings

In a classroom course, the relationship among the students and between the students the teacher is an integral part of the learning experience, and there are many ways that a classroom course will be inconsistent from one day to the next and from one week to the next. For example, if a teacher attempts a new teaching method that is not especially effective, the intellectual work will suffer. If a teacher makes a tactical mistake for the day (for example, letting one student take too much time to develop a concept), the intellectual work will suffer. If it is raining and not as many students attend class, the intellectual work will suffer. Moreover, the classroom course will be inconsistent when one section is taught by one teacher who favors a particular methodology and another teacher who favors a different one. However, a telecourse that has been rigorously prepared will have none of these disadvantages. The student is exposed to a thoroughly trained teacher and, in the case of such national courses as *A Writer's Exchange*, *Voices and Visions*, and *Literary Visions*, a wide range of academic and non-academic experts. Every time the course is taught, the academic material will always be presented in the same order, the lessons will be exactly the same, and the intellectual work performed by
the televised material will be exactly the same. In such a situation, teachers and students alike simply follow the prescribed pattern, thereby mitigating mistakes made by teachers who are not skilled in certain aspects of teaching the subject matter.

**Summary Of The Benefits For The Student's Learning Experience**

- Convenience and flexibility
- Students can engage in the intellectual material while remaining at a spatial and temporal distance from faculty, fellow students, and the home institution
- Students can receive needed academic credit
- The school schedule doesn't interfere with the student's work schedule
- Students can learn at their own pace
- Students don't have to arrange transportation to school
- Students don't have to arrange child care
- Less classroom time is required—"seat time" becomes unnecessary
- Students have the freedom to view material according to their schedule
- Students have the opportunity to review the televised material, either by rewinding the videotape to a particular teaching moment or by re-viewing at their convenience previously viewed sessions
- Highly motivated students will succeed at a higher rate than less motivated students
- Telecourse students learn and retain information as well as or better than in classroom courses

Perhaps the most important benefit for students is that they can engage in the intellectual material while remaining at a spatial and temporal distance from faculty, fellow students, and the home institution. Although most telecourses have consistent deadlines and due dates, students can still work at their own pace within the general guidelines of the course. Because less classroom time is required, students do not need to complete "seat time" and can move from unit to unit as they master the given material. Instead of following the weekly schedule of a classroom class—a schedule that may be slower or faster than is optimum for the student—the student can move forward in the class requirements as they master the material, or, conversely, they can slow down and
review the material they have not yet mastered. Thus students can juggle their academic work around a work schedule, rather than trying to fit their work schedule around the traditional day-time hours of a college or university or even the evening courses offered by many schools. This is especially important for students who are parents.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Benefits for Parents}

Carol Tittle, Carol Kehr, and Elenor Denker explain that returning students who are parents (historically women, though more and more often men) bump against a number of barriers in their quest for education. "Scheduling, location, and availability of courses still provide barriers to women returning to higher education, particularly part-time students" (39), while "Strict attendance requirements may hinder women with children, especially low-income women" (38).\textsuperscript{15} Tittle, Kehr, and Denker point out that attendance and availability are not the only obstacles: child care is one of the tallest hurdles that parents face. "Surveys routinely find that a majority of women with children will state that their academic work was hampered by the need to care for children. Increasingly, men may also report such a need and increase the demand for child care facilities available for longer periods of time" (40). When we consider the description of the viewing habits of one of my students, we can begin to see why telecourses are so popular with women: "I watched them by myself [. . .] when my kids would be napping--preferably. Also when my husband was away." Telecourse students don't have to arrange transportation to school and they don't have to arrange for child care; these benefits have rippling effects, ranging from saving money to the potential for a closer
relationship among family members. I hasten to add that this benefit is not only a benefit for women; fathers, too, can view the televised material when children and spouses are sleeping or away. As one of the male students in my classes writes, "[I watched when] everyone [was] in bed."

The Benefits of Teaching Utilitarian Writing to Women

Recall that the significant majority of telecourse students are returning adults, mostly women, with children and blue- or pink-collar jobs. Demographic data on telecourse students over the past twenty years indicate that these students are taking the telecourses primarily in order to advance their economic and social status. For example, the 1976 evaluation of the composition telecourse, "Writing for a Reason," found that a significant percentage of telecourse students were married women over 29 years old who had jobs outside the home. Likewise, the 1985 study, "An Evaluation of DCCCD's The Write Course," reports that "Women outnumber men almost three to two." With an average age of 25 years old, a "large percentage" of these students "have been out of high school for a decade or longer, many of whom are either trying to establish a track record prior to transferring to a regular two-year or four-year college or trying to improve important job-related skills" (D-2).\textsuperscript{16} The results of these studies are consistent with Bonny Goodwin's 1993 study, in which Goodwin found that typical distance students are "remedial students with high levels of motivation" who have had a "previous lack of success with traditional programs." They are "35 years of age, on the average" and "financially disadvantaged" (7). Such students report high levels of "anxiety about the course" and
“feelings of isolation.” The typical telecourse student appears to be a woman who has been marginalized economically, academically, and professionally.

I again turn to Tittle, Kehr, and Denker to help explain the situation of these students. They report two primary groups among women returning to higher education:

[. . .] the first appeared to be women who stopped formal education to marry, raise a family, and be homemakers. Home responsibilities were cited as having been the primary barriers to returning to college, and now children were in school. The return to college placed a financial burden on the family, even though the family income was high. Their goals were to train for careers. The second group of women students apparently stopped attending school to take a job. These women were also in their thirties, married, but had fewer children [. . .]. This woman was more likely to be an evening student with a part-time course load, and college was also a financial strain. (31)\textsuperscript{17}

My experience teaching telecourse students accords with this description. As I have indicated, many telecourse students struggle to attend school while and make ends meet for their families. The authors draw the following conclusion from this information: “the highest needs related to goals were in assistance in vocational choice, vocational preparation, and job search” (31). If students are to become a successful communicators outside of the academy, they must have access to the methods, codes, and signifying practices of those vocations to which they seek access. It is no exaggeration to say that for these students, the telecourse that teaches a utilitarian English is one of the last opportunities to achieve their academic and professional goals. Consequently, I agree with the emphasis on teaching utilitarian writing that will help students achieve their academic, economic, and professional goals.

At their best, then, telecourses can provide an excellent educational opportunity for students with a below-average economic status and unsettled, hectic personal lives that
include jobs and families. When telecourses are well-produced with appropriate attention to pedagogical and organizational issues, they allow such students to complete inexpensively the required course material and receive the academic credit that they need to continue with their educational and occupational goals.

**Disadvantages for Enrolled Students**

As beneficial as the telecourses can be to students, the disadvantages of telecourses are numerous and need to be considered. I've said that studies of telecourse are often fervent in their enthusiasm for telecourses, and few studies address the disadvantages of telecourse instruction. Keegan's list of disadvantages above emphasizes that students are isolated from one another with little opportunity for peer group interaction, and a number of studies discuss the high drop-out rate. I have already described the shortcomings of my own courses: instead of the variety of academic and writing professionals offered by the PBS-distributed courses, my courses solely emphasize my talking head. Instead of exciting graphics and detailed film-making, my courses utilize simple PowerPoint slides and simplistic props. Instead of the meticulous attention to detail afforded by a large budget and a long-term production schedule, my classes have the simple errors attendant with a low budget and hurried filming schedule. These weaknesses do not appear to hinder learning, but they serve to highlight the comparative quality in telecourse production.

What I offer below, however, is a more thorough accounting of the disadvantages for both students and faculty. Based on my review of telecourse research and my own
experience with telecourses, I suggest that the following are the major practical
disadvantages for telecourse students. Although I present them in a systematic fashion, it
is important to remember that these negative features are not discrete elements. They
often work hand-in-hand, either as a result of the nature of distance education or as a
product of the institution’s efforts at using the courses as profit centers.

**Summary of the Disadvantages For Enrolled Students**

- When compared to classroom courses, a higher percentage of enrolled
  students don’t complete a telecourse
- Simple banking model of education in which students are filled by “experts”
- Lack of interaction among students and between students and teacher,
  therefore students have little opportunity to create knowledge
- In literature classes, there is no opportunity for students to discuss the
  imaginative works—they are instead relegated to the passive role of observing
  what others say
- In composition classes, students are given little opportunity to develop their
  own writings in collaboration with other students
- Students receive no training at editing the work of others
- Students receive no training in rhetorical speaking
- Students receive no training in how to interact with a group of students
- Little direct or immediate access to the teacher
- Requires too much self-discipline—too much individual responsibility to
  cover and understand the course the course material
- Little opportunity to receive answers to questions about course logistics
- Little opportunity to receive answers to questions about intellectual material
- Inconvenient access to televised materials—television schedule is difficult to
  follow; technology (like VCRs) break down; limited access to videos through
  libraries or telecourse office
- Lack of connection between the video and the syllabus—the teacher designs a
  different course than the televised material calls for
- Televised material may be at times not interesting or difficult to follow

As the research indicates, students report not only that they are hindered by the lack
of interactivity (a problem that in some important ways can be overcome by using
technology, as I explain below), but that they sometimes have difficulty gaining access to
the televised material. Martha Field summarizes this situation in her report on
telecourses at Greenfield Community College:

One problem mentioned across all courses was the lack of availability of tapes in
the GCC library and the inability to view tapes prior to their broadcast time.
Despite the ability to tape the course from the TV broadcast, many students relied
on viewing the tapes supplied by the library. A repeated suggestion is to have
more tapes available in the library. Another student concern is the inability to
view library tapes ahead of time. Many students mentioned the need to keep up
with the workload and the desire to try to get ahead but that the library policy
prevented them from doing so. (2)

My own experience at Pima Community College indicates that students can struggle both
with coordinating their schedules with the television schedule and with the technology
itself. Sometimes, for instance, a student’s VCR will break, or they will not have enough
money to pay for cable. In such instances, the technology itself causes a frustrating gap
in the student’s educational experience.

Sometimes, though, it is the student himself who is responsible for the gap. Two
anecdotes may serve to put students’ complaints regarding access in perspective. During
one of my introductory meetings with Pima Community College telecourse students
some years ago, one student raised his hand and asked, “Do you need a television to take
the course?” As I have explained, the tapes for the PCC classes were available at the
campus libraries; nonetheless, one would think that a television with cable access would
be of primary importance in a telecourse. Similarly, during an introductory meeting for
students enrolled in an online course, one woman asked if it was necessary to have a
computer to take the course. When these events occurred, I simply chalked up the
student responses to foolish individuals: of course you need a computer for an online
course; of course you need a cable-ready television for a cable telecourse. However, these responses suggest that one reason telecourse students drop out of the course so often is that they do not know what to expect. All they know is that the course is advertised as an easy way to gain college credit from home; perhaps they are not made aware of even the practical and logistical demands of distance education. To be as successful as possible, telecourse (and online) programs need to provide all potential students with accurate information regarding the practicalities necessary for student success.

However, these anecdotes also point out an economic implication. Not all students can afford cable-ready televisions and not all students can afford computers and internet access. While institutions cannot be responsible for every students’ ability to purchase such technologies, it is incumbent upon the institution to provide access to the course material, whether in the form of computer labs or libraries with access to television videos. As I’ve said, PCC provides each of their campus libraries with copies of every telecourse videotape so that students who do not have home access to cable television can still have access to the course material.

IV

Solutions to the Problem of Interaction

In his exceptional book, *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies*, James Berlin argues for a classroom that is “preeminently participatory and democratic” (101), in which the teacher works with the students “to enable students to
become active, critical agents of their experience rather than passive victims of cultural codes” (104). For English studies to be effective in this endeavor, the “relation between the teacher and students is crucial” (103). The teacher must know the individual students well enough to know which problems to pose: “The success of the kind of classroom I am recommending,” Berlin says, “depends on teachers knowing their students. The teacher must understand the unique economic, social, and cultural conditions of his or her students to arrive at the appropriate forms and contents that dialogue can assume” (104). I would venture to say that the sort of teacher-student relationship Berlin describes is precisely what many of us educators thrive on.

Indeed, Elizabeth Ellsworth, in an essay that describes her experience teaching a course that was designed to address a particularly unsettling period of racial and gender intolerance at a specific university, echoes the need for students and teachers to know one another. “Opportunities to know the motivations, histories, and personal stakes of individuals in the class” should be planned early in the semester (108), she says. Such group interaction requires “social interactions outside of class—potlucks, field trips, participation in rallies and other gatherings” (108). Such goals are laudable; indeed, some of my most enjoyable professional moments come during what I’ve come to call “unofficial coffee-shop hours” at a campus café on Sunday evenings. Students tend to be especially enthusiastic about intellectual inquiry in such relaxed settings. However, it is misplaced to suggest that in addition to their scholarship, committee work, and classroom teaching, faculty must also consistently coordinate potlucks and other gatherings. Moreover, the students themselves are often overburdened with classroom, occupational,
and family responsibilities; to require them to attend and participate in outside functions seems inappropriate. Berlin acknowledges as much, and advises instead that the teacher of an effective English studies course should learn enough about his or her students to facilitate the classroom learning environment: "Extensive knowledge about the students' backgrounds enables sound planning about the topics, questions, and comments that are most likely to set a meaningful encounter in motion" (104).

However, such "extensive knowledge" is impossible in a telecourse situation. Not only do students not know one another, but faculty rarely get to know the students. Especially in classes that are over-enrolled, faculty have little time and ability to interact with students on any personal level. As I demonstrated in Chapter Three, few students attend the introductory or review meetings, and fewer still take the time and effort to get to know the instructor. This sort of alienation from each other is an inescapable consequence of the telecourse. Students are at a distance. They are busy. They cannot be expected to form a community amongst themselves. Moreover, students don't know who their teacher is. Is it the person on television dispensing information? Is the teacher Fran Dorn, the host of Literary Visions who presents such interesting material on the use and meaning of symbols? Or is the teacher the one who grades the student papers but never participates in the conversation about symbolism? Here in Tucson, I was once stopped in a supermarket by a telecourse student who told me that the course was going well and thanked me for giving her a good grade on the last paper. The problem is that I wasn't the teacher of record. I had already been dismissed from my position as the telecourse teacher, and another part-time faculty member was grading the papers and
handling the course logistics. But the student who I saw on the street saw me on
television, dispensing information, reminding her of due dates, and in general acting like
I was her teacher.

In this section, I propose solutions to the most pressing problem of telecourse
instruction, the lack of interaction between teachers and students and among students.
Below I detail the advantages and disadvantages of four methods: classroom sessions,
email and listservs, educational virtual communities, and networked courses. I conclude
the chapter with a warning that we must take care to plan distance education based on a
moral vision of education that complements the need to recover costs and make money.
Otherwise we may very well end up with an immoral educational system built around
surveillance and compliance with the authority of systems.

Four Methods for Interaction

In Chapters 2 and 3, I demonstrated that the telecourse as it has been conceived so far
is an inflexible course. Syllabi, course assignments, and schedules cannot be changed, in
part because the televised material at the heart of the course cannot be altered and in part
because the logistical efforts necessary to inform all the distance students of such changes
are too daunting. As it stands now, the telecourse is simply a place to transmit
information. It is not a place for interactive learning where teachers and students learn
together, nor is it a place where students can construct knowledge. This is easily the most
significant disadvantage of telecourse instruction. I am happy to report, however, that
with the astonishing growth of technology, it is also a disadvantage that can be addressed.
With the advent of such technologies as educational MOOs (Multi-Object Domain, Object-Oriented) and online courseware packages, the telecourse can become a fluid entity. Below are extended analyses of four different methods for turning the one-way, non-interactive telecourse into an interactive course in which students collaborate to construct knowledge.\(^{18}\)

1. **Classroom Sessions**

The advantage of requiring students to attend classroom sessions is that students living in the same geographic region can meet one another and the teacher on a consistent basis. They can utilize the excellent benefits of the televised material, and spend the classroom time asking questions, solving problems, and conversing about the intellectual material. In this situation, the teacher reclaims the role of leader of the intellectual inquiry rather than being relegated to the passive role of tutor and grader. The problem with this solution is that not all students can attend such classroom sessions. After all, telecourse students take telecourses because family, occupational, health, and logistical situations prevent them from attending classroom courses. It is unreasonable to ask these students to attend classroom sessions. Although classroom sessions are beneficial and should be offered to the telecourse student, they should not be mandatory. Other methods of creating interactions must be utilized.

2. **Electronic Mail and Class Listservs**
Electronic mail and listservs (discussion lists dedicated solely for a select group of email users) are fast becoming a staple of not only daily life but also of higher education. The Pima Community College telecourses that I designed do not make much use of electronic mail, in part because not many students have email accounts, and in part because the faculty are not encouraged to link students with one another via a listserv dedicated to the course. However, linking students to a common listserv allows conversational threads to develop so that students participate with one another in critical conversation. For telecourse instruction, the primary advantage of a course listserv is that students have direct access to one another and to the teacher. The teacher can disseminate new or additional information to every student, and the teacher can create a variety of assignments that require students to participate in writing on the listserv. Of course, the teacher needs to monitor the listserv and help the community maintain an appropriate level of "netiquette," but the use of email allows for significantly more interaction than conventional telecourses.\textsuperscript{19}

Although research on the use of email and listservs is still spotty, one literature review focusing on the use of email in literacy learning indicates that email "is capable of bringing traditionally peripheral persons into the instructional mainstream" and that "email lends itself to more user control and user responsibility." The author, Liqing Tao, also suggests that email might positively affect "social behaviors such as collaboration and motivation" by allowing consistent contact between students.\textsuperscript{20} Tao's conclusions are supported by a paper given by JoAnne Podis at the 1998 Conference on College
Composition and Communication. Podis reports the following benefits of using Internet email to facilitate discussion:

(1) professors tended, at least initially, to replicate their classroom style when they instructed on-line; (2) as the volume of email between and among students and instructor increases, so does the informality of the exchanges; (3) the use of "emoticons" and acronyms contribute to the informality of email; (4) students tend to interpret on-line criticisms of their work more harshly than remarks made orally or on paper; (5) on-line instruction may enable students and professors to become better acquainted because of the opportunity for more, not less, communication; (6) the quality of students and instructors' communication may be higher in the on-line setting; and (7) the overtly dialogic aspect of on-line instruction causes professors to respond in readerly, rather than teacherly, ways.21

Podis' findings correlate with my own experience with electronic mail: the increasing familiarity of email leads to an informality that breaks some of the barriers of authority that normally separate teacher and student. Moreover, although a class listserv is an excellent tool for the teacher to communicate with the students, students (and, at times, the teacher) are still learning their way around the etiquette of email rhetoric and feelings can get hurt.

Take as an example an advanced composition course that I recently taught. The course met once a week in a regular classroom and once a week in a computer lab. Students were required to utilize a listserv and a variety of other educational technologies. Early in the semester, one woman, P.N. sent an email to the listserv critiquing the previous listserv post of another woman, E. W. The other student, E.W., took offense and promptly fired back an email to the whole listserv that read, in part, "I am sorry, but if the main purpose of this list serve is to attack and insult what other people have to say, then please count me out. I do not check my e-mail to find insulting
or condescending language like that of [P.N.] and if I must log on my account to find that sort of attacks, then I would like to be discontinued from this list serve."22

Such fractious situations are not unusual, though they can normally be managed by using the same sorts of methods teachers use to manage classroom situations. For example, an instructor can use the exchange of emails to discuss issues of tone, audience, and intent. Thus, even these occasional difficulties with email interactions provide learning opportunities, particularly for courses that focus on the power of language. In this particular case, I solved the troubles by bringing the two women together in person and mediating their discussion about the email exchange. P.N. apologized to E.W., the offended student, and said that she hadn’t intended her critique to be a personal criticism. I’m happy to report that they resolved their personal differences and continued on with the course. Indeed, the student who asked to be removed from the class listserv sent the following email message to me less than a month later, using humor and a certain creativity to request additional information from the previous classroom session. (n.b.: the term “MOOOOffice hours” with two extra “Os” refers to a version of online office hours that I playfully termed “MOOffice hours”):

Will you be holding MOOOOffice hours at all this weekend? Why? Becuase [sic] I can feel my sanity running from my skull like rum from an overturned glass. Drip. Drip. Drip. And oh the mess on the floor. A sticky, drunken reminder of the person I used to be.....before this paper plagued my thoughts!!! Can you e-mail me that list of questions you had in class yesterday??! It would greatly be appreciated. And happy mooing to you.23

This student has changed her tone drastically. The previous complaint of “insulting or condescending language” has been replaced by the light-hearted, informal banter that functions as a request for information. She wants to know if I will be available for online
consultation, and she wants me to send her a copy of the information that I had provided in the classroom the previous day. The student is now utilizing the very technology that she previously criticized in order to utilize even more of that same technology. Her experience indicates that once students become facile with such technology, the technology becomes an essential aspect of their class experience.

Although this particular email exchange began in frustration and ill-will, it well represents the benefits that can arise from a well-used and well-organized electronic listserv. Such teaching moments correspond to Podis’ findings that the relative informality of email allows students and faculty to “become better acquainted.” This student is clearly comfortable enough with the teacher-student relationship to play with language in ways that most likely would not happen in a face-to-face setting—after all, it would be rare to find a student visiting a teacher’s office hours and saying what E.W. wrote in her email, “I can feel my sanity running from my skull like rum from an overturned glass. Drip. Drip. Drip.” In terms of the typical telecourse, such a dialogic relationship is very rare indeed. Potential student-teacher conversations are silenced by the insurmountable gap in distance and time, leaving the students and the teacher isolated. A class listserv would contribute to creating an educational community that benefits not only the telecourse students but the instructor.

Advice for Moderating a Listserv

In the 1997 special issue of the cultural studies and technology journal, *Works and Days*, devoted to teaching online courses, Ken McAllister provides some practical advice
for teaching with listservs, including the necessity of a dynamic listserv facilitator and proper planning. McAllister points out that it takes significant planning for a listserv to succeed: "It cannot be overemphasized that forethought about one's electronic educational courses and projects is usually worth the effort it requires" (329). Such planning must take into account the abilities and limitations of the listserv members, the intellectual goals of the course, and the abilities and limitations of the available technology. For example, the level of conversation will be different on a list whose members are already fluent with computer technology as opposed to a list whose members are still learning the specific keyboards strokes that enable them to reply to an email. Because the learning curve for both students and teachers is particularly steep, McAllister notes, "These learning curves are typically stressful to endure" (329). Consequently, either group or individual face-to-face interactions early in the process will encourage the levels of trust and energy necessary for a successful online community. As we know, however, telecourse students are not always available for such face-to-face contact.

In all listserv situations, but especially when the members do not meet one another in real life, the facilitator becomes responsible for enabling successful conversations. As McAllister suggests:

Facilitators are the dynamos behind on-line courses and projects. In order to offset the disadvantages of collaborating without face-to-face contact with their groups and in order to exploit the advantages of working in electronic environments, facilitators must first be aware of such benefits and drawbacks, and, second, must be charismatic enough to help participants adapt to them quickly and smoothly." (328)
McAllister's comment regarding the facilitator's charisma is particularly helpful. The facilitators of any listserv, but particularly the teachers of educational listservs, must be capable of moderating the written conversation in a kind and generous manner that both keeps the conversation on task and allows participants the freedom to move in different directions. The facilitator must be energetic, for if the leader of the project doesn't display an eagerness to engage in the topics at hand, then the rest of the group may follow suit, leaving the listserv conversations to trickle to a slow death. Moreover, as my students demonstrated with their email tiff above, some listserv members are easily perturbed by the conversations. To handle such tiffs among members, the facilitator must also be an astute rhetorician, choosing with accuracy the times to employ humor, praise, negative critique, or even silence.

3. Multi-User Domains: Educational MUDs and MOOs

Multi-User Domains (MUDs) and Multi-User Domains, Object-Oriented (MOOs) are two of the newer computer technologies that hold significant promise for teaching at a distance, primarily because they allow students at a temporal and spatial remove to communicate in writing with one another. These Multi-User Domains are virtual spaces created by computer technology; as long as a computer has been properly set up for accessing the Internet, any computer can be used to access the MUD or MOO community. Participants log onto a specific Internet address via their computer, connecting to other participants through a main server.²⁴
Traci Gardner of The Daedalus Group, one of the leaders in the field of computer education, explains that an essential aspect of a MOO is the creation in writing of objects:

The thing which makes MOO a little different is that "Object Oriented" part. People who log on have "objects" -- they might have a room, a robot, a slide projector, and so forth. These objects are all created by text: descriptions, features, and verbs are all written by the person who "owns" an object. Thus MOO has a lot to offer since writers can describe what they look like, fashion personal messages about themselves, and communicate with other writers (in their classroom and beyond). (http://www.daedalus.com/4cmoo.html)

Early versions of MUDs and MOOs were used primarily for chatting and gaming, particularly playing fantasy games with players finding treasures, killing monsters, slaying dragons, and meeting various other characters with special powers.25 Over the past few years, however, these virtual communities have grown to include communities devoted to education, in which the fundamental purpose is to assist students and teachers in academic work.26

Lonnie Turbee presents a helpful overview of educational MOOs in her article, "Educational MOO: Text-Based Virtual Reality for Learning in Community":

Early multi-user domains, or "MUDs," began as net-based dungeons-and-dragons type games, but MOOs have evolved from these origins to become some of cyberspace's most fascinating and engaging online communities. MOOs are social environments in a text-based virtual reality where people gather to chat with friends, meet new people, and help build the MOO. Users connect from anywhere in the world and communicate with one another in real-time. Users can create rooms, objects, and programs that recreate in text anything the user might imagine. Educational MOOs have an academic theme and use a variety of MOO communication tools such as internal e-mail, newspapers, documents, blackboards, and classrooms to accommodate a variety of teaching styles.

Perhaps the most significant benefit of MOOs for English studies is that they are text-based. Unlike some video games where graphics depict images of castles or lunar landscapes--and unlike the Internet, which is filled with graphics, banners, and video
clips—everything in the MOO happens strictly within language. For instance, one of the first things a new participant in the MOO needs to do is create a character for himself or herself. The user types “@preferences” and the computer screen scrolls down, allowing the participant to describe himself or herself. The participants can be as creative as they want, morphing into a different gender, changing personal qualities, and adding virtues as they like. Because these descriptions are an important way to present oneself to the MOO world, the act of describing oneself becomes a rhetorical event of creation, imagination, and persuasion. In addition to creating their own physical characteristics in writing, participants converse with one another, adding descriptive phrases to convey emotions and attitudes. In the foreword to High Wired: On the Design, Use, and Theory of Educational MOOs, an invaluable collection of essays on educational MOOs, Sherry Turkle presents a clear description of how participants converse on the MOO:

In the MOO world, characters communicate by invoking commands that cause text to appear on each other’s screen. If I log onto LambdaMOO […] as a male character Turk and strike up a conversation with a character named Dimitri, the setting for our conversation will be a room in which a variety of other characters might be present. If I type ‘Say hi’, my screen will flash, You say “hi,” and the screens of the other players in the room (including Dimitri) will flash ‘Turk says hi.” If I type, ‘Emote whistles happily’, all the players’ screens will flash, Turk whistles happily. Or I can address Dimitri alone by typing, ‘Whisper Dimitri Glad to see you’, and only Dimitri’s screen will show, Turk whispers “Glad to see you.” People’s descriptions of Turk will be formed by the descriptions I have written for him (this description will be available to all players on command), as well as by the nature of Turk’s conversation and behavior. (x)

In such a setting, the written word is paramount because every single communicative act is in writing. As Joel English reports, the writing done on the MOO “allows participants to talk, perform actions, thoughts, and emotions, manipulate objects and furniture, and altogether control the online environment. The technology allows for
students at a distance to interact with one another on a variety of levels, whether in
casual, joking conversation or sophisticated academic discourse” (ED413892, 1997). An
additional benefit of a world in which writing is so important is that reading becomes
equally important. Participants need to learn to read with accuracy, recognizing where
other participants exaggerate, disguise, or misrepresent themselves and whether this is
done in a light-hearted or hostile manner.

In my own experience teaching on the MOO, I’ve found that students are exposed to
various rhetorical strategies in ways that the conventional classroom does not enable.27
When all the communication is carried out in writing, students quickly learn to write
more clearly. They no longer have the luxury as we do in face-to-face conversations of
relying on body language, facial clues, and the ubiquitous sentence, “You know what I
mean?” Every communication act on the MOO is an act of writing, and students quickly
learn the power of rhetoric, including the necessity of reading critically and writing
clearly. Echoing Michel de Certeau’s contention in The Practice of Everyday Life that to
read is to create, Shawn Wilbur explains in a High Wired chapter that,

Reading is writing, or creating, and every participant plays a role in shaping the
environment, whether or not they ever create an object or program a single verb. In
some sense, every participant shapes the whole environment—not without limits, but
perhaps in ways that differ considerably from other participants. (150)

Each player is thus a consumer of text and a producer of text, a poacher and a creator
simultaneously.28

Consider the following rather lengthy transcript from a MOO session in a Spring
1999 Advanced Composition course at the University of Arizona. The four students, M.,
B., L., and La., had been asked to read the back cover of the quarterly journal Radical
Teacher. Part of the back cover presents a lengthy dictionary definition for the term "radical teacher." The students were asked to discuss the ideologies presented by this definition, then prepare a paragraph to present to the larger MOO community. The following is the written interaction as recorded on the MOO. You will notice that (except for the spelling errors) such a conversation is typical of classroom group work. The conversation does not stay fully on task, ranging from logistical questions regarding how to use the MOO tools, to moments of discussion focused on the assignment, to continued reference to a popular television program, "Saved by the Bell."29

M. says, "Is somebody recording this?"
B. says, "I don't know."
M. says, "just checking"
L. says, "yes"
La. says, "to M. I have no clue so maybe L. can"
L. says, "i am recording"
L. says, "i'm still not sure what we are supposed to be doing"
L. says, "does everyone like this definition? Disagree with it?"
La. says, "to L. I thought we were supposed to talk about the lower portion of the paper"
L. [to La.-]: what do you think the ideology is?
B. says, "what's the definition"
L. says, "the definition of radical teacher, B."
La. says, "to L. that radical teachers are those who do it all"
L. says, "i like that"
La. says, "office people does anybody have anything to add"
M. says, "they take teaching to another level"
B. says, "I think radical teachers are portrayed as super teachers in the article"
L. says, "what common ideals do they have?"
La. says, "office they are teachers that go far beyond what past teachers have been willing to go"
L. says, "in other words- what do you have to believe in to be considered a radical teacher?"
B. says, "they care about their students first"
L. says, "i wish we could make a list, 1...2...3... etc."
M. says, "a teacher who gets rid of the ego and tries to teach"
La. says, "they believe that being involved in their students lives inside and out of class is the only way to keep them in school"
L. says, "okay i'm ready to do something else now"
B. says, "they also don't judge by color of skin or ethnicity"
L. [to M.-]: I really like what you just said
La. says, "do you know what else we are supposed to do"
M. says, "if Mr. Belding was a teacher, he would be a radical one"
La. says, "why do you say that M."
B. says, "I wish he would have taught Zack and Slater a thing or two about hair styles"
L. says, "mr. belding- from saved by the bell"
L. says, "he is the anti- radical teacher"
L. says, "the opposite of what we should strive for"
M. says, "That's a little Saved by the Bell reference-he cares so much about the kids and wants to influence their lives"
La. says, "what kind of a teacher would he have made, he was at Zack's house on more than one occasion"
L. says, "wow- directions. it is about time we figured out what we were supposed to be doing"
L. says, "key words-"
M. says, "what was that?"
La. says, "what passages are we supposed to be looking at"
B. says, "I think he substituted a few times but Zack always had some scheme to stop the test they were about to take"
L. says, "teacher, radical teacher vs teacher, um..............................."
L. says, "my god how much saved by the bell did you watch?"
La. says, "okay M. we can talk about why Belding wouldn't be a good teacher later, what are we supposed to do now"
M. says, "I've seen every episode at least a dozen times. Go ahead, quiz me!"
L. says, "let my summarize what we have comprised for ideology-"
B. says, "we could focus on the words radical teacher and at the bottom the words Postrevolutionary Dictionary because it shows a new way of doing things"
La. says, "who played Screech's girfriend"
La. says, "sorry don't know how to spell his name"
M. says, "Tori Spelling and her name on the show was Violet"
La. says, "did you ever go outside when you were little"
La. says, "L. where are you getting the dictionary portion from"
B. says, "M. what did Slater and the gang find when installing a new goalpost on the football field"
L. says, "radical teachers care about their students, they are willing to adapt to the environment in every way possible to help their students, they are able to disregard their ego...."
L. says, "are we all looking at the same piece of paper"
M. says, "The radical teacher (to get back to the topic) raised the bar as far as the learning aspect is concerned, teaching takes a more important role than any other"
B. says, "La. The very bottom right under Pamela Annas, editor says New Words:A
postrevolutionary Dictionary, 2008"
L. says, "L. that is great you put it all together nicely"
L. (asleep) has disconnected.
M. says, "M. to B.-the is the answer is oil"
The housekeeper arrives to cart L. off to bed.
M. says, "The radical teacher demands a great deal of his/her students"
L. [to Tumamoc]: classroom
M. goes out.
L. goes out.

The critics that I have discussed would argue that such a MOO interaction is valuable, if for nothing else, than the fact that the students are crafting language in writing. While this is true, I contend that this writing is not especially sophisticated. As the transcript indicates, the students often communicated in short, ungrammatical sentences, with very little deeper level cognitive effort and very little effort at crafting language to present complicated thoughts. Nonetheless, there are benefits of using the MOO. Although the discussion of the television program is only tangentially related to the assignment at hand, the learning potential is valuable because the students have made a practical connection between a popular culture model of education as represented by the television program and the theoretical model of education presented by Radical Teacher. An additional benefit of the MOO is that the students now have a transcript of their thoughts. If they desire, or if they are required to, they can return to the transcript and draw from it either specific written utterances or general concepts that can then be used in future writing assignments.

Joel English reports that when used well, that is, when "the writers actualize the environment, using objects and emoting to become confident and capable online yet focusing primarily on the writing work to be done, the MOO can become one of the most
productive spaces for learning that writing instruction has found." Indeed, some would argue that the MOO provides a rhetorical space of deep complexity. Take, for example, Victor Vitanza’s celebrated essay in *High Wired*. In their introduction to *High Wired*, Cynthia Haynes and Jan Rune Holmevik say that Vitanza’s article “rocks the volume with its incendiary language” and “lights the flame of justice amid a rousing romp through the histories of reactionary violence he would have us unlearn in the learning spaces, folds, and bearings of the educational MOO” (10). In the essay itself, Vitanza argues that the MOO environment provides a way for writers and readers to rethink traditional patterns of discourse, primarily academic discourse. Troping the MOO as “the libidinal body of the dead cow” in which all language “is fold or can be refolded into fold by flattening the surface and ever giving it, along the waves, a half twist” (306), Vitanza re-tells an infamous story of a cyberrape in one of the original MOOs and the resulting construction of rules and regulations by the MOO community (298-303). Vitanza uses this story to interrogate and finally celebrate the rebellious nature of the MOO in which all participants can use language games to “as a means of our (singularly and collectively) political resistance” (289).

Vitanza provides a compelling, layered reading of MOOs, yet his over-the-top performance is at odds with the experiences my students have had with MOO writing. As I’ve indicated, one significant problem with the MOO is that the conversations are not always particularly rigorous. As one student wrote in response to an impromptu in-class writing exercise asking them to reflect on their experience on the MOO, “Talking on the moo was a waste of time. If you look at most conversations, the assignments didn’t get
done until a page of giggling had passed.” Perhaps the discrepancy between the celebrated, theoretical play of Vitanza and my experience as a teacher on the MOO can be accounted for by the fact that neither I nor my students were experienced MOOers, but I’m not certain this is the entire reason. Although commentators have described the MOO as a place that engages the students’ sense of play with language, enabling them to see the value and joy of rhetorical acts, I have yet to find empirical research on the gains made in the quality of student writing. The fact that MOO writing is often dashed off in a hurry to keep up with the thread may explain the minor punctuation and typographical errors. However, we must also remember that such writing is often performed with little analytic or critical thinking. Although in many ways, this sort of writing is useful—particularly when used to create an on-going conversation or as discovery for future writing assignments—we should not blindly celebrate the virtues of MOO writing without acknowledging the limits of such writing.31

There are other disadvantages to using MOO. Bernard Holkner reports that the typical MOO problems include “‘noise’ in a crowded room; problems for players being unable or reluctant to type in real-time; and the need for powerful and flexible user tools” (ED396728). By “noise” Holkner refers to the significant amount of writing that appears on each user’s computer screen. Depending on the set-up, participants are exposed to the writing of more or fewer fellow participants. As the multiple, competing voices in the transcript of the student interaction above suggests, too many participants at one time can be an overwhelming and unnerving experience, akin to trying to have a conversation at a loud, crowded gathering. Such a chaotic virtual setting is quite different than the gentle
parlor conversation of Kenneth Burke’s metaphor for intellectual inquiry. Perhaps today’s students are conditioned to the multi-tasking required of chat-room users and games players, but I’m not convinced that intellectual inquiry is well-suited to the hectic pace of a MOO conversation. Nonetheless, as the technology improves and as we become more acclimated to the pace of electronic conversations, I believe that the MOO will prove to be a valuable space for interactive learning, particularly for telecourses.

A Quick Guide to MOOing

In brief, the MOO allows students to hold discussions online, to conduct tutoring sessions, to conference with one another, to share texts, and to collaborate. The MOO also allows every communication to be recorded, so that all the written comments and thoughts can be reviewed at a later time for additional writing activities. Although the primary way to learn to navigate the MOO is to spend time on it, a number of articles in High Wired provide advice and strategies for building and utilizing an educational MOO.\textsuperscript{22} For example, Jorge Barrios and Deanna Wilkes-Gibbs ("How to MOO without Making a Sound"), Ken Schweller ("MOO Educational Tools"), and Cynthia Haynes ("Help! There’s a MOO in This Class!") provide practical information for the MOO participant, whether administrator, teacher, or student. Barrios and Wilkes-Gibbs present detailed information on not only the computing capabilities necessary, but the step-by-step process of connecting and participating in a MOO. In addition, they provide in-depth programming commands and directions for finding additional information. Their article itself provides testimony to the efficacy of working on the MOO; the authors live
nine time zones apart, and they conducted their research and co-wrote the article without “even so much as one phone call or face-to-face meeting” (86).

Schweller’s article addresses “the three major technical difficulties in online MOO teaching—maintaining conversational coherence, making resources available, and managing presentations” (88). Schweller leads the reader through the detailed steps necessary to create and use a functional MOO, including how to build virtual classrooms where students can interact with one another. Such classrooms can include a range of objects modeled after conventional classrooms, such as blackboards, chairs, and desks, but they can also include more creative objects, such as treasure chests that contain course information. According to Schweller, the goal in creating classrooms is “to allow differing degrees of conversational moderation and control” (91). In this way, students can participate in the interactivity so necessary for English studies, working one-on-one with each other or in small groups. Once the virtual space is created (and we must remember that space can always be re-arranged and added to), either the instructor or the MOO “wizards” can add elements that enable the teacher to communicate with the class as a whole. An electronic mail service that allows for the distribution of syllabi, class notes, lectures and other documents can be built into the system so that students and faculty can deliver larger amounts of written text to the group as a whole. In addition, faculty can create a virtual library where students can find resources suitable for the course content. Finally, the instructor can design tape recorders or cameras so that the written conversation can be recorded and viewed later, either by the conversants or the instructor. Schweller concludes his article with the advice that the tools built for an
educational MOO should be similar to objects in the real-world. "If the commands for virtual TV sets correspond to the actions we perform on real-life TVs, then in some sense we already know how to use these tools, and we adopt them easily. Commands should be easily guessable, and the tool's behavior should be as predictable as possible" (106).

Using the MOO for Collaboration: Implications for the Telecourse

The contemporary telecourse student rarely has contact with fellow students or with the teacher of record. Most of their work in the course is done on their own—receiving information from the televised material and the textbook, and completing assignments and essays that are then graded and returned. As I’ve stressed, there is little opportunity for interactivity: no heated classroom debates over the moral justification of a literary character’s actions, no peer reviews of an essay, no raising of the hand when a student has a question. Such a situation changes drastically when a MOO is introduced to the learning environment. Precisely because the only way to communicate on the MOO is by writing, all work in the MOO is a form of collaborative writing in which the writers negotiate and manipulate language together. Of particular interest for our discussion of telecourses is that students at a distance can meet in real-time and use writing to communicate about the course content. As Eric Crump, the founder of the online journal of writing and computers Rhetnet, says, the MOO becomes a "world to inhabit. A new world written into existence using familiar words. MOOing is living with writers, living in writing, a whole new kind of thing" (178). Collaboration in such a space is not only easy to facilitate, it is cardinal to the whole experience. For example, students can
arrange to log into the MOO from their separate homes at the same time in the evening and discuss the class assignments. Whether the students live on the same campus or in cities across the country from one another, they can write to one another in real-time or they can leave material for one another on bulletin boards or in email folders.

As students and teachers become more adept at maneuvering within such virtual spaces, the MOO will offer endless possibilities for telecourse and other distance students to participate with one another. One of the primary MOO activities is building virtual architecture (classrooms, castles, dormitories, landscapes, etc.) and the act of creating what has been called “architexture” is one of the fundamental methods through which students can collaborate on the MOO.\(^\text{33}\) For example, a group of students can be assigned the task of constructing an academic workroom for themselves. To complete the task, the students need to negotiate architextural choices. For example, one student might ask, *Should we have a couch? Yes, another may reply. What color? It should be big enough to seat all of us—maybe covered in blue velvet, with yellow stars and dog hair.* To which a student may reply, *No—I don’t want dog hair in my office.* In such exercises, students practice a variety of the rhetorical modes often taught in developmental or first-year composition courses, including descriptive writing, narrative writing, process writing, and persuasive writing.\(^\text{34}\) However, students often don’t even realize they are practicing such modes—to them, they are simply talking in writing about how to build a room. Whether working together to construct architecture or working by themselves to describe their own MOO characters, students must rehearse the various lessons in writing that are often stressed in writing classes.\(^\text{35}\)
The MOO can also be used to create collaborative activities in literature classes. In fact, working on the MOO will substantially change the pedagogy of a literature telecourse. For example, a typical classroom assignment on Walt Whitman might ask students to break into small groups and discuss the ways Whitman tropes grass in the first stanzas of “Leaves of Grass.” To complete the assignment, the small group of students then needs to negotiate some of the conventional dynamics of small group work: keeping on task, taking notes, and mediating the various personalities. In a classroom, such a classroom activity will most likely stay verbal; someone may take notes, but the bulk of the interaction will happen with the spoken word with the result that most of the specific language used will disappear, to be only partially recalled later by the different students. Consider the telecourse. As we’ve seen, telecourse students rarely, if ever, receive the opportunity to discuss the imaginative texts with each other or the teacher. As the telecourses are now designed, there is no opportunity for students to participate in such a collaborative activity. Instead, students are relegated to the passive role of hearing how the televised experts might interpret Whitman’s use of the grass imagery. However, if the telecourse class had a MOO available to the students, they could log on at prescribed times and meet their classmates and the teacher of record in the MOO classroom space. Even if the teacher is not there at the same exact time, he or she could have left a note describing the assignment on the course bulletin board or in each student’s email box. The telecourse students would then follow the directions of the assignment, working with one another to make meaning out of the literature. Again, in the MOO the written conversation can be recorded and the resulting transcript used later for analysis and
reflection or as the basis for another written document. In this way, students working together in any MOO conversation provide each other with written material available for further use.

Of course, a MOO writing center requires a time commitment from tutors and MOO administrators; this, in turn, requires a financial commitment from the institution to extend funding beyond the campus Writing Centers to the virtual centers. Even without the larger commitment to a MOO writing center, the MOO teacher can hold what I've playfully called "MOOifice hours." In addition to regular office hours, the teacher can establish set times to be in his or her MOO office, ready to answer questions and engage in the sorts of conversations that are currently denied them in most telecourse settings.

It doesn't take much imagination to recognize that the virtual space of the MOO would enable telecourse students to participate in the valuable and fundamental act of communal critical thinking. For example, the MOO can be used for recording and editing a transcript of written conversations, editing word documents, or publishing communal web pages. Another method for collaboration is a MOO writing center (a version of an OWL, an online writing laboratory). Just like in face-to-face writing centers, in a MOO writing center, tutors are on hand to help students with their assignments. Eric Crump, who has developed and worked in online writing centers, describes the experience as a "conversation-based virtual environment" (185) in which the tutors engage with the writers in "the informal and exploratory conversation that is our standard approach" in writing centers, as well as in the common concerns of gathering material, organization, grammar, and usage. For Crump, the benefit of the
online writing center is that such a virtual space deconstructs social hierarchies. I mentioned above that studies of email use indicate that students and faculty become "better acquainted" when using email, and the same sort of collegiality develops online. As Crump says, "The easy informality that seems to come naturally in the MUD contributes to an environment nearly free of fear" (190). He concludes that the development of personality and equality in the online learning environment leads to "the development of proficiency and fluency with language [...] in writing" (190, italics original). Crump is a strong advocate of MOOs, and he fails to acknowledge that a problem in working with MOOs is that they are not predictable. In addition to the unavoidable technical difficulties, some students may write material that is not appropriate in the classroom context, and other students may simply not focus on their assignments. Just like with a listserv, as discussed above, the MOO teacher must be capable of administering the MOO with a firm, yet gentle hand, providing etiquette guidelines and other rules for the community.

I said earlier that both the literature and the composition telecourses reminded me of the "unending conversation" at the heart of Kenneth Burke's parlor metaphor. The problem with the telecourse, though, is that both the student and the student's teacher are left out of the conversation. It is only in the televised material that people are "engaged in a heated discussion" as Burke says. The MOO changes this. By adding the MOO, the telecourse creates a space for students to participate in the parlor conversation. As Burke would say, in the MOO you read the text of others for a while,

until you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself
against you [. . .]. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

Technology such as the MOO makes this parlor discussion available to the students themselves—a significant departure from the way telecourses are often used currently.

**Disadvantages to the MOO**

Once the institution has committed to using a MOO, there are two primary problems with implementing it into a telecourse. First, students and faculty must learn how to use the MOO technology. Although some students may have significant experience with internet chatrooms or MUD gaming, the majority of students (particularly the returning adult woman) may have little or no experience with these computer technologies. Consequently, the institution should provide training opportunities for the student. Moreover, many teachers who are willing to utilize a MOO need to be trained in using it for themselves. It is often the case that the students will most likely turn to the teacher for advice on how to use the technology. This presents a significant labor problem for the teacher. Traci Gardner of The Daedalus Group reports that the “amount of time necessary to feel comfortable with a MOO and a client will vary, but as a general guideline, you can assume you'll need at least a month, perhaps as much as a semester.”

A teacher of an introductory literature class is supposed to teach the elements of literature—a difficult task in itself—and when we add the element of technology, we have an entirely new job description with disturbing implications for academic labor.

Second, and perhaps more important, in order to navigate the MOO students must have access to a computer with Internet capabilities. Although the use of personal
computers is wide-spread, ownership of a computer may present a significant, though not overwhelming, obstacle for a potential telecourse student. However, even if the student does not own a computer, many institutions, including PCC, make computers available to students in libraries and computer labs. Once again, though, this points to the conundrum of distance education: the students who take courses at a distance do so because they either do not want to or cannot attend campus activities. Requiring them to visit a library or computer lab defeats the purpose of the telecourse, but not requiring them to interact with fellow students and the teacher defeats the purpose of the educational mission.

**Ten Suggestions for Implementing a MOO into a Telecourse**

The following is a short list of suggestions for implementing a MOO into a telecourse. Some suggestions apply specifically to the teacher of the course, others to the general administration of a telecourse/MOO program. The list is not exhaustive, of course.³⁹

**Implementing a MOO**

1. Choose the MOO that is most appropriate for the given course;⁴⁰
2. provide funding or course-release time for teachers to spend time learning the MOO;
3. provide funding reimbursement to teachers who must pay for online access to work a home;
4. provide students with well-written, detailed, technical documents that explain how to communicate and move within the MOO;
5. provide students and teachers with access to a technology leader who can answer questions, either in person, via email, or by telephone;
6. plan the course schedule carefully (for example, arrange the schedule so that students in different time zones can still communicate easily in real-time with one another);
7. build into the course schedule enough time for students to learn how to use the MOO;
8. provide initial behavioral guidelines for the MOO community and have the class develop further etiquette conventions;
9. tailor the MOO experience to the needs of the course (for example, if teaching *Voices and Visions*, utilize the MOO to facilitate critical discussion of the poetry proper or of the televised material; provide a "library" of web sites and other resources specific to the poets; provide links to Internet chat rooms devoted to the poets);
10. incorporate appropriate assignments so that the time students spend learning how to use the MOO is also time spent learning the academic material. These are a few examples of how to utilize the MOO experience when teaching composition courses (of course, each suggestion can be modified and elevated for higher-level courses):
   - begin the course with a unit on descriptive writing so that students can practice and excel in the rhetorical mode of description when creating their own characters and building virtual spaces;
   - develop a process assignment that asks students to craft their own technical support documents. Place students in groups and have each group be responsible for creating a document that explains and defines a particular aspect of using the MOO (for example, one group can explain the commands to use to create physical spaces, while another group can explain how to use tape recorders to keep a transcript of a given written conversation);
   - develop an assignment that calls for students to practice persuasive writing by coming to a small group consensus on communal guidelines for behavior when in the MOO;
   - develop assignments that call for critical thinking and persuasion (for example, ask students to craft a position paper that critiques the course's use of the MOO).

As this brief overview demonstrates, a MOO provides a valuable and unique opportunity to teach English studies, whether at a distance or within a classroom community. The MOO is well worth investigating as a tool for telecourse instruction.

4. Online Courseware Systems

MOOs are not the only virtual place where students and teachers can meet and interact. The past few years have seen a surge in for-profit distance education ventures devoted to providing institutions with networked course-design tools and administrative services that allow not only the exchange of information from a distance but also
interaction. A range of commercial entities—such as eCollege.com (formerly Real Education), Blackboard, Convene, Embanet, and TopClass—offer a variety of services, from virtual classroom systems to elaborate electronic mail communication systems, free web pages, and administrative systems that allow for such activities as online course registration, faculty advising, and other student services. These companies also offer computer network administration services, such as hardware design, dedicated servers, hard drives, and other up-to-date technologies. According to a Spring 1999 article in The Chronicle of Higher Education, “The Marketing Intensifies in Distance Learning” by Goldie Blumenstyk, the number of companies devoted to distance education is growing:

The companies are maneuvering on multiple fronts. Real Education [eCollege.com], of Denver, which some educators consider one of the most aggressive marketers in the field (with advertising in The Chronicle and other media), is more than quadrupling its sales force. Blackboard, in Washington, is wooing professors with free World-Wide Web sites for online courses, in hopes of winning more business from their departments and universities. Convene, in San Francisco, has just hired a top official away from the University of Phoenix's 6,000-student distance-education operation to head up marketing.

The primary benefit of aligning a telecourse with one of these computerized systems is that students and teachers can interact constantly. The breadth of services offered by eCollege.com well represents the ways such companies can re-shape telecourse instruction. According to the eCollege.com web page, institutions can purchase various packages, ranging from what they call “complete virtual universities” to simpler courseware packages. A complete virtual university includes “not only courses and course-related information, but also many aspects of student life, administrative, financial, social and other service information that is vital to any campus environment.”
However, institutions can also purchase courseware packages. The following list describes features of the courseware packages offered by eCollege.com:

- Interactive Syllabus: The Interactive Syllabus is a guide found on the course homepage to inform students on what to expect in the weeks/units to come. Courses are divided into units and faculty members can organize their content into these units to define the student's path for learning the material.

- Course Syllabus: The course syllabus is a traditional syllabus available for faculty members to outline course goals and policies, textbooks and the requirements for successful completion of the course.

- Webliography: A hypertext-based course bibliography, utilizing Web links to reference sources. Students and instructors can build the Webliography together as a semester progresses, or an instructor can define a Webliography of resources for students to use as reference material for completing assignments and course objectives.

- Document Sharing: Document Sharing allows instructors and class members to share files with individual students or specific groups of students. This tool can be used by students for collaborative work and as a means for turning in assignments. Instructors can also use the document sharing tool to post class resources.

- Student Journal: The journal is a writing and note-taking facility for individual students enabling them to keep a journal throughout the semester. Instructors have access to each student's journal, so they can coach their students throughout the semester.

- Student Notebook: The notebook is a note-taking facility that is private for each student.

- Messaging: Class members can use the messaging tool to easily send messages and attach documents and images to instructors, the entire class, small groups or individual students. Instructors can also use messaging tools to post class announcements to the course.

- Online Chatroom: The Online Chatroom provides real-time, distributed communication useful for group projects, student-to-student interactions, and instructor office hours.

- Threaded Discussion: Threaded discussions simulate in-class discussion, only they take place asynchronously.

- Online Assessment: Online tests provide an environment to evaluate students knowledge of course material. Question types consist of: True/False, multiple choice, many multiple choice (choose all that apply), fill in the blank, short answer, matching, and essay. Online exams provide automatic scoring of objective material that is easily accessible in the grade book. There are two online formats to choose from: practice format and regular exam format.
• Gradebook: The Gradebook allows instructors to keep track of students' progress, calculate grades, and provide feedback to students.
• Student Activity Log: Instructors can track the time students spend logged into the course, and what activities they participated in.

Interactive syllabi, online chatrooms, threaded discussions, document sharing: these features all allow students and faculty to discuss, converse, argue, critique—activities that are not readily available in most telecourses situations. Individual faculty members and individual institutions can utilize the different features according to the needs of the given course and the goals of the institution. Regardless of which tools are chosen, the range of possibilities allows faculty to create virtually any communal academic environment.

One teacher’s experience with networked courseware

Not very much research has been done on the efficacy of such classroom systems as eCampus.com. Indeed, I have uncovered no published writings on teaching English with such systems. However, I have used a similar system, WBT System’s TopClass, in the online composition courses that I developed for Pima Community College. With a few exceptions, I’ve found it an adequate way to increase participation among students at a spatial and temporal distance from one another. Indeed, much like Eric Crump has found online tutoring to be beneficial, I’ve found the technology that contributes to collaborative text creation and revision to be an especially valuable benefit in teaching writing.

First, a brief overview. As I described in the Introduction, PCC no longer hires me as the teacher of record for the telecourses that I developed and taped. However, perhaps because of my expertise in teaching at a distance and in developing courses with new
technologies, in 1997 the Community Campus administration requested that I implement their first-ever Online Writing 101 course. Once again, PCC provided neither additional release time nor salary as compensation for the significant effort it took to create the online format. In the course's first year, I transferred many of the PowerPoint slides from the televised format to an html format, making close to fifty separate web pages on the topics covered in the class, such as the rhetorical modes, writing introductions, and so on. I have had no formal training in html language, so my learning curve was quite steep; consequently, my efforts were time consuming and, to my mind, inadequate.

Initially, the web pages were meant both to disseminate information and allow for interactivity in the form of an internal email system by which students could submit to me their pre-writing exercises, rough drafts, and final drafts. For example, on the page devoted to writing introductions, I installed a text box in which students could write practice introductions using the techniques that I had presented on the web page (such as beginning the paper with a quotation, asking a question, defining a term, and so on). I had installed a "submit" button with the expectation that as the students worked through each web page, they would submit to me their practice writings. However, my technical incompetence prevailed, perhaps because there was little institutional support in place to help me with the technical particulars. I never was able to get the "submit" buttons to run, so the students could never send me their practice writings. Instead, I soon resorted to using the web pages merely as another form of course textbook, suggesting to the students that they copy the pages and paste them in files on their home computer. I hoped that students would read through the material and at least work through the various
writing exercises as discovery writing for their graded essays. As the semester progressed, the primary method of instruction in the course became an email "cc" list, to which everyone would submit a rough draft and receive feedback from me and another students. In this way, the course operated primarily as a series of independent studies in which I was primarily an editor and tutor, shepherding students through various draft stages.

After one semester of this method, PCC aligned itself with TopClass, a training management tool designed specifically for the Internet. A product of WBT Systems and based in Dublin, Ireland, TopClass is used by over 500 organizations, including Dow Chemical, The Money Store, University College of Dublin, Helsinki University, and a number of universities in the United States, including Purdue, Arizona State, and the California State system. TopClass allows an institution to distribute learning materials for viewing on any personal computer, utilizing either the Internet or campus local area networks. The TopClass system stores all the information on a remote server, making it available to three groups of users: students, instructors, and administrators. In addition to a built-in electronic mail system which allows users to email one another, users also have access to folders labeled "Class Discussion" and "Class Announcements." The Announcement folder allows the instructor or the administrator to send information to each individual student. This is a read-only folder for the students. Such information may include schedule announcements, course descriptions and prerequisites, reading lists, last minute changes, and other classroom messages. The Discussion folder allows students, instructors, and administrators to maintain a threaded discussion on an open
bulletin board area where students can post messages and collaborate on projects. The course material is divided into a series of units. Each unit is subdivided into folders, which are in turn subdivided into a collection of pages. Folders can be categorized according to the type of material they hold or their function; pages carry either the intellectual course content or ad hoc writings by students and instructors. Students are expected to read all of the pages assigned for their course. Unopened and unread pages are marked by a red "N" for new, and an empty space beside the page indicates that the material has at least been opened, if not read with the diligence that teachers would like.

The instructor of the course is responsible for overseeing the students who are taking the course. Depending on the institutional situation, the instructor may be responsible (as I was) for developing the folders that contain the course information, requirements, and tests, or the instructor may simply be responsible for shepherding the student through the actual assignments. The shepherding can be done by answering emailed questions, monitoring the discussion areas, and correcting tests. Once the course material is posted to the internal folder system, much of my work consisted of maintaining the class discussions and commenting on essays.

The students are assigned to one or more classes, each of which has the course material designated for it. After connecting to the course web page, students log into the system with a user name and a password that is designed to guarantee the privacy of their individual folders. Once into the system, the students can maneuver through the course material. The course material consists of a variety of folders, in which are different units or chapters. These units can contain a variety of text, graphics, video, sounds, movies,
and tests. In the courses I designed, the course material was strictly text-based, with no
special effects. Each course page has a "Mail Instructor" button that enables the students
to send an internal email directly to the instructor’s folder system. Depending on the
course, students can be asked to take a pre-prepared exam at certain junctures in the
course, or they can be asked to submit essays to a common folder.

To cite an instance, in my composition courses, throughout the semester students
were required to write four essays. The students were required to post a readable rough
version of each assignment to a discussion folder; they were also required to post a peer
review to another student’s paper in that same discussion folder. After receiving
feedback on their essays from both a fellow student and me, the instructor, they were
required to submit a final version of their own essay to be graded. At the end of the
semester, students were asked to submit a portfolio of two rewritten versions chosen from
the original four. To prepare them for these tasks, I had created a variety of materials in
different folders. For instance, basing my materials on the PowerPoint slides that I had
created three years earlier for the telecourse, I created a lengthy folder on how to write an
essay that proposes solutions to a local community problem. This folder is essentially a
textbook chapter that provides information, advice, and examples. The TopClass system
allows for space in which students can take notes and then download to a disk or personal
computer. Ideally, the students will use such a folder as a pre-writing tool leading them
through a series of steps that help them create their own rough draft. In addition, they
will learn how to write the assignment from doing a peer review of another student and
from receiving comments from me.
There are two primary benefits for the students to such a system. First, it allows interaction among students and between students and faculty, and second, all of these interactions take place in writing. Just like in the MOO, not only do students have to read material from the instructor and other students, they have to participate in creating that material. All this writing can take a toll on the teacher, though, for it is a heavy workload to comment on student drafts, moderate the discussion, and provide additional information.

Two Disadvantages: Technology Breakdowns and Cost

There are two primary disadvantages to these sorts of systems. The first is rooted in a simple fact of technology: it breaks. For all its benefits, the TopClass system for the PCC courses has constantly had technical troubles. If too many people log on at one time, for example, the server cannot handle the traffic and shuts down. As I write this, when I attempt to enter the system in order to download a copy of the course folder page to include as a figure in this text, I receive this message: "Error. Unable to launch ACGI application." Unfortunately, in my role as the course instructor, I have neither the ability to fix the "error" or to "launch" an ACGI application (whatever that is), so I am left at the mercy of the technicians, either at Pima Community College's computer center or at WBT Systems in Ireland. At other times, the entire system has crashed, requiring students and instructors to wait until the support system personnel can fix the problems. Such crashes may present no more than an inconvenience if they merely require a user to wait until the next day to log on, or they may present a significant problem if course
material is lost. In the Spring 1999 semester, for instance, the whole program crashed for over two weeks, with lingering troubles for another couple of weeks. Not only could students not submit their work in a timely manner, but a significant portion of earlier course material was lost, requiring a significant time commitment on my part to re-write and up-date material and on my students’ part to re-post previous work. We have all lost material before, causing us to spend an annoying amount of extra time to recover from our own mistakes; however, such system crashes have the potential to wreak large-scale havoc. Although these distance education companies are working hard to solve such technical problems, technical glitches still happen and need to be accounted for.

The second disadvantage of the online systems is their cost. These distance education companies charge a fee per student user. According to Blumenstyk’s article in The Chronicle of Higher Education,

Real Education [eCollege.com] and Convene make most of their money from their per-student charges, which are assessed each time a student takes a course. Real Education charges $120 per student per course. Embanet charges on a per-semester basis, with a maximum of $100 a year per student no matter how many courses he or she takes.

Blumenstyk also reports that “Convene charges between $80 and $140 per student, depending on the duration of the course and whether a student is a repeat user.” One result of utilizing a for-profit system is that the institution may be tempted to use these courses as profit centers, overloading students into each class section and collecting additional registration and user fees. As the Chronicle article reports,

The University of Colorado at Denver was losing so much money on its Real Education [eCollege.com] courses that administrators got permission from state officials to add a 30-per-cent tuition surcharge for those courses last fall. Most of the 1,000-plus students taking them didn't mind, says David R. Kassoy, associate vice-
president for technology in the University of Colorado System. ‘They were willing to pay the $100 for the convenience of not having to go downtown, park, and pay babysitters.’

It is one thing to add an additional fee to students who seek a measure of convenience, but it is another to force the consumer to spend additional monies unnecessarily. This becomes a moral issue that must be addressed on a number of fronts. Although it has long been common in higher education to add supplementary fees for certain courses (such as materials fees in art and photography classes), the risk here is that such extra costs will make the courses prohibitively expensive for the very students who most need such courses: the working, returning adult of limited means. Moreover, particularly in English composition courses, the institution must be rigorous in keeping to the National Council of Teachers of English-mandated cap of 25 students per composition course; otherwise, the instructors will be exploited and adequate learning will not take place.

Many of the features and advantages of online systems can be found on educational MOOs—at significantly less cost. In High Wired, Haynes and Rune Holmevik claim that “schools and universities [...] can host an educational MOO and operate it for users of all platforms and systems for a fraction of the cost of other Internet-based technology” (2-3). According to Holmevik, the primary costs to establish and maintain an education MOO are negligible. The technical costs include the cost of a “Pentium-based server machine with Internet networking” (anywhere from zero expense if the operator already has an older machine to upwards of $2,000 for a new system). The Linux operating system for the server machine is free of charge, as is the MOO server and the enCore
database. Holmevik explains that the cost of personnel to administer the system is also quite low:

One part-time MOO administrator position. This person could be responsible for the daily operation of the server machine and the MOO, and also provide user and teacher support when needed. Depending on the size of the operation, and the skills of the person involved, this job can be accomplished in as little as 1 hour per day. On average, however, I would say that 2-3 hours per day is a more realistic estimate. 38

At the minimum wage that universities and colleges often pay, this administration position can be filled for roughly $10,000 dollars a year in salary. Both educational MOOs and courseware packages have much to offer an institution and an instructor. The costs to maintain an educational MOO are less than the per-student fees required by distance education companies, yet institutions may appreciate the professional status of the courseware products, as well as the advantages of having a virtual university, including the student and administrative services packages.

V

The System as Surveillance: A Warning

In both the MOO and online courseware systems, the instructor and the administrators ("wizards" in the playful language of the MOO) have access to the writings of the participants. On the MOO, the transcripts of the conversations can be saved and downloaded, enabling the participants or the teacher to keep an on-going record of the interactions. Likewise, in TopClass (just as in other courseware systems) instructors can gain entrance into each student's folder system in order to monitor their progress. Moreover, the administrators have full access to not only the student files but
the instructor’s files. Such a situation presents an interesting form of surveillance in which the instructor can tell if the students are reading the pages assigned to them or otherwise doing the required course work (and the administrator can tell if the instructor is keeping up with his or her required tasks).

There are some practical benefits to such a situation. For example, if I as the teacher recognize that one student is having trouble with writing fully developed paragraphs, I can check to see if that student has read the coursework folder on paragraphs; if the student hasn’t, I can suggest that she do so. In this way, my surveillance is designed to help the student accomplish the course goals. This surveillance can also operate to maintain discipline. For example, after receiving a very low grade in the online course last year, one student complained in a breathless email that she had done all her work and submitted her assignments on time and didn’t deserve the low grade and would go complain to the Dean unless I changed the grade. However, I had never seen postings from her, nor had I received her coursework. In addition, a quick check of her folders revealed bright red “N”s” next to almost every one of her coursework folders, indicating that the material had not been read. Even though I do not relish the teacher’s inevitable roll of disciplinarian, the computer system enabled me to verify her claims to effort and prevent her from causing the greater, unwarranted distraction of making an unfounded claim.

This system of surveillance bears an uncanny resemblance to the panopticon, that method of surveillance developed by Jeremy Bentham and theorized so usefully by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*:
Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by their supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication [...]. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order. If the inmates are convicts, there is no danger of a plot [...]; if they are patients, there is no danger of contagion; [...] if they are schoolchildren, there is no copying, no noise, no chatter, no waste of time; if they are workers, there are no disorders, no theft, no coalitions, none of those distractions that slow down the rate of work, make it less perfect or cause accidents. (200-201)

While not a precise analogy, the student’s private individual folders can be compared to the prisoner’s individual cell, into which the institutional keeper (the teacher, the administrator) can gaze at any time. Thus the computer-mediated courses have a panoptic effect in which the students know that they are under surveillance. Not only are they performing for a public audience (posting comments to the listserv, adding essay drafts to the bulletin boards), but they are performing for the instructor or administrator, who can at any moment enter their virtual folders to monitor their progress and efforts. If, as Foucault declares, the purpose of the panopticon is “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assure the automatic functioning of power” (201), then the online courseware system or the MOO that ensnares the student in these multiple webs of surveillance functions successfully as a panopticon. After all, every utterance made by a student or an instructor is available to the next level of power up, enabling those in power to discipline and punish those who transgress the system’s rules.

Consider this one example of a student dialogue from the MOO that I used in an advanced composition course. The three characters, B., Mary guest, and R., are all students in the class; at one point they refer to me, the teacher, as “master randy.”49

These students have been asked to complete a particular writing assignment using the
MOO in a computer classroom, and this is but one portion of their transcript from the thirty-minute session.

B. says, "I don't have my book"
mary guest says, "I hate this assignment"
B. says, "This is being recorded for posterity ... remember?"
B. says, "Big brother is watching ...... not to mention your professor"
mary guest says, "Oh, I have two interviews by the way... my sister and her boyfriend have agreed to answer questions via email this weekend... told them to answer separately"
B. says, "Cool, you are the bomb, virgin mary"
B. beats up L.
mary guest says, "Big brother... so master Randy can't look at this unless we let him"
R. says, "All I know is that we are supposed to break down this definition. The books example is "People who use hate speech" It is then broken down into two categories; "Those who use it inadvertently" and "Those who use it to hurt people." It then breaks these two categories into other descriptions of these people"
R. says, "I don't know how to break up arraignment, though. I thought you guys were master lawyers!"
R. says, "Arraignment can be divided by the people who plea guilty and those who plea not guilty. Other than that I'm stuck"
B. says, "Master Randy just stopped by to read my screen"
R. says, "Hello, master Randy"
B. says, "He's gone"

The students are clearly conscious that their dialogue is not private. When mary guest writes, "I hate this assignment, " B.'s immediate response is to warn her that the teacher will know that mary guest is critical of the course arrangement: "This is being recorded for posterity ... remember?" Not only are the MOO students aware, as are most students doing group work in a classroom, that the teacher can physically enter the conversational space ("Master Randy just stopped by to read my screen"), but they are aware that the teacher will have access to the transcript of their conversation ("Big brother is watching ...... not to mention your professor"). As the student who invokes Orwell recognizes, one troubling implication of this eternal observation is that dissenting voices
may be smothered. What happens if I as the teacher choose to punish the student who writes, "I hate this assignment"? Students who raise objections either to the teacher’s pedagogical methods or to the intellectual material itself may easily be silenced by the threat of punishment arising from the teacher’s constant monitoring.

Such a situation does not guarantee misuse, of course, but it may very well lead to an educational system that is deeply flawed. For instance, instead of the relatively benign requirements that students submit rough drafts and peer reviews and the like, the course requirements could become simply another form of seat-time. Each student can be required to make his or her way through worksheets, for instance, moving from topic to topic without engaging in the level of reflection or critical analysis so fundamental to solid education. As another example, a course can be designed as an independent study, in which students complete worksheets, quizzes, and tests without being required to participate in bulletin board discussion. There would be no room for argument and dissent. There would be no room for constructing knowledge. In such a situation, the student's only hope of passing the course is to regurgitate the material presented in the lesson folders.

As yet another example of the dangers inherent in a panoptic setting, the instructor herself can be placed under rigorous surveillance, disciplined for not spending enough time online, or for spending too much time online, or for any other situations deemed infractions by the lurking administrators. A faculty member who attempts a new pedagogical strategy that is at odds with her supervisor will easily be found out, as will the faculty member who takes a too-radical or too-conservative political position. It is
easy enough to imagine the ease with which an institution can monitor a faculty member
and easy enough to imagine the devastating consequences of having every educational
utterance recorded and made available for review. Taken to an extreme, a regime of what
Althusser calls “true knowledge” may surface, in which students and instructors alike are
kept under strict surveillance and disciplined for any breaks with the institutional rules.
As Althusser has said, schools, like churches, discipline both the flock and the shepherds.

For telecourse instruction to move beyond simply transmitting information and
realize its potential as a source for high-quality, interactive education, institutions must
link the televised material with computer technology, joining forces with computer and
communications companies to provide access to the new interactive technology for all
students. Of course, technology is changing at a breathtaking pace, so I do not dare
suggest which technologies to use. Indeed, as I write this, the newspaper reports another
move towards Interactive TV, by which users can send email, work on the Internet, and
make telephone calls using the same screen on which they watch television. The world is
changing in a hurry, and those responsible for telecourse instruction should make every
effort to keep up with those changes. However, these changes must be implemented with
a moral strategy in mind.

NOTES

1 For more information on the USDLA, see their web site, http://www.usdla.org. My citations are from
their various pages, dated August 23, 1999.

2 I find my own phrasing an instructive comment on the nature of distance education: “students who take
their education at a distance” sounds similar to such common expressions as “take your medicine” and
“take your punishment.” I shall return to the notion of distance education as a disciplinary practice towards
the end of this chapter.
See Desmond Keegan, *The Foundations of Distance Education.* (London: Croom Helm, 1986). Keegan helpfully draws a distinction between two primary models for distance education, the industrial model and the interactive model. He draws upon Kevin C. Smith to argue against the industrialization model of education for the following reasons:

- external teaching should not be done by part-timer tutors but by the full-time university faculty
- by being part of a normal university a distance system remains in the educational mainstream
- a university is a community of scholars and all distance students must become part of this community by attending compulsory residential schools
- concentration on the ‘learning package’ can lead to a dehumanising of the learning process, as this is a social experience
- distance education must not depend solely on correspondence methods. Some degree of interaction not only with materials but also with other students is essential. (107)

See Slavich. Only the abstract was reviewed, not the dissertation itself.

See Giles. Only the abstract was reviewed, not the dissertation itself.


See ED371708, Goodwin et al., “Perceptions and Attitudes of Faculty and Students in Two Distance Learning Modes of Delivery: Online Computer and Telecourse.”

See EF475353, Alavi, Jafar And Others. “Using the ‘Economics USA’ Telecourse within the Traditional Microeconomics Course.” 1993.


See Busby and Alfers, 33-38.


This is not always the case, however. In previous chapters I’ve detailed some of the mistakes that I made in filming telecourses—mistakes that are still broadcast because the institution has not financed replacement televised material. The well-financed courses, however, have been much better edited.

Of course, the growing number of online courses also provides access for such students. However, given that one barrier for returning students is financial, telecourses may be the cheaper option. It is less expensive to rent videos from a library or to tape them from a cable television provider than it is to pay for a computer and the monthly internet access fees that are necessary for one to succeed in an online course. However, as prices for personal computers and internet access continue to plummet, the online courses may prove to be equally economical.


See Linda Aler’s study, pp 13-21.

This material is drawn from Warley (1979).

In casual conversation, people have suggested that the telecourse should use web pages to give students more exposure to the course topics. There are thousands and thousands of web pages that can be utilized by the telecourse instructor or home institution. For example, there are a variety of pages on Walt Whitman, some academic and others commercial. For instance, Long Island Globalink, a for-profit arm of Long Island OnLine Services operates the web page, “The Poetry of Walt Whitman,” which has received close to 200,000 visitors over the past few years (see http://www.liglobal.com/walt). This site contains text of
much of Whitman’s poetry, as well as a map of what is called “Whitmanland,” an extensive area of Long Island in which Whitman lived. Links from this page include brief descriptions of the geographic region, as well as photos of some of the buildings he lived in and visited. The page is an interesting example of intellectual culture meeting technologized marketing: advertising banners on various pages provide some income, but the pages are surprisingly clear of marketing. In fact, the rhetoric of the pages can be surprisingly rebellious. Take, for example, the page that reprints the poem “Miracles” from the “Calamus Sequence.” At the top of the page is the page’s title, “The Poetry of Walt Whitman.” Directly below the title is a parenthetical announcement that reads, “We used to have Walt’s autograph [sic] in this space but Columbia U. owns it and ordered us to remove it. Walt is probably rolling in his grave!” To the left of the title is a shadowed image of a slouching Whitman silhouette. The unnamed webmasters have written, “There used to be a light-hearted image of Walt, but Columbia U. owns it and ordered us to remove it” (see http://www.liglobal.com/walt/miracles.html June 19, 1999).

Another web page is The Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive. The Hypertext Archive contains academic material such as up-to-date bibliographies, electronic versions of Whitman’s poetry, electronic versions of contemporary reviews of Whitman’s poetry, and as the home page itself says, “digitized images of original documents, transcriptions of those documents, and an elaborate body of introductions, commentaries, and other materials useful in interpreting Whitman’s works.” Yet another web page is found at the Bartleby Project of Columbia University, a project whose tag-line is “Great Books On-Line.” The Whitman page of the Bartleby Project is an electronic version of David McKay’s 1900 edition of Leaves of Grass, including “a Fac-simile autobiography, variorum readings of the poems and a department of Gathered Leaves” as the web page says (see http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/whitman/reviews/index.html June 19, 1999. The project is co-directed by Ken Price, a Professor of English and American Studies at the College of William and Mary, and Ed Folsom, a Professor of English at the University of Iowa and editor of the Walt Whitman Quarterly Review). This is also the project criticized by the Long Island Globalink site.

This short review of easily accessible web pages devoted to Whitman illustrates the problem: these sites provide information; they do not provide an opportunity for students to interact. Of course, the internet provides countless “chat rooms,” virtual spaces in which people from around the world discuss topics of mutual interest. However, the conversations one finds in such spaces are not nearly up to the standards of an academic conversation. They are haphazard, short snippets of sentences with little depth and little value. No, the Internet itself is not the answer to the problem.


See ED399530 Tao, Liqing “What Do We Know about Email–An Existing and Emerging Literacy Vehicle?” (1995). Liqing’s paper was originally presented at the 1995 Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference.


Personal email communication from Erin Worth. Date: Mon., 25 Jan. 1999 Subject: Re: My 1st day in the lab.

Personal email communication from Erin Worth. Date: Thur., 18 Feb. Subject: MOOffice hours.


As Cynthia Haynes and Jan Rune Holmevik write, “Since the system was derived from adventure games like Dungeons and Dragons and Zork, the architecture has replicated real-life dungeons, caves, and rooms” (4–5).

The MOO community is compellingly fluid: one MOO may last for years and years, while others may come and go. Nonetheless, Jeffrey R. Galin has compiled an excellent list of educational, professional and

27 The University of Arizona's College of Humanities has created a MOO used specifically for University of Arizona students. The "Old Pueblo Moo" is a virtual landscape consisting of an academic center (Old Main (the primary virtual building which houses a collection of classrooms and faculty offices), a public meeting place called "the fountain," student dormitories, and other locations such as local geographical points of reference like Tumamoc Hill, A-Mountain, and Mt. Lemmon. See the University of Arizona web site on the OldPuebloMoo instructor's Handbook at [http://www.gened.arizona.edu/cic/opm.htm](http://www.gened.arizona.edu/cic/opm.htm) or the OldPuebloMoo home page at [http://128.196.59.21:7000](http://128.196.59.21:7000). I thank my colleague Rich Hansberger for his useful and timely assistance with the OldPuebloMoo.

28 See my explanation of Michel de Certeau's use of the term "poaching" in Chapter 5, the theoretical implications of telecourses.

29 "Advanced Composition MOO Discussion." January 25, 1999. OldPuebloMoo. Although students signed a research waiver, I have changed their names to initials to protect their privacy.


31 See, for example, Leslie Harris' "Transitional Realms: Teaching Composition in "Rhetland"" (Works and Days 25/26 Volume 13, Numbers 1 & 2, 1995). [http://www.iup.edu/~c271pddefault/cyberspaces/Harris.html](http://www.iup.edu/~c271pddefault/cyberspaces/Harris.html). See also Eric Crump, "At Home in the MUD: Writing Centers Learn to Wallow" in *High Wired*, pp 177-191. Both essays provide significant examples of MOO conversations.

32 Another excellent source of material regarding MOOs can be found at the Lingua MOO web site [http://lingua.utdallas.edu/](http://lingua.utdallas.edu/). According to its web page, "Lingua MOO was created to serve primarily the University of Texas at Dallas Rhetoric and Writing program and the School of Arts & Humanities. It serves as both a learning environment for our students and a broader community for research and collaboration on projects situated at the intersection of Arts & Humanities and electronic media. Lingua MOO is also home to an international network of researchers in these areas and supports links with other educational MOOs and the GNA-Net (Globewide Network Academy)" [http://lingua.utdallas.edu/purpose.html](http://lingua.utdallas.edu/purpose.html).

33 Haynes and Rune Holmievik explain the term *architectural*: The MOO becomes "a space for *bricolage*, for those who create from what they have on hand, constructing and recycling imaginative murmurings in *architectural* ways." See *High Wired*, pp 4-5.

34 Leslie Harris develops this argument in his article, "Transitional Realms: Teaching Composition in "Rhetland"" (Works and Days 25/26 Volume 13, Numbers 1 & 2, 1995). See [http://www.iup.edu/~c271pddefault/cyberspaces/Harris.html](http://www.iup.edu/~c271pddefault/cyberspaces/Harris.html).

35 As another method of collaborative learning, Cynthia Haynes suggests having the students critique the MOO experience. In her experience (which is similar to my own MOO classroom experience), some students will have negative reactions to the MOO while others will be attracted to the element of language play. Regardless of whether or not they immediately like the MOO, students—especially English students—gain a measure of critical thinking by committing to the rhetorical act. "By placing [students] in a position of making their reactions public and recorded," Haynes writes, "they will often change their opinions after having to learn for themselves how to create an object, post something, and then explain to the class how they achieved their assignment" (166). Such communal activities highlight the importance of the rhetor's consideration of audience, such an important feature in composition.

36 The editors of *High Wired* have created Lingua MOO, one of the more influential educational MOOs. The Lingua MOO web site describes a few methods for using the MOO for collaboration: "We are extremely committed to fostering an environment for collaboration at Lingua MOO. There are a number of ways to work collaboratively. First, we designed a special building to house such projects. It's called the COLLABORATORY, and you can find it off the main Courtyard. In the Collaboratory, students may create whole matrices of rooms and texts, collaborating in the design of the building and on the texts they create, and connect them to their office/room in the ComMOOnity. Students may also take advantage of
the Multiple Ownership System available at Lingua MOO. The Multiple Ownership System (MO system) allows for more than one owner of textual and architectural objects.

One way to collaborate on writing projects involves recording a discussion and editing that transcript, revising it just as you would a word processing document. With the MOO system, any number of players may edit the transcript. [...] With the @paste feature, players may also paste in text from outside the MOO (like a separate word file), which makes it easy to incorporate text from offline sources. In addition, Lingua MOO is now proud to offer a web publishing system within the MOO. The Cyphertext Lab is a special room where players may find instructions for creating HTML documents and publishing them from within the MOO as a webpage. Such collaboration enhances the pedagogical sphere and broadens the virtual community at the same time" (http://wwwpub.utdallas.edu/~cynthia/collab.html).

37 See Eric Crump, "At Home in the MUD: Writing Centers Learn to Wallow" in High Wired, pp 177-191.

38 See ERIC NO: ED421701 Podis, JoAnne M. "Authority Issues in On-Line Instruction." 1998

A variety of internet sources provide additional information for the novice MOO teacher. See in particular the LinguaMOO web page for advice and other resources, (http://lingua.utdallas.edu/).

39 See Jeffrey R. Galin’s list of educational, professional, and experimental MOOs, found as an appendix in High Wired, pp. 325-338.

40 As an example of the technologies offered, see the eCollege.com web page titled “eCollege System Technology” at http://www.ecollege.com/company/index.html. For example, eCollege advertises itself thusly: “eCollege System 3.0 is the result of more than three years of design and revision, featuring the latest in three-tier, object-oriented technologies and relational database interaction. In short, eCollege System 3.0 has been designed to necessitate a minimum learning curve for students, faculty and administrators alike.\[ Utilizing our partnership with Microsoft, eCollege Course software was designed with the aid of the world’s foremost software experts, and Microsoft’s SQL Server provides a powerful, scalable database solution.\[ More than anything else, eCollege System 3.0 has been designed with efficiency in mind. In order to ensure this level of reliability, eCollege.comsm engineers proactively monitor all aspects of the system. And if utilization exceeds 40% average loads, new system tools are installed in preparation for the increased traffic, providing a minimum of client latency during upgrades.”

41 See Blumenstyk’s online article “The Marketing Intensifies in Distance Learning,” The Chronicle of Higher Education. 9 April 1999. 5 April 1999 <http://chronicle.com/free/v45/131/31a00101.htm>.

42 “See the page entitled “eCollege.com Campus” @ http://www.ecollege.com/company/index.html. These are some of the services eCollege.com offers via internet technology: Course Catalogs, Academic Calendars, Inquiry/Application Forms, Registration Information, Online Payment, Degree Requirements, Course Add/Drop Policies, Admissions, Financial Aid, Bursar’s Office, Administrative Services, Student Services, Faculty Directory, Academic Advising, Career Counseling, Bookstore, Student Union, and Demo Courses.

43 See the eCollege.com web site at http://www.ecollege.com/company/index.html (June 20, 1999)

44 According to the TopClass/WBT Systems web page, “The first version of TopClass Server (then known as WEST) was released in 1995. TopClass was selected as a winner of an Apple Enterprise Award at PC Expo in New York in 1996, and was rated the top training management tool by PC Week the following year. TopClass Server has been deployed in over fifty countries to date.” (see http://www.wbtsystems.com/)

45 For more information on the clients who use TopClass, see the TopClass/WBT Systems home page at http://www.wbtsystems.com/. The following description of the TopClass system comes from my own experience with the product, supplemented by reference to the TopClass Version 1.2 Administrator’s Guide.


48 When introducing myself to the students in the beginning of the semester, I told them that I didn’t yet have my Ph.D. so they did not need to call me “Doctor Accetta.” I told them, though, that I did have a
Master's degree, so they could call me "Master" instead. Some students used this light-hearted moniker throughout the semester.

50 See "Advanced Composition MOO Discussion." OldPuebloMOO. January 25, 1999. Although students signed a research waiver, I have changed their names to initials to protect their privacy.
CHAPTER 5
THE POLITICAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF TELE COURSES THAT TEACH ENGLISH

Introductory Remarks

I've written at length about the pedagogical methodology of the telecourses, especially the two that I developed. I've demonstrated that the composition courses focus primarily on current-traditional concerns of correctness in standard English, with an emphasis on the writing process and occupational writing. I've also demonstrated how the literature telecourses soft-peddle cultural critique, shying away from potentially controversial interpretations and focusing instead on a combination of New Critical formalism and biographical analysis. Some might say that these teaching methodologies are meant to be un-political, but what happens if I as the producer and teacher of a telecourse use my forum of televised English classes to deposit a programmed political agenda? What happens if I seek to infiltrate the minds of my students, using the combined powers of television, education, and language to advance my opinions, beliefs, and desires? What happens if I use the telecourse as a bully-pulpit, exhorting students to think as I want them to, to write as I want, to act as I want? These are important concerns because this is exactly what the telecourse does. In the following sections, I am especially interested in explaining how the English telecourses in the United States function to reproduce ideological formations. I move now to the ideological implications
of these telecourses, focusing primarily on Althusserian theory to explain how the telecourses function as carriers of ideology.

I

The Telecourse as an Ideological Apparatus

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky offer a succinct explanation of how the mass media disseminate ideologies:

The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfill this role requires systematic propaganda. (1)

Herman and Chomsky provide a compelling overview of the mass media's role in disseminating the "messages and symbols" by which a given society perpetuates itself. The rhetoric employed by Herman and Chomsky—particularly their reference to systems, codes of behavior, and class interest—indicates that they've been influenced by the French neo-marxist Louis Althusser, whose theory of State Apparatuses provides an especially helpful tool by which to understand how institutional systems perpetuate ideological formations. Although Althusser's student and colleague Etienne Balibar calls Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Toward an Investigation" "notoriously incomplete and [. . .] quite contradictory" (11), Althusser provides a useful tool for understanding how a culture produces and reproduces itself. 2

Althusser's primary concern in the essay is to explain how capitalist social formations reproduce labor power at the expense of the exploited worker. That is, he provides a
model for the ways capitalist culture reproduces itself: "Every social formation," he argues, "must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce" (128). In addition to providing appropriate wages, the reproduction of labor power requires a dual level of training:

not only a reproduction of skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of [. . .] submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class "in words." (132-133)

The reproduction of the means of production takes place because the "capitalist education system and [. . .] other instances and institutions" train the subject not only in the "know-how" and skills necessary for material production, but also in the "rules' of good behaviour" (132). According to Althusser, then, the so-called "ruling class" perpetuates a system that ensures the survival of their wealth and power by catching both the "exploited" and the "agents of exploitation" in the web of the rules that guide behavior and beliefs. Althusser stresses the notion of ideologies—that is, competing systems of belief, a plurality of values that complement and contradict one another. From this, Althusser argues that an individual will act according to the ideologies that envelop him. "The individual in question behaves in such a way, adopts such and such a practical attitude, and, what is more, participates in certain regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which 'depend' the ideas which he has in all consciousness freely chosen as a subject" (167). As Althusserian scholar Ted Benton explains, "It is in our daily participation in the practices and rituals of the family, school, party, union, and so on, that we come to 'live' our relation to conceptual forms of ideology, as it is
‘materialised’ in these practices” (105). The question arises, then, how does ideology reproduce itself in practice?

Educational Institutions as Repressive State Apparatuses

According to Althusser, the reproduction of ideology occurs through the combined forces of two forms of state power: repression and ideology. In brief, the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) are a province of the State—“an organized whole whose different parts are centralized beneath a commanding unity” (149). Responsible to the “head of State, the government and the administration” (137) and working “‘in the interests of the ruling classes’” (137), repressive apparatuses include those with juridical power to discipline and repress the populace. As Althusser says, the “role of the repressive State apparatus [. . .] consists essentially in securing by force (physical or otherwise) the political conditions of the reproductions of relations of production” (149). Such apparatuses include the local police, the local and national courts, local and national jails and prisons, and the various branches of the national military. These institutions are given the power to coerce movement; one thinks of the police dogs and water cannons trained on the marchers in Selma, for instance, or the National Guard escorting James Meredith through a phalanx of state troopers into the University of Mississippi. Such repressive institutions are sanctioned for violence by the state and utilized to maintain social order.

Although Althusser never explicitly calls the educational system a repressive apparatus, he does state that “Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment,
expulsion, selection, etc. to 'discipline' not only their shepherds, but also their flocks” (145). Let me explain some of the ways that I see higher education functioning as an RSA.

The conventional college and university function as what historian Lawrence W. Levine calls, “a center of intellectual authority” in which students are required “to learn to accommodate to the whims and prejudices of professors, to the attitudes and sensitivities of fellow students, and to the values and beliefs of the larger society.” As I discussed in Chapter 2, Paulo Freire argues that this “intellectual authority” is maintained by the banking version of education. The goal of conventional educational practices, Freire claims, is “to regulate the way the world 'enters into' the student [...] to 'fill' the students by making deposits of information which [the teacher] considers to be true knowledge” (62-3). According to this perspective, the academic institution is invested with the intellectual authority to transmit a government- and cultural-sanctioned form of true knowledge.

I wish to draw a distinction here between on the one hand the public dissemination of knowledge that has been produced at a university and on the other hand the course content that is transmitted from faculty to students. Knowledge gained at an institution is constantly being disseminated to the larger local, national, and international community in the form of journal articles, academic books, conferences, press releases, and the like. However, this knowledge is different from the intellectual content of a given course. The course content is monitored closely, provided to the student by the faculty in a regulated space that is authorized by the institution. A number of initiatory rites are necessary for
admission into this regulated space, and only those students who pass the financial tests of tuition fees and who pass the intellectual tests of SAT scores and GPAs are allowed to register for the course and consume the knowledge transmitted in the classroom. Furthermore, only those who pass the course are allowed to leave the classroom for the next step along the institution's path. If you fail the institutional rites (such as mid-term exams, final exams, written essays, laboratory reports), you do not earn the credentials necessary to continue.

A comment by one of my telecourse students provides another way of explaining the repressive quality of higher education. When asked why she enrolled in the composition telecourse, the student wrote, "I am taking this course [because] of my assessment score. But the other reason, which means more to me, is that it's an important form of communication. It can literally open or shut doors." Figured as a door, today's institutional classroom is similar to how Michel Foucault describes seventeenth-century architecture, with the "thick walls" and "heavy gate that prevents entering or leaving" (190). Foucault says, "stones can make people docile and knowable" (190). Today, stone has been replaced by the conventional classroom's sheet-rock, but the point remains the same: the educational institution functions as a "mechanism for training" (190) that seeks to control the production and transmission of knowledge.

In this respect, the educational institution—whether community college or university—functions as a repressive apparatus, maintaining social order by limiting access. The following description of the mission of the community college illustrates this point:
The community colleges serve all sorts of individuals as well as society as a whole. They are among the frontline institutions in the continuing war against illiteracy and irrationality. They defend an American culture, articulate it, filter people into it. They stand alongside the public libraries, museums, youth groups and other community agencies in transmitting values and shared understandings[...]. The college’s societal role extends also to their serving as gatekeepers. They protect the university by sorting out the prospective students and sending only those who have passed the college-level initiatory rites: the courses, tests, and prescribed modes of conduct. They assist the community’s employers by screening their prospective employees. (Cohen and Brawer 3)

In this scheme, higher education is troped as a military organization "on the frontline" of the "war against illiteracy and irrationality." We’ve already discussed in Chapter 2 the difficulties of defining the term “literacy”; however, here we are meant to understand this vexed term as synonymous with irrationality. According to this rhetoric, if you cannot communicate in the language of the “American culture,” you are “illiterate and irrational” and dangerous to the American way. War will be waged on you, and the college, with its classrooms and requirements, is the front-line of this war. Thus, colleges and universities serve as gatekeepers not only for the communities of business and education, but for what the authors call “an American culture.” Their disciplinary task is to defend, filter, sort out, screen, serve, protect—words that bring to mind the slogan on police cars throughout the United States, "To serve and protect." This vision of higher education suggests an enterprise funded and maintained by the state in order to pressure a citizenry into appropriate intellectual, professional, and civic behavior.

Ideological State Apparatuses

However much physical power they hold, however, these repressive apparatuses must function within a system of beliefs. As John Clifford comments, “Control is maintained
not by brute force but through an internalized ideology embedded in practical knowledge, such as law or writing" (41). In other words, while behavior can be coerced by RSAs, the repressive apparatuses are themselves reproduced and controlled by the ideology of "social rules." As Althusser says, institutions such as the "Army and Police also function by ideology both to ensure their own cohesion and reproduction" (145). Althusser calls the various social institutions that produce and reproduce ideology Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). "The ideology of the ruling class does not become the ruling ideology by the grace of God, nor even by virtue of the seizure of State power alone. It is by the installation of the ISAs in which this ideology is realized, and realizes itself that it becomes the ruling ideology" (185). Even though termed "State Apparatuses," Althusser considers these "multiple, distinct, 'relatively autonomous'" (149) institutions mostly disengaged from State control. Although RSAs are unified by their subservience to the established power structures (what Althusser calls the "centralized organization[s] under the leadership of the representatives of the classes in power"), the ISAs are not unified—indeed, they are at times contradictory.

Following Althusser (149), we can categorize the sorts of institutions that create and perpetuate cultural belief systems.

- religious, including the systems of different churches and their various beliefs and rituals;
- familial, including the modes of reproduction;
- legal, including the juridical establishment;
- political, including the various organized parties;
• trade-unions, such as organized labor;

• communications, including the various media, such as the written press, radio, news and educational television, cinema;

• cultural, including literature, the arts, sports, music, film, entertainment television;

• educational, including publicly and privately funded schools, as well as lower and secondary grade levels and higher education.

These categories are not rigid and are commonly represented as a web of power relations, each strand of which embeds the individual within a way of thinking about the world.

The various strands within the web weave together, forming a system of interconnected institutions that borrow from each other, partaking of similar powers. Althusser's university classmate, Michel Foucault, helps us understand the role these institutions play in constructing a social order. He argues that power is not "a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state," nor is it "a mode of subjugation" (92). Rather, power is exercised through the "chain or system" (92), including "disjunctions and contradictions," of the "multiplicity of force relations" that are "embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies" (92-3). These various institutions and their influences weave through what Richard Ohmann calls "a thousand capillaries of transmission, a million habitual meanings" (xii). Composition theorist John Clifford describes this effect as a "centerless web of educational, legal, and cultural institutions" which produces the dominant ideas, beliefs, assumptions, and expectations of a society (41).
According to Althusser, each local strand of this centerless web contributes to the
greater web of power relations in the way proper to it:

the political apparatus by subjecting individuals to the political State ideology [. . .] the communications apparatus by cramming every 'citizen' with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc. by means of the press, the radio, and television. The same goes for the cultural apparatus (the role of sport in chauvinism is of the first importance), etc. The religious apparatus by recalling in sermons and the other great ceremonies of Birth, Marriage, and Death, that man is only ashes, unless he loves his neighbour to the extent of turning the other cheek to whoever strikes first [. . .] but there is no need to go on. (154)

Althusser says that there is no need to go on, in part because as we open a new century, we have become inured to living within the various strands of ideological apparatuses.

Althusser hedges throughout his essay on State Apparatuses, time and again calling his project a “descriptive theory” (140), a “hypothesis” (150), and the like. However, on one point is he absolutely clear: “I believe that the ideological State apparatus which has been installed in the dominant social position in mature capitalist social formations [. . .] is the educational ideological apparatus” (152, italics original). Whereas it used to be that the Church was “natural, indispensable and generous for our ancestors a few centuries ago” (157), with the decline of the Church’s influence in the Enlightenment and the Industrial Age, the Church has been replaced by the educational system as the principle method of transmitting ideology in advanced industrialized nations. Althusser argues that the educational system functions on two levels: to impart a technical competency to the citizenry and at the same time to impart “a universally reigning ideology [. . .] which represents the School as a neutral environment purged of ideology” (156).8
For our purposes, it is important to recognize that literature and composition telecourses are composed of and utilize multiple apparatuses, including the communications apparatus of television and film, the cultural apparatus of literature and written English, and the institutional apparatus of the educational system. Because these apparatuses combine to make the telecourse a powerful vehicle for ideology, the task becomes, in Foucault's words, "to differentiate the networks and levels to which they belong, to reconstitute the lines along which they are connected and engender one another" (Reader 56). Following Foucault's injunction, I seek next to explain how the educational telecourse functions as a communications apparatus.

"As Seen on TV!: The Telecourse as Ideological Apparatus"

Because television itself is one of the central sectors of the United State's culture industry, the telecourse material gains credibility in ways that a college classroom cannot simply by virtue of being on television. The telecourse has the potential to be a significant force in the shaping of a national culture, and we err if we fail to recognize the potential powers of education by television. In this section, I seek to locate the telecourse within contemporary critical conversations on the nature of television in the United States. On the one hand, I agree with the critical commonplace that the communications apparatus of television shapes, reifies, modifies, and perpetuates ideology (indeed, I will explain below in significant detail what ideologies I think the telecourses produce for the student consumer). On the other hand, utilizing Michel de Certeau's claim that "reading" (in this case, viewing) is not necessarily a passive activity but rather may be a form of
poaching, I will demonstrate the ways viewers can subvert the intended use of the
telecourse. Finally, I will return to Althusser's essay on State Apparatuses to explain
how the televised material interpellates its audience.

**Telecourse as Communications Apparatus**

A billboard not far from my house sits alongside a busy thoroughfare. The billboard
structure is rickety, the sign itself in disrepair. At the bottom of the sign is the following
tag-line: "As Seen on TV!" This claim, with the energetic exclamation mark, is meant to
appeal to the viewer on at least two levels. The message is that the product is an elite
product. Like an entertainment celebrity, the product is one of the few that are good
enough to appear on television. The cultural coding of the phrase, "as seen on TV"
indicates that any product that has been broadcast on television is clearly valuable
(otherwise it wouldn't be on television), and, consequently, if we purchase that product,
then we will become equally valuable. Even taking into account our culture's fin-de-
siècle cynicism (manifested in a film like *Wag the Dog*, in which a television producer
manufactures a fictional war in order to save a presidential election), the prevailing belief
is that if it's on TV, it must be true. Advertising still sells the product as a way of life:
buy this product and not only can you have the benefit of the product but you will attain
the cultural and physical attributes of the characters in the advertisement. Drink this beer
and you too will be young and sexy and have friends just like all the actors in the
commercial; buy this vehicle and you too will feel the freedom of the open road; buy
Viagra and you too will lead the love life of Bob Dole.
To claim that the television sells a way of life is not a unique claim, and I raise the point because the telecourse furnishes another example of television providing the viewer with a model for behavior. It's on TV, so it must be accurate; consequently, when Fran Dorn shakes her head sadly at the concluding scene of "The Blue Hotel," then I should shake my own head and feel sorrow at the Swede's foolishness. If Harold Bloom vigorously denounces the notion that Whitman had sexual affairs with men and if he suggests that Whitman was shamed into silence and inaction because of his homosexual desires, then perhaps I, the telecourse viewer, should also be shamed by my own sexual leanings. If Lena has a better chance of getting the job she's dreamed of simply because she has written a good cover letter, I had better learn to write a good cover letter. I saw it on TV; it must be true.

The Telecourse as News

The telecourses that I described in Chapters 2 and 3 all utilize different television genres: the talk show, in which a studio host interviews various celebrities and experts; a dramatic piece, in which the imaginative literature is presented as a typical television drama; the documentary, in which experts present their information; and the representational dramatization, in which actors portray real-life situations that represent the viewer's own life. Finally, each of the telecourses features an authority figure. The writing telecourses that I developed, for example, look like a news program in which an authority figure (in my case, a white, heterosexual, middle-class male) sits before the camera disseminating information with assistance from pre-prepared graphics. In
*Literary Visions,* Fran Dorn functions as the knowledgeable hostess who provides the necessary information for the ignorant viewer. *A Writer's Exchange* features John McCaa in the role of the public intellectual who skillfully interviews academics and scholars. As I've said earlier, *Voices and Visions,* with its fourteen separate films on each of the poets does not feature an individual teacher; nonetheless, the off-screen narrators who provide the authoritative voice-overs function as the televised authority. As I demonstrated in the section of the Whitman video, the narrator acts to solve critical, biographical, and interpretive disputes, presenting a seemingly objective "answer" to the critical dilemma in question. I suggest, then, that in their role as informational authorities, these telecourses function like all the other news programs, documentaries, and video-magazines that flood the nation's television channels.

Students of television suggest that television programs such as typical morning news shows "[interpret] the world on behalf of the viewer, mediating the horizons of experience of interviewees and others through discourses familiar to the studio 'family' and to the intended family audience" (Wilson 26). That is to say, television programs work to order the viewers' world by making familiar the outside world. The television set and the televised material that appears on the set becomes naturalized, a part of the normal order of things.\(^1\)

The telecourses that I developed function in a similar manner. As the on-screen persona who delivers the current-traditional message of correct English (*This is the way to use punctuation; these are the methods to use for writing introductions*), I am the embodiment of cultural values of language, the privileged agent of linguistic continuity.
When I say on television, “If you split your infinitives, your audience will think you are illiterate,” I am perpetuating the myth that correct standard English is the only acceptable form of literacy. In doing so, I am perpetuating a hierarchy of language use—not a bad thing according to some perspectives. As Allan Bloom writes in *The Closing of the American Mind*, the “dominant majority gave the country a dominant culture with its traditions, its literature, its tastes, its special claim to know and supervise the language” (31). According to Bloom’s view, in my role as telecourse teacher, I represent the dominant culture, supervising the “special claim” to language.

The typical televised viewer will consume this material without questioning its validity. For example, recall the PCC student who reports that she watches the telecourse lying on the floor late at night when “everyone [was] in bed, nice and quiet room” with a “can of diet coke, black pen, note pad, writing book, and a pillow.” Sprawling prostrate on the floor before the television, this student receives the televised material, passively, repeating in her notes the messages that I transmit that day. In doing so she enacts an extreme version of a daily cultural ritual performed by millions and millions of couch-potatoes every day. As one of the other PCC students said about his viewing habits, “I would watch it after everyone went to bed. 10:00 PM and while sitting on the couch in the living room, dimly lit [. . .]. Put the tape in VCR--press play--Dr. Pepper in one hand, remote in the other. I would watch until the point was made, then fast forward until the next slide.”

Seminal communications theorists John Fiske and John Hartley help us understand more clearly how the television functions as an agent of cultural transmission. Fiske and
Hartley claim that a culture communicates with itself through the figure of the bard, who "functions as a mediator of language" at the "center of culture" in order to select and perpetuate a culture's myths (600, 601). They argue that contemporary television "performs a 'bardic function' for the culture at large" (600), in which the viewer is cast as the medium for the transmitting bard. As I've said, the various Pima Community College logos (just like the various logos of Public Broadcasting Service, Dallas County Community College District, and the multiple sponsoring foundations and corporations) represent the authority of higher education. Just like the phrase "As Seen On TV!" is meant to authorize the product, so do these lofty logos authorize the material.

In the telecourses, the academic experts play the role of the cultural bard, transmitting to the audience the institutional mythology of language. The men in shirts and ties with neat hair and attractive features; the women dressed in professional dresses, hair just so, face makeup obvious but not garish—these are trustworthy figures. As I suggested above, Fran Dorn in Literary Visions is the viewer's guide to the televised literature, mediating for the viewer the "correct" interpretations of various dramatizations of short stores and dramas. When she says, "Stephen Crane offers us little exposition. Some characters don't even have names," we believe her and we wait for her to articulate the implications of her statement. Similarly, during the televised images of Harold Bloom and Allen Ginsberg arguing over Whitman's sexuality in Voices and Visions, we viewers are exposed to the critical struggle and we are implicated in the debate. We watch and take sides in the discussion until the authoritative narrator puts an end to the argument: "Whitman was romantically involved in the 1860s with Peter Doyle, a horse car
conductor, 28 years his junior.” And when I explain to the camera the various definitions of literacy and then provide the definition that I prefer, I am seeking to convince my students to believe as I believe. In our television roles, we televised intellectual authorities are transmitting ideology.

II

The Telecourse as Professional Intellectual

Michel de Certeau provides two contributions to our analysis of telecourses in his essay “Reading as Poaching.” First, although de Certeau considers reading a fundamental aspect of consumption, he broadens the term “reading” to mean more than interpreting the marks on a written page: “Today,” he writes, “the text is society itself. It takes urbanistic, industrial, commercial, or televised forms” (167). The telecourse that teaches English—a televised educational lesson that functions as a profit center for the institution—is an excellent case of such a text. De Certeau’s second contribution to our analysis of telecourses is that he helps us understand that reading is not always a passive activity. In his analysis of the difference between consumers and producers, he explains some of the ways that the individual has certain powers within the all-encompassing systems of apparatuses.

Like Althusser, de Certeau acknowledges that society reproduces itself by producing and reproducing ideologies that favor the hierarchies of “contemporary culture” (169). De Certeau acknowledges an “only too real” division between producers and consumers.
The ones with the primary power are producers of "the social text," those "professional intellectuals" (writers, artists, film makers, television producers, and educators) who construct texts that are in turn received "by the faithful who are supposed to be satisfied to reproduce the models elaborated by the manipulators of language" (169). He argues that the consumers ("those who do not produce") of texts (books, films, television programming, political tracts) are often made passive in the act of consuming, willingly receiving the material and its attendant ideologies because it is easier to consume than produce. He calls such passivity, "the inertia of consumption" (167), in which the "consumer" receives ideology "without remaking" it (169). According to this scheme, the consumers of the evening's television schedule may flip through the channels watching various television programs, but they are never involved with creating the various meanings of the various texts. The inertia of consumption is necessary, de Certeau says, for "the system that distinguishes and privileges authors, educators [. . .] in a word, 'producers,' in contrast to those who do not produce" (167). We hear echoes of Allan Bloom's argument that the dominant majority has a special claim to know and supervise language: the producers do the supervising, while the consumers are the ones supervised. As de Certeau says, "a social hierarchization seeks to make the reader conform to the 'information' distributed by an elite (or semi-elite)" (172).

Let's pause for a moment to consider de Certeau's point in terms of the telecourses that teach English. I've said that the nationally produced and distributed telecourses begin with a montage of logos from corporations, foundations, and non-profit organizations. These logos, including the well-known PBS/Annenberg logo, signify to
the viewer that the televised content is a product of intellectual integrity and the
economic upper class. Just as the slogan "As Seen on TV!" is meant to signify the
legitimacy of the given product, so do the telecourse logos signify a national intellectual
and economic elite. Likewise, the televised courses that I developed begin with the
orange logo of Pima Community College, then cut to the words, *Writing I, Randy
Accetta, M.A.* scripted across the screen. These images legitimate the program to follow
by deploying the force of the institution and reminding the reader that the following
televised material has the authority of higher education behind it. The locally produced
community college courses like mine are a product of the regional elite, or what de
Certeau would call the "semi-elite," while the PBS courses are a product of the national,
or even international, elite.

Regardless of whether the PCC telecourses are elite or just semi-elite, as producer and
teacher of a writing telecourse, I can be seen as a "professional intellectual," a member of
what de Certeau calls the "church of the media." I was literally paid by the state of
Arizona to interpret the social text of standard English language, to mediate between the
television viewers and the conventions of standard written English. In this role, I provide
order for the most basic rules of social interaction, familiarizing the audience with the
seemingly obscure and arbitrary language conventions: *A comma must go after the last
word of the first independent clause and before the coordinating conjunction that leads to
the second independent clause, unless the two independent clauses are short enough that
the reader will not get confused. However, you can also mark the shift between the two
independent clauses with a semi-colon, providing the two independent clauses are closely
related in meaning. I was paid to produce and model a cultural text which the uninitiated must consume to receive entry into academic, professional, social communities otherwise denied them. In this way, the telecourse functions as an apparatus of cultural ideology, forcing students and viewers to consume facts, opinions, and values that are authorized by state-mandated educational and cultural systems.

De Certeau, however, helps us recognize that the consumer does not always consume these facts, opinions, and values in the state-mandated manner. Indeed, de Certeau, while acknowledging the division between producer and consumer, challenges the conventional theory presented by Fiske and Hartley above that reading (that is, viewing or consuming) is a passive activity. De Certeau says, "In fact, to read is to wander through an imposed system (that of the text, analogous to the constructed order of a city or a supermarket)" (169). The reader (i.e., consumer) has control over the direction of the wandering and control over the entire interpretive process. "The reader takes neither the position of the author nor the author's position. He invents in texts something different from what they intended" (169). In the case of the telecourse, while my televised image is expounding on the ways to begin an essay or while Harold Bloom is arguing eloquently for Whitman's celibacy, the viewer may very well be in the kitchen making a chocolate milkshake. The telecourse student who says, "I would watch until the point was made, then fast forward until the next slide" reminds us that the viewer has significant control over his relationship to the transmitted material. I'll watch until I want to stop watching, the student says. I'll consume until I don't want to consume any more. Students may feel pressured to take notes because of grades and the certification process, but they are free
to control certain aspects of their consumption. Indeed, I’ve had students say that they
don’t watch any of the televised material.

De Certeau claims that the act of reading transforms the reader into a wanderer. He
calls this poaching: “Far from being writers [. . .] readers are travellers; they move across
lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did
not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves” (174). In describing
reading, de Certeau uses the metaphor of space, more specifically spacelessness:

Indeed, reading has no place: Barthes reads Proust in Stendahl’s text; the television
viewer reads the passing away of his childhood in the news report. One viewer says
about the program she saw the previous evening: ‘It was stupid and yet I sat there all
the same.’ What place captivated her, which was and yet was not that of the image
seen? It is the same with the reader: his place is not here or there, one or the other,
but neither the one nor the other, simultaneously inside and outside[. . .]. (174)

De Certeau conflates the high art of reading literature with the low art of watching
television because both activities are a form of consumption, and in both instances, the
consumer consumes portions of the culture’s ideology. More importantly, in the trope of
space de Certeau provides a valuable framework for understanding the ideological
implications of telecourses, particularly with regard to those who view the course.

I submit that telecourse students are poachers, and as such they occupy a number of
“places.” First, they are members of the educational institution’s community: they pay a
fee in order to consume the intellectual material. In paying, they agree to keep certain
commitments: turn in assignments on time, attend review sessions, attend examinations,
and the like. In addition to being “inside” the institution in this respect, telecourse
students are very much “outside” the institution. They do not enter into the classroom but
stay at home and consume from a distance. In the non-interactive telecourses, they
cannot produce knowledge in the manner that their peers involved in classroom
discussions do; they can merely choose to receive or not receive the transmitted material.
For example, telecourse students can observe the conversation between Ginsberg and
Bloom—but they cannot participate in that conversation. Instead of speaking in a
classroom setting and controlling the intellectual conversation, they must “move across
lands belonging to someone else” by fast-forwarding or rewinding the VCR.

There are moments, of course, when telecourse students can participate in the
intellectual conversation. When they take their exams, for example, they have the
freedom to produce, to speak in writing, their own interpretations and their own answers.
However, these moments of freedom are not lengthy and are constrained by the limits of
the course requirements. In the final analysis these moments of production on the part of
the student-consumer are nothing but a gap in the dominant power dynamic. The
enrolled telecourse student is required to watch (consume) prepared video, and regardless
of how the student consumes the course material, the student must still appease the
teacher (who, as Althusser reminds us, represents the authority of the State) by
reproducing the course material satisfactorily. De Certeau claims that “to read is to
wander through an imposed system.” In the same way, to take the telecourse class is to
wander through an imposed system: you may choose to rewind or fast forward; you may
choose to do a particular assignment or not, to watch the televised session or not; you
may or may not choose to read the textbook, but in the end you are still constrained. You
are still forced to make your way through the imposed order of the course, a state-
mandated journey. But you are not wandering at your leisure; you are herded through.
Your wandering is limited by the choices given you. You have to jump through certain hoops on your way through the wandering; if you jump well enough, you get the passing grade. If you don't wander the way I the teacher want you to, I (with all the cultural and social authority bestowed upon me by the state) will not let you continue your academic path. You will be constrained by the multiple apparatuses at play—education, communication, and language.

**Viewers as Poachers**

As I’ve tried to make clear, unlike the conventional classroom course in which the course content is generally kept behind the closed doors of the university, the course content in telecourses is available to all those with access to cable television. Here in Tucson, for instance, educational programming is available on the two Pima Community College cable stations from 6:00 AM until 2:00 AM every day of the week; combined, the two writing classes are broadcast for over twenty hours each week. In this respect, no other formal educational program has the opportunity to reach such a large audience as a telecourse broadcast on public or cable television. All it takes is a cable-ready television, and you the viewer have access to university-level material that is normally reserved for a paying customer. I know that people who have not paid and are not officially enrolled in the course do consume this material because they are not shy about telling me. A few years ago, for instance, a University of Arizona School of Law professor called to offer a compliment on the telecourse's attention to standard written English. Likewise, a visiting professor from California called to criticize me for misspelling *euphemism* (mistakenly, I
had typed an a instead of the middle e in a few PowerPoint slides). At a track meet, a junior high school student approached and said, "Are you the guy on TV with a dinosaur? I like watching your show." And after eating breakfast at a local restaurant once, I was approached by the bus boy. "Hey" he said, excitedly. "I know you, you're the writing man. I watch you all the time. I need to get my GED, and I watch your class whenever I can. It's cool."

Such non-enrolled viewers are poachers. They have not paid any registration fees, nor are they a part of the official educational system. Nonetheless, the educational material is available to them at the press of a remote control button. Such non-enrolled viewers are poaching, in de Certeau's terms. They are not required to attend review sessions or take mid-term or final exams. They do not have to submit any assignments or be responsible for any relationship with the teachers. Such observers are both inside and outside the course. As insiders, they can follow the course with all the enthusiasm of enrolled students, taking notes, reading the text books, learning the lessons; as outsiders, they are free to avoid paying the fees, free to avoid the potential penalties of poor learning, free to avoid participating in the entire educational system. These viewing poachers can travel the landscape of the television dial at their leisure, picking the intellectual crops they wish to feed upon.

The most diligent non-enrolled poacher of the course that I have come across is H.P., a 71-year-old retired Hughes Aircraft worker. A year after the telecourses started appearing on Tucson cable stations, Henry sent me a letter telling me that he watches the telecourses "all the time" and that he had bought the required course books for both
telecourses. Enclosed in the letter was a draft of an editorial for the local newspaper that he wanted me to proofread. In his letter, he asked, "Can I be a writer?" After returning his letter, I called H.P. to ask him about his viewing habits. H.P. enjoys talking about his writing, so I will let him talk.13

As he said during our interview, "I started watching the first time the telecourse was on the air—I had got a flyer from Pima in the mail. It announced that the course was for credits, so since I didn't need credits I just kept watching. Plus I wasn't going to pay if I didn't have to [. . .] I've always loved to write [. . .] Since I've been in Tucson I've had five letters in the editorial section and one in sports. Before, my brother told me that my letters home got him confused. I would always be slopping [sic] down words because my brain was getting ahead of myself. Now I don't do that." When asked what lesson he remembers from observing the telecourse, H.P. responds, "One of the simplest of all, and this will surprise you. The comma. I have a habit of putting commas all the time. You had a section on commas, and I thought, geeze, commas must be important." He continues talking about things he's learned: "I never knew a single word can be so powerful--like a stick of dynamite. And trying to read out loud what I wrote, oh that's the greatest thing. I find all sorts of blunders. You find where the comma should go, and it sounds soothing to the ear, the way it's supposed to be. Right now I'm writing a letter to the President [. . .]."

H.P. says, "I didn't need the credits," and so without the need for an institutional stamp of approval H.P. uses the telecourse material for his own ends. By not paying for the course, H.P. transforms what others call "schoolwork" and its attendant "homework"
into a form of leisure; and he in turn transforms that leisure into an intellectual product. As H.P. and the other examples demonstrate, the writing telecourses take the knowledge previously reserved for those fortunate enough to attend a school of higher education and make it widely available. Like H.P., anyone in the region who has access to cable television has the opportunity to attend to their own higher education.

However, as de Certeau points out, "it remains to be asked what the consumer makes of these images and during these hours" (31). In H.P.'s case, the consumer makes use of images to understand the conventions of standard written English so that he can write not only personal correspondence but rhetorical declarations in the public sphere. In addition to his letter to President Clinton, not long after our interviews, H.P. wrote a lengthy opinion article about the Oklahoma City bombing that was published in the editorial section of the Arizona Daily Star, the local morning paper. H.P. mailed me a copy of the editorial, and enclosed a letter thanking me for teaching the telecourse. He said that the printed version had not been edited at all, and he attributed his growth as a writer to viewing the telecourse. Indeed, to my mind the editorial was well-written and persuasive, arguing among other things that with "freedom of speech [...] comes responsibility." I say it was a persuasive letter, but apparently not to everyone. A responding letter to the editor blasted H.P. for dragging the militia groups "through the mud." I relate this exchange of letters because it indicates that the telecourse has an influential place in our contemporary community. Though not officially enrolled in the course, H.P. used the televised material to provide himself with the tools to craft a reasoned and articulate public document, which in turn provoked public response. This public exchange of ideas
indicates that the telecourse can encourage the free and constant communication of thought, one of the most important tasks of any English course. As H.P.'s example indicates, we must consider that the telecourse that is available to general television viewers is no longer the private domain of higher education; it is potentially as much a part of the dominant popular culture as America's Most Wanted, The Weather Channel, and Good Morning, America. People watch such programs and take action depending on what they observe.

H.P.'s experience suggests that the televised lessons designed specifically for writing students can be poached by the non-enrolled observer and put to use in situations completely removed from the original, narrow academic intent. Take, for instance, the example of M., a 36-year-old apartment manager who has taken telecourses in other subjects. Although he has previously received A's in all three transfer-level Writing courses, he says he watched the writing telecourses "at least once a week for the past two years." In fact, M. even tapes many of the writing sessions. He says that he likes "any information I can gain, especially if it's free." M. relates how he has made use of a variety of specific lessons from the telecourse. "I was having trouble with paragraph transitions, and you were running a section on that and it really helped me." He rattles off a series of lessons he has learned: "Word usage, the need to set paragraphs up right, and why you use them. The sense of time in transitions—to make sure the words in the paragraphs were consistent. To not use the past tense and present tense in the same sentence." Observing the telecourse helped him write a research paper: "I was having a hard time doing a research paper for another class [...] and you covered outlining, and
that helped me quite a bit because I was being too specific in my outline." In addition, he says, "I learned how to give credit to the proper source," using the MLA citation method that was taught on television. Aside from aiding M. in his other academic endeavors, the televised material that M. observers has altered the way he handles his professional writing. "As manager of an apartment complex, I write contracts and letters." Having observed a number of lessons on persuasive writing, M. claims that his letters, "especially to tenants late on rent," are "more coercive, but not so abrupt." He spends "a little more time--I wanted them to sound nicer but still be more forceful." As this example illustrates, a non-enrolled observer of the writing telecourses can improve functional writing skills, whether for other academic work or for a variety of professional communication needs. In this way, the telecourse offers opportunities to increase literacy for the entire community.

Designed to function as another arm of the officially sanctioned system of higher education—another form of the classroom for which you must pay for participation—the telecourse actually makes educational material available to a significantly broader range of consumers. In this respect, the educational telecourse is fundamentally populist, providing all citizens with access to the educational materials previously reserved for those select few enrolled in institutions of higher education.

**The Telecourse Hails**

Returning to Althusser provides a way of understanding how and why the telecourse can appeal to non-enrolled viewers. I suggest that the telecourse "hails" the viewer,
interpelling the individual viewer as a subject that becomes contained within the web of
the various apparatuses at play in the telecourse. Althusser explains that ideology is
transmitted in part by the act of hailing: "I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or
'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them
all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very
precise operation I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along
the lines of the most commonplace police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" (174). In
such a "theoretical scene," as Althusser calls it, the hailed individual is made into a
subject by the act of being called upon. A few additional anecdotes of non-enrolled
observers will provide us with the opportunity to understand a final ideological
implication of the telecourse: the ways the telecourse acts to hail the observer into the
governing ideologies of the telecourse.

K., 44, a restaurant waiter, says he has watched the program "at least fifty times. I
kind of come across it while channel surfing, say, while eating dinner after a late workout
at the gym." Another example of a non-enrolled observer is T., 26, who works as a maid
in a Tucson hotel while going to school at Pima. "I have twenty-six credits toward the
fifty-sex I need. I passed [English] 101 in a classroom course, and I'm taking 102 this
semester, but I've seen the class on television a bunch of times--maybe five--for about
half an hour at a time. There were a lot of things that I didn't know, so I was curious."
And J., a 22-year-old senior at the University of Arizona reports that she finds the
televised courses interesting: "What made me stop at the channel was your personality.
The math channel was boring because the teacher seemed disinterested [sic], but having
the [writing] teacher looking at the camera made it feel like the teacher was paying attention. Even though I was just channel surfing, I felt like I could ask a question. I've taken all my writing requirements at the UA, but I've watched the [Pima] writing classes about twenty or thirty times.”

J. has been hailed by the interesting English channel. As she wanders through the various channels, she is in some ways summoned by the television image in front of her in the same way Althusser describes the hail of “Hey, you there.” Perhaps the educational system of which she is a part at the University of Arizona has prepared her to recognize the value of the televised material; perhaps she was simply happy to have a television figure appear to “pay attention” to her. Either way, the material grabbed her interest and turned her from a channel surfer seeking some form of passive viewing entertainment into an active viewer who has watched the program “twenty or thirty times” because she feels “like I could ask a question.” Likewise, the high-school dropout who once told me, “I watch you all the time. I need to get my GED, and I watch your class whenever I can,” has also been hailed by the educational system. He recognizes that the telecourse material is a helpful tool for passing the standardized high school equivalency exam offered by the State of Arizona. These non-enrolled viewers have been interpolated as viewing subjects who feel as if they have something to learn from the televised material.16 In this respect, the non-enrolled viewers substantiate Althusser’s claim that the educational system functions both to impart a technical competency to the citizenry and to impart “a universally reigning ideology [. . . ] which represents the School as a neutral environment purged of ideology” (156). The questions to ask for our purpose
are, what sort of ideologies are transmitted, and what sort of subject does the telecourse interpellate? In other words, how is the viewer constructed by the ideologies presented in the televised material?

III

The Cultural Work of the Telecourse

My intention in this part of the chapter is to recast the conversation away from an examination of the telecourse as an ideological apparatus and toward an examination of the telecourse as a narrative structure. In doing so, I explain how the telecourse material draws much of its power from long-standing themes embedded within conventional American mythologies. I focus this discussion primarily on the composition courses that I described at length in Chapter 2. Although the literature telecourses *Voices and Visions* and *Literary Visions* make use of narrative structure in their dramatizations of the imaginative literature, the composition course *A Writer's Exchange* provides a particularly rich text for this analysis because the televised vignettes and dramatizations are the product of a conscious effort to reproduce the actual lived situation of the viewer. According to course designer, Harryette Brown, the case study vignettes are meant to provide "role models" for the telecourse student, and the "characters in the acting scenarios represent the [...] distance learners" (12). I hope to demonstrate that these televised "role models" create a pattern of narrative moments, the sum of which is a master narrative that transmits to the television audience specific ideological formations. These ideological formations are designed not only to assist the viewer in achieving
academic success but to instill in the viewer certain cultural virtues. I suggest that the telecourses can be read as another in the long line of rhetorics that seek to mold American culture. In this chapter I argue three main points: (1) that the composition telecourses (and, to a lesser extent, the literature courses) reproduce the rhetoric of the American melting pot; (2) that the telecourses reify the rhetorical tradition of American individualism and what I call an economic self-reliance; and (3) that as a consequence of utilizing the rhetorics of the melting pot and economic self-reliance, the telecourses function to train their viewers in occupational and functional literacy at the expense of critical, oppositional thinking.

In this analysis, I am using such terms as "rhetoric" and "rhetorics" to indicate the diverse discourses and signifying practices put in play by various texts that function to construct an American identity—including the telecourses and a variety of texts canonized by scholars of American literature. This point is important for our discussion of telecourses because the televised material relies on both the language of everyday use and the semiotics of the material world (including, for instance, the presentation of academics as experts who are well-dressed and isolated in their rooms filled with books and papers).¹⁹ I draw upon the interpretive methodologies utilized by such scholars of American literature as Richard Slotkin and Jane Tompkins. Following Slotkin, I am using "myth" in a manner somewhat analogous to ideology. Slotkin's use of ideology is consistent with Althusser's (though without the Marxist emphasis on production and reproduction of capital): "the basic system of concepts, beliefs, and values that define a society's way of interpreting its place in the cosmos and the meaning of its history"
Slotkin argues that the ideologies that carry the "dominant conceptual categories that inform society's words and practices" (5) are "often expressed in the symbolic narratives of mythology and [...] transmitted to the society through various genres of mythic expression" (5), primarily narrative. As Slotkin says, "Myths are stories drawn from a society's history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society's ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness—with all the complexities and contradiction that consciousness may contain" (5). I hope to demonstrate below that the televised images of the telecourses are conscious representations of stories drawn from our current society. I explain the ways that the narrative patterns developed by the telecourses present and re-present a number of major themes in the cultural mythology of the United States.

In addition to drawing upon Slotkin's use of cultural mythology, I make use of Jane Tompkin's notion of "cultural work" that I explained in Chapter 3. In Sensational Designs, Tompkins argues that literary texts should be seen as doing a certain kind of cultural work within a specific kind of historical situation [...]. I see their plots and characters as providing society with a means of thinking about itself, defining certain aspects of a social reality which the authors and their readers shared, dramatizing its conflicts, and recommending solutions. It is the notion of literary texts as doing work, expressing and shaping the social context that produced them, that I wish to substitute finally for the critical perspective that sees them as attempts to achieve a timeless, universal ideal of truth and formal coherence. (200)

In a like manner, I suggest that the seemingly diverse and multiple stories presented in the telecourses should be read not as individual teaching moments but as a coherent narrative that articulates and defines the ideologies of a particular social order. I am concerned in the following analysis with examining how the telecourses represent social
relations. To that end, I am interested in answers to these sorts of questions: What political position does the televised material take? Whose interest is advanced in the televised material? Whose interests are silenced, and why?

A Brief Catalogue of Telecourse Narratives

First, a brief reminder of the sorts of televised material presented by the telecourses. As I’ve indicated, my own courses primarily utilize my talking head and computer slides to focus on the traditional rhetorical modes (narrative, description, persuasion, etc.) in an effort to prepare students for success in other academic writings. In Chapter 3 I described how the sorts of stories that I tell about myself are meant to create a television personality that is responsible, trustworthy, and accessible. To that end, I often tell stories about my academic and professional careers as well as the academic careers of telecourse students. For instance, in one televised segment of Writing 101, I explained how one of the women in the course called me on the telephone early in the semester to explain how frightened she was of the course—especially because she had received low grades on initial assignments. I described how the woman felt overwhelmed by the amount of work required and how she felt that she was ill-prepared for the course. I then presented on television a sample of the student’s first essay, complete with my own grading comments. My surface goal was to demonstrate that her work was, in my opinion, an excellent beginning to the course and a valuable building block to future success. My deeper goal was to reassure the telecourse viewers that their own situations were not much different from the struggles and experiences of other students.
As I've said, I believe my job in these courses is to prepare students for the sorts of academic writing they will confront during their college careers as well as the sorts of occupational writing they will encounter in their working lives. Throughout the televised lessons, I repeat such sentiments as, "Once you get a handle on academic writing, then it will be easier to write in other areas, such as your jobs." To reinforce this point, I spent the bulk of one televised session examining a business brochure that friends of mine had designed. First I explained how my friends had been engineers whose employers had downsized, forcing them to change careers. I told the story of how they decided to begin an adventure travel company whose vacation destinations included the northern coast of California. The brochure was nicely done—except for the numerous spelling errors, confusing sentences, and general sloppiness of writing. I analyzed the effect of such mediocre writing on a potential audience for the business—perhaps wealthy California professionals with vacation time. Such an audience, I argued to the television audience, might not purchase a vacation package if the public documents that represented the business were of such low quality. My teaching goal in this and similar lessons was to provide stories with realistic characters and plot lines in order to demonstrate the practical importance of using standard written English.

Likewise, the DCCCD televised material that described in Chapter 3 uses storytelling to teach how to write from an occupational perspective. As Harryette Brown points out in the preview booklet for A Writer's Exchange, the telecourse reflects a commitment to cultural and intellectual diversity by featuring "many kinds of writing, from traditional academic forms to the kinds of writing often found in work place settings" (2). Brown's
contentions are born out when we consider the following list of case study vignettes, acting scenarios, and teaching moments depicted in the televised material of *A Writer’s Exchange*, some of which I have already described in more detail in Chapter 3. Recall that the program host, John McCaa, is an African-American man who interviews men and women of various ethnic and racial backgrounds about their experiences with occupational and academic writing. McCaa considers such televised moments “representative” of the types of writing that students can expect to confront:

- An interview with an African-American woman professor who discusses how she needs to be able to write in a variety of styles depending on her audience.
- An interview with an Anglo male attorney who discusses the need for accurate writing.
- A vignette featuring an African-American woman who works in human resources at an unnamed company who is writing an employee manual that lays out the rules and regulations necessary for smooth and legal conduct.
- An interview with an Anglo single father who is getting a degree so that he can become an architect.
- An interview with a Hindu woman who discusses the way she goes through the composing process while driving her car to work.
- An interview with an Anglo woman regarding a neighborhood newsletter she writes.
- An interview with a young woman student of Asian descent who reads through a university course catalogue in order to establish her course schedule; the
interview includes a conversation with an older Anglo woman who edits the
catalogue and who describes the importance of accurate and clear writing.

- A lengthy vignette featuring two African-American community college students
who are struggling over finding a topic for their history class term paper. They
receive assistance from an Anglo teacher and an African-American librarian.
Finally, one of the women students settles on using her recent trip to Europe as a
starting point for the assignment.

- The vignette of Lena, the young Hispanic woman who learns from her Anglo
tutor to write a strong cover letter in her quest for a job as a secretary in a law
firm.

Each of these dramatizations and vignettes reproduces a brief moment in the life of a
student or in the life of a person who uses writing in his or her job. In each brief
reproduction, the televised material isolates an important detail within the wider range of
the character's life experiences, thereby creating a sense of urgency in the specific topic.
This particular moment is important, the televised image calls out. Pay attention to it.
Learn from it. Mimic it. The telecourse hails, but to what purpose? What does the
viewer learn? What should the viewer mimic? One object to mimic is the televised
expert, while another object is the representative student. The narrators and academic
experts are projected as reliable figures who, when taken as a unified source, represent an
all-knowing, omniscient teacher who can provide anyone with the right tools for a
successful life. In short, the televised material presents happy pictures of happy students
happily at work, developing not only their inquisitive and impressionable minds but
developing at the same time their professional and occupational prospects. Certainly the happy images presented by the telecourse are meant to cheer telecourse students that they, like the depicted characters, are working toward a valuable and enjoyable goal. Certainly the happy images are meant to raise the telecourse students toward a higher intellectual and practical level. And certainly the happy images are designed to guide, by showing that this, the telecourse way, is the correct way to read, to write, to think, to believe.

**Doses of Ideology**

Although I said above that I wanted to move the conversation away from the Althusserian rhetoric of ideology, let me return to Althusser for a brief moment. Althusser says that the communications apparatus functions by “cramming every 'citizen' with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc. by means of the press, the radio, and television.” I am trying to illustrate that the telecourse also functions to cram what we might call the *telecourse citizen* (the enrolled student and the non-enrolled observer) with its own doses of cultural ideology—a mission often acknowledged as essential to the project of higher education. Recall this description of the purpose of community colleges: “They defend an American culture, articulate it, filter people into it. They stand alongside the public libraries, museums, youth groups and other community agencies in transmitting values and shared understandings […]” (Cohen and Brawer 3). One of the projects of the telecourses is to re-describe, re-create, re-fashion what Cohen and Brawer call “an American culture.” The narratives embedded
within the television material articulate the myths of that culture, while the educational system behind the telecourses filters people into that culture.

Our next task, then, is to interrogate what that "American culture" is. Or, to use the discourse of Althusser, we might ask, what "doses" of ideology are transmitted by the telecourse material? The following list provides a partial description of the various values and assumed shared understandings transmitted by the narratives of the telecourses:

- The United States is a panethnic society in which men and women of all ethnicities and races have access to various positions of social and economic power.¹¹

- America is the land of opportunity: anyone—regardless of skin color or gender—can find gainful employment that is personally rewarding to them.

- Dreams can come true: if you watch the telecourse program and do what it tells you, you will succeed not only in your short-term academic goals but in your life-long dreams.

- Although kind and generous people (such as teachers, tutors, and business-people) may offer you assistance, you must rely on yourself to succeed.

- You can make money by learning to write.

- Although honest physical labor is valuable, it is better to work in an office with your mind, your fingertips, and a computer.

- You have to work your way up the career ladder—start as a secretary and then perhaps go to law school.
• People with suits, ties, dresses, and otherwise professional clothing have authority to dispense information.

• Academics have valuable knowledge.

• Academic writing will help improve business writing, which in turn will improve your economic condition and spiritual well-being.

• Accurate and correct business writing in standard English is fundamental to economic success.

• Accurate and correct speaking skills in standard English are necessary for economic and social success.

This list is necessarily partial, and I cannot review each and every moment of ideological reproduction in the five composition and literature telecourses that I have described. However, a number of broad strands deserve interrogation, so I turn now to a discussion of the ways the telecourse material re-creates a number of the fundamental myths of American culture. I begin my analysis by focusing on multiculturalism.
IV

Appropriating the Myth of the Melting Pot

The televised material in *A Writer's Exchange* (and, as we have seen, in *Voices and Visions* and *Literary Visions*) clearly emphasizes a multicultural approach to teaching. The television images include not only a wide range of panethnicities such as Hispanics, African-Americans, Anglos, and Asian-Americans, but also a wide variety of men, women, parents, young adults, the employed, the unemployed, the wealthy, the able-bodied, the disabled, and the poor. These images are the product of a conscious choice to represent an idealistic image of multicultural America. According to the Preview booklet designed for teachers of the telecourse, *A Writer's Exchange*, the televised material is designed to reflect and address "the cultural diversity of our student's world" (2).²² Course designer Harryette Brown writes that the material is meant to appeal to the typical telecourse viewer: "More than half of the videos have minority professors as program experts; more than half of the role models in the case studies are minorities, and the characters in the acting scenarios represent the diversity of distance learners in age, gender, and ethnicity" (12). In addition, the "readings in the text, both students and professional, represent diverse academic disciplines, and their authors represent a variety of cultures. The handbook offers special help to students whose first language is not English" (12). The ultimate goal of such wide-ranging cultural and ethnic depictions is to "reflect the diversity of cultures in today's world" (12). The telecourse appears to succeed in this goal.
Consider, for example, the vignette of the young black student whose European travels provide the focus for her history term paper. Such an image replaces a stereotypical image of black teenagers who are uninterested in academics with an image of African-Americans who participate in the cultural pursuits often ascribed to upper- and middle-class white Americans. In short, this young student appears to illustrate that hard work and motivation allow you to become a globe-trotting success, regardless of skin color. Likewise, the character of Lena becomes a fictional role model whose efforts at joining the professional mainstream display the traits of commitment, hard work, and a willingness to change. The repetitions of such accounts function to justify, indeed, glorify, the academic mission. To be sure, representing the benefits of cultural diversity is a laudable goal, and certainly it is also valuable to represent young adults from minority cultures in a positive light. However, these images are not innocent. They carry cultural weight, and as I have labored to illustrate by locating the telecourse as an ideological apparatus, such images must be interrogated for the sorts of ideologies that they transmit.

I start with the trope of the melting pot because there is a curious connection between this standard American trope and the ways the telecourse narratives melt their various characters into a standardized figure of a successful student on her way to academic and occupational success. The trope of the American melting pot originates in Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur's *Letters From an American Farmer*. Published in 1782, *Letters* is a series of twelve fictional letters written through the persona of Crèvecoeur’s fictional
narrator, a Quaker farmer named James. Although at times satiric, Crèvecoeur's *Letters* demonstrate his fixed effort at crafting a national character.\(^{23}\)

In response to the question that titles Letter Three, "What is an American?", Crèvecoeur's Farmer James answers:

What then is an American, this new man? He is neither an European nor the descendent of an European; hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. *He* is an American who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new modes of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. *He* becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma Mater. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. (69-70, italics original)\(^{24}\)

Although Crèvecoeur had little inkling of how accurate his phrase "individuals of all nations" would become, his image of different nationalities melting together to form "a new race" has since become the principal metaphor of identity formation in America.

As an example of this trope at work, in *The Opening of the American Mind*, Lawrence W. Levine describes how in the early twentieth century the Ford Motor Company reified the metaphorical melting pot in an elaborate ceremony of acculturation. Between 1914 and 1921 the Ford Motor Company sent its immigrant workers to an in-house English language school. As Levine writes, the "purpose of the school according to a company spokesman was 'to impress these men that they are, or should be, Americans, and that former racial, national, and linguistic differences are to be forgotten'" (111). According to Levine, the Ford Motor Company graduated some 16,000 immigrant employees from this school. He describes the commencement exercise thusly:
On the stage in front of a model of an immigrant ship stood a huge pot, seven and half feet high and fifteen feet in diameter. The graduating members of the class, dressed in clothes representative of the nation from which they had come and carrying the types of luggage they had brought with them when they first arrived in the United States, marched down the gangplank from the ship and disappeared into the pot. Six of the teachers then stirred the pot with ten-foot-long-ladles. When the pot began to "boil over," the workers emerged, according to an eyewitness, "dressed in their best American clothes and waving American flags." (111)

We see similarities between this account from three generations ago and the images I've described from the telecourses. Just as the participants in the Ford ceremony leave the immigrant ship in order to enter the "melting pot," the wide range of televised characters leave their home communities in the pursuit of academic knowledge and are accordingly processed by the educational system into functioning members of the Anglo-American capitalist system. Levine's further description of the melting pot effect helps understand how this processing occurs:

the outsiders, the strangers, passed through without leaving any trace of themselves, of their cultures, of their identities. In whatever form it took, Anglo-conformity insisted that the immigrants and their progeny had to shed their cultural skins, lose their distinctiveness, and conform to the "standard" American mold which, of course, turned out to be an Anglo-American mold. (111)

We must remember, though, that acculturation in the actual world is not as simple as changing clothes beneath the stage, grabbing a flag, and climbing out of a theatrical pot.

An Absence of Opposition

As I say, it is admirable that the telecourses present successful role models for the many and varied students who participate in telecourses. These narratives offer positive examples that empower students in their quest for personal achievement. What interests me at the moment, however, is that the televised material is standardized in such a way
that the cultural experiences of these many and varied students are elided from the television narrative. For example, the televised images rarely present (or even recognize, much less celebrate) the cultural codes, rules, symbol, signs, or attributes of the students' culture of origin. Because the televised characters speak in clear standard English, all local, ethnic, and cultural linguistic practices are silenced. Similarly, although the young woman of Indian heritage has the traditional Hindu bindi forehead mark, there are few outer markings of culture: no dashikis, no corn-rows, no jewelry, no overalls, no baggy pants, no zoot suits. Instead, the characters wear middle- and upper-class clothing that is clean, neat, and predictable. Although the Preview booklet for A Writer's Exchange claims that the course represents the cultural diversity of its students, the characters don't discuss family, gender, economic, or political practices of their culture of origin. In short, the images in this television program are too often one-size-fits-all, standard, American middle-class with little trace of the distinctiveness that marks the many different cultures that are represented. Like the Ford Motor Company's theatrical melting pot of the early 1900s, the telecourse narratives work diligently to create a myth of standardized Americans who are happily inculcated into the educational and occupational systems of mainstream America, without acknowledging the complications or difficulties faced by such characters in real life. Such mythic images betray an excessive faith in existing power structures and consequently present a false picture of cultural assimilation in the United States—with all its complexities of good and ill.

I am troubled by the lack of oppositional voices in the telecourses—none of the characters address racism, sexism, or any form of the cultural intolerance so prevalent in
the United States. None is angry at their current social or economic condition, and none argue against unfair business practices, none argue against unfair funding for primary and secondary schools, none argue against unequal access to financial aid for minorities.25 Instead, these characters appear happy with their social situations, striving with the help of good-hearted academics and business-people to enter into the economic and professional mainstream. Take Lena, for example. Lena (and through her, the television viewer) is told by the tutor that her writing has become successful: “I think it’s great and I think if I were the employer I would want to interview you. Good work, Lena.” The televised image ends here, with Lena poised on the brink of academic and professional success. This is a fine and happy image, but it is not an especially true representative image, as Manning Marable and Gloria Anzaldúa help us understand.

**Oppositional Voices**

In contrast to the happy scenes of the minority experience presented by the telecourses, Manning Marable’s *Black Liberation in Conservative America* points out the disparities in minority scholarships for college-level funding (77-79), argues against the inequality of standardized testing as admissions criteria (82-84), and reveals the systemic “fiscal disparity” between those primary and secondary schools that are primarily minority and “the comfortable suburban schools that draw their students from the middle and upper classes” (90). The televised material never indicates such troubling differences, creating in their place a much happier myth of educational equality. In its insistence on equating academic success with occupational success, the telecourses send
the message that if you the viewer join our academic community you will undoubtedly (and soon!) have access to social and economic power. In this way, the telecourse hails its viewers into ideologies rooted in the ease of mainstream Anglo-American experience. Marable, however, hails young African-Americans in a way that the telecourses do not. Although both Marable and the rhetoric of the telecourse present the valuable lesson that African-Americans can and should expect to succeed in mainstream American society, Marable shifts the focus away from personal financial and professional fulfillment and toward cultural accountability:

So I would urge African-American young people, no matter what education you may attain, or vocation you pursue, or social, religious, and political affiliations you may have, to “speak truth to power.” If you go forward to law school or professional school, acquiring skills of advocacy and technical information, speak truth to power by applying those credentials to a fearless examination of inequality and social injustice. If you become a teacher, teach in a manner that will empower your students to recognize oppression and racism, to liberate themselves from bigotry and inequality. If you become a journalist, writer, or poet, use your creative talents to unearth the cultural roots for contemporary social problems. (74)

Marable argues here for action on behalf of a greater community. Moving beyond the telecourse’s emphasis on the individual, Marable urges readers to “examine,” to “empower,” to “liberate,” and to “unearth.” Marable argues for a cultural critique similar to what is advocated by Ira Shor, who, as I illustrated in Chapter 1, wants students to reconsider the cultural contexts of knowledge by questioning the central bank of stored knowledge as historical products and not universal wisdom. I don’t see this sort of argument in the telecourse material—my own included. Instead, the televised material depicts the melting pot effect by which the many ethnic groups become assimilated into the mainstream Anglo culture. The telecourses, for all their efforts at cultural inclusivity,
do not adequately examine what Marable calls "the cultural roots for contemporary social problems."

Gloria Anzaldúa hacks away at such cultural roots in her provocative book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in which she presents a starkly different version of an Hispanic woman making her way through Anglo culture than the version depicted by the vignette of Lena writing a cover letter. Anzaldúa’s book, a powerful account of life on the Texas-Mexican border, is written in a wide range of voices, including prose and poetry in a mixture of Castillian Spanish, academic English, “Chicano Texas Spanish,” and “Tex-Mex” (59). As I’ve said, such a variety of dialects and home voices is silenced in the telecourse, replaced by standard written English. One example of Anzaldúa’s hybrid voice is found at the end of Chapter One, “The Homeland, Aztlán.” In the following passage, Anzaldúa sketches the difficulties of women who migrate from Mexico into the United States:

*La Mojada, la mujer indocumentada,* is doubly threatened in this country. Not only does she have to contend with sexual violence, but like all women, she is prey to a sense of physical helplessness. As a refugee, she leaves the familiar and safe homeground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain.

This is her home
this thin edge of
barbwire. (13)

This short passage performs a series of moves that typify Anzaldúa’s political and rhetorical project of unsettling the Anglo reading audience. On a linguistic level, this passage represents the multiple voices that confront the reader, including standard prose English, poetry in English, and idiomatic Spanish. The juxtaposition of Spanish and English reveals the constant linguistic and identity tensions that mark the life of a person
caught between cultures. The Spanish phrase ("The wetback woman, the undocumented woman") at the beginning of the paragraph personalizes the representation by giving a home voice to the women who cross this deadly terrain of the American/Mexican border where, as Anzaldúa says elsewhere, "trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot" (3).26 At the same time, the phrase politicizes by reminding the reader of the arbitrary laws that create the juridical, disciplinary categories of documented and undocumented aliens. The switch to the English prose description of the United States as threatening and "dangerous" subverts the longstanding myth of this country as a safe, nurturing place for immigrants. The refugee woman is not welcomed by the open arms of Lady Liberty but is instead enwrapped in the spikes of barbwire fences that divide a common landscape into separate political and cultural spaces. The concluding poetry in English tightens the emotional pitch, locating the violence of the barbwire as the domestic space to which this undocumented woman has been consigned. Such ferocious imagery contrasts sharply with the benign image presented in the telecourse material of the Hispanic woman learning to integrate into mainstream Anglo culture.

Whereas Lena seems quite content to practice her cover letters in standard English, Anzaldúa gives voice to deeper rhetorical, political, and personal issues, among them the fear of losing a central part of her identity when forced to use standard English. Throughout Borderlands Anzaldúa describes the difficulty of living with so many languages, most of which are discounted by mainstream American society: "So, if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot
take pride in myself" (59). In opposition to the happy television image of Lena mastering standard English, Anzaldúa suggests that it is a form of violence to be forced into learning English:

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for “talking back” to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. If you want to be American, speak “American.” If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong. (53)

The telecourse presents a diametrically opposed message: in contrast to Anzaldúa’s painful shame at being forced to learn English, Lena takes pride in herself precisely because she masters standard English. The telecourses don’t participate in such repressive tactics as the beatings and corner exiles that Anzaldúa describes from her childhood; however, we must note nonetheless that the telecourses do not accommodate voices like Anzaldúa’s in their mythological multicultural representations. Although the telecourse advertises that it features “many kinds of writing,” Anzaldúan oppositional anger is not one of those kinds.

The question to ask is, Why not? One answer, quite simply, is that dissenting voices like Anzaldúa’s are threatening and disruptive. Such voices call into question exactly what the telecourse takes for granted: mainstream, Anglo belief systems.

In her article “Borderlands in the Classroom,” Carla Peterson helps us understand how the Anzaldúan voice disrupts an otherwise happy educational experience.27 Peterson describes her experiences as “an African-American feminist” teaching what she considers a “multicultural’ American literature course” (295). Peterson recounts how her students, primarily middle-class and Anglo, “reacted to Sula with polite bafflement, to The Woman
*Warrior* and *Storyteller* with fascination over the process of narration, and finally, to *Borderlands* with downright anger" (297):

The issues exploded, I believe, because certain tonal and linguistic elements in *Borderlands* foregrounded, as the other texts had not, the radical alterity of contemporary ethnic/racial experience in such a way as to *displace* the students from their secure positions as middle-class, white women and transform them into others. They felt displaced, first of all, because the ethnic writer’s anger was no longer directed at white settlers, cops, or ghosts, but rather at them, women readers who had been prepared to identify sympathetically with her plight. They became angry at Anzaldúa's anger, and their anger intensified as they confronted her use of Spanish—of eight different Spanish idioms in fact. They claimed that, as an American writer, she had no right to use any language other than that of the dominant culture, English. (298).

Peterson explains how her classroom community negotiated the thorny issues raised by *Borderlands* by depending upon intense interpersonal communication skills. With much “vent[ing] of emotions [. . . and] intellectual debate” (299), the students discussed the concept of borderlands, told stories of their own lives, looked at family photographs, and questioned Peterson’s construction of her own racial identity. Peterson concludes her story by reminding herself and the reader “of the centrality within a multicultural society of storytelling—and specifically of personal narrative—as an important constitutive act of literature, literary studies, and cultural work” (300).

It seems to me that Peterson describes an ideal pedagogical moment in which the text calls into question cultural and personal ideologies previously unconsidered by either the students or the teacher, thereby compelling the classroom community to wrestle with unresolvable issues. The telecourses that I have described, whether devoted to composition or literature, are not equipped to handle such a cultural studies approach to their subject, primarily because the students are at a distance from one another. Students
do not know one another, and this lack of interaction prevents the students and the
teachers from engaging in the heated, often threatening, conversations that such
controversial topics require. As I described in Chapter 4, there are various technologies
that may allow students at a distance to cohere into a rhetoric-based community capable
of such earnest debates; however, at the moment most telecourses cannot offer that level
of engagement.

One last point remains to be made regarding Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*. Although I
admire Anzaldúa’s powerful voice, citing her work in this context is vexing. Anzaldúa’s
text has been well-received in academic circles as a right and true depiction of the
situation of Hispanic women in large part because Anzaldúa has mastered the ability to
switch languages and therefore provide the reader with a unique interpretive experience.
She has put herself in a position to be listened to not only because she has mastered those
various discourses of the Texas-Mexican border but because she has also mastered the
standard written English of academia. It seems to me that in this respect, Anzaldúa
proves the accuracy of two of Robert Pattison’s arguments regarding literacy presented in
Chapter 1: first, that the personal expression of students should be honored in a
classroom—as long as that expression demonstrates a linguistic self-awareness—and,
second, that access to what Pattison calls “society at large” is provided by an awareness
of and ability to express oneself in standard English. In sum, the fact that Anzaldúa’s
multiple voices have become well-accepted argues for the importance of encouraging the
multiple discourses which most students bring into an English classroom, and at the same
time argues precisely for the value of a utilitarian pedagogy that teaches standard English.
My Own Complicity

Voices like Anzaldúa’s and Marable’s present an important corrective to the happy myths presented by the telecourse. Although I am critical of the simplistic image of a multicultural United States that is presented in these courses, I should note in defense of the nationally developed courses that these televised images are significantly more varied than those in the courses I developed. In my courses, the primary “mold,” as Levine would say, is indeed Anglo-American, and there is little trace of the “outsiders” to whom Levine alludes. After all, my image on television is what Elizabeth Ellsworth, writing from a post-structuralist feminist perspective, calls “the current mythical norm, namely, young, White, Christian, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, thin, rational man” (102). Recall that I was trying to create a television persona in part modeled on such national television figures as Tom Brokaw and David Letterman—two men who also reify what Ellsworth calls the “mythical norm.” I sought this television persona precisely because I wanted the power that is granted to such a persona: I wanted my viewers to enjoy both my zest for the material and to trust me as the voice of accuracy, reason and truth.

Clearly, not everyone in the viewing audience would find the light-hearted antics modeled after late night talk shows valuable; nor would everyone find it easy to trust a Brokaw-figure. Ellsworth, for one, argues against this “ideal rational person” who constitutes the normative subject on the grounds that an epistemology and a pedagogy predicated on the normative subject perpetuates “oppressive formations” (97), including
"current situations of racial and sexual harassment and elitism on campus" (95).²⁹

Echoing Anzaldúa’s arguments in Borderlands/La Frontera, Ellsworth concludes that, “Dialogue in its conventional sense is impossible in the culture at large, because at this historical moment, power relations between raced, classed, and gendered students and teachers are unjust” (108). Her proposed solutions to these unjust power relations stem from her faith in the powers of the postmodern “unsettling every definition of knowing arrived at” (113). Ellsworth seeks a pedagogy in which identity is not seen as a stable, unchanging position but rather “becomes a vehicle for multiplying and making more complex the subject positions possible, visible, and legitimate at any given historical moment” (113).

Although my courses fail to live up to Ellsworth’s ideal, A Writer’s Exchange makes a valuable effort at being this sort of vehicle, multiplying as it does the possible subject positions taken by telecourse students.³⁰ For example, both A Writer’s Exchange with John McCaa and Literary Visions with Fran Dorn should be commended for avoiding the normative subject that Ellsworth argues against and fronting their program with African-Americans. Indeed, especially when compared to the courses I developed, the nationally distributed telecourses should be commended for giving voice to and making visible the wide range of experiences that they do—even if those voices and experiences are not as aggressive as voices like Anzaldúa’s.

As a white, heterosexual male I have struggled with Ellsworth’s critique of the normative subject, and I have come to the conclusion that we cannot allow ourselves to be paralyzed by a fear that based on our own gender, ethnicity, or skin color, we will
facilitate racial, ethnic, or gendered oppressions. In terms of the telecourses, I had been
hired to develop and teach the courses, and I needed to make choices within the confines
of that situation. Although I must recognize the implication of teaching from this
normative subject position, I cannot let myself become paralyzed by guilt or angst over
whatever possible oppressions I may facilitate. On a simple level, we must recognize that
we all have our skills and privileges—what James Fenimore Cooper’s Natty Bumppo
calls “gifts”—and we should make use of them to the best of our abilities.

Certainly, the project of multicultural inclusivity is a difficult one, and a telecourse is
limited in what it can do. Historian Ronald Takaki, author of A Different Mirror: A
History of Multicultural America, argues for a multicultural curriculum: “By allowing us
to see events from viewpoints of different groups, a multicultural curriculum enables us
to reach toward a more comprehensive understanding” of the American experience (4).
As I’ve tried to make clear, the telecourses don’t quite get this far. We viewers do not
see “viewpoints of different groups” nor do we have a “more comprehensive
understanding” of our national experience. There are no personal narratives, as Gregory
Jay (following the lead of bell hooks) argues for, “to connect the authority of experience
with the historical and theoretical issues under discussion” (125). As Marable writes,

A curriculum of diversity must do more than relate the individual stories of these
racial ethnic minorities. It must integrate their cultural perspectives, divergent
socioeconomic experiences, and political histories into a broader, richer discussion of
the commonalities and differences among cultures and values, the tragedies and
triumphs in the making of American society. (99)

We do not see this sort of multicultural curriculum in the English telecourses. What we
do see is an appropriation of the melting pot myth in order to present an image of the
successful student as one who focuses her attention on utilitarian concerns and does not use language to disrupt or challenge the dominant culture.

One major reason that the telecourses do not emphasize cultural critique may be that a divisive television program would not sell. After all, the sphere of broadcast television wrestles with this problem all the time. As I indicated in Chapter 3, when I began to develop the telecourses for the Southern Arizona region, I was advised to avoid controversial topics, and so I began to moderate my own teaching methods. Instead of including a unit on AIDS, for instance, or a unit that interrogated the gender roles depicted in MTV videos, I focused my teaching on such functional concerns as usage and correctness. The telecourse needs to appeal to a much broader audience than a given classroom course, and I simplified my course material so that I would have less chance of offending potential student viewers. I am not happy with this moderation; to me, it represents a significant weakness in my courses.

V

Reproducing the Ideology of Individualism and Economic Self-Reliance

The above list of produced and reproduced ideologies indicates that one of the primary ideologies transmitted by the telecourses is that if students learn to write in the manner prescribed to them by the televised teachers and business professionals, then they will be able to advance themselves economically and socially. The multiple narratives that transmit this ideology may be distilled into one master narrative that reads something like this: American society is comprised of individuals (like you, the viewer) from various
ethnic and racial communities. Although you may be a member of communities that can be characterized by skin color and geographical origin, your primary allegiance is to yourself. The only way to improve yourself is by forsaking the safety and heritage of your community of origin and entering into the open ranges of higher education. Once you begin college, if you follow the rules and prescriptions offered by well-meaning academic and occupational professionals, you will then be able to pass into the economic and professional communities that you desire.

This narrative sounds similar to the American hero myth, does it not? Indeed, this master narrative reads almost as if it were frontier fiction. Just as in The Pioneers when James Fenimore Cooper’s Natty Bumppo must learn to navigate the wilds of New York state, the emphasis on the telecourse text is on the solitary individual, removed from previous communities and left to fend for herself until she can find a new community. Consider R. W. B. Lewis’ famed description of the mythic American Adam: “an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant, and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources” (5). Although Lewis’ description is often referenced regarding such literary characters as Cooper’s Bumppo, Herman Melville’s Ahab, and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Gatsby, I suggest that it also applies to the characters created by the telecourse narratives.

After all, even though the mythic image of the American Adam is an individual alone and removed from others, this is not the case. In The Pioneers Bumppo shares his
knowledge with Effingham and with Chingachgook. Melville’s Ahab scours the seas
with Starbuck, Flask, Stubb, and the rest of Pequod crew. Gatsby takes up with Daisy
and Nick. No, for all of the mythic emphasis on the solitary, the mythic American
character constantly navigates his way between and among communities. I emphasize
this because I see important parallels between the image of the American Adam and the
telecourse. First, Lewis says that the American Adam relies upon “his own unique and
inherent resources.” It seems to me that the telecourse student must rely more heavily on
her own resources than does a student who attends classroom courses. As I’ve
demonstrated, a telecourse student is removed significantly from the academic
community: although fellow students do indeed navigate the same intellectual terrain,
these classmates are not readily available to share stories, to study with, to collaborate
with. Instead, the solitary student must learn to handle the difficulties inherent in
individualism.

Let’s return to the story of Lena as a synecdoche for the telecourse narratives. I am
not suggesting that the telecourse intentionally positions Lena as a form of the American
Adam, yet there are similarities between the characters that illuminate the cultural work
of the telecourse. In the televised narrative, we know little of her origin. Unlike
Anzaldúa’s narrative of origin presented in Borderlands, we do not know where Lena
was born—it may have been in the United States, though it may as easily have been
Mexico or Latin America. The only thing we know is that she speaks English with a
Spanish accent and that she is struggling to survive in mainstream American life. The
primary resource available to Lena is the academic tutor, the middle-aged Anglo woman
with a Southern accent whose role is to guide Lena through the wilderness of academic and occupational discourse. Although the tutor plays an important role in the televised material, she remains nameless, thereby emphasizing the importance of Lena’s individual journey. The tutor offers advice on how Lena can position herself in writing, but Lena and Lena alone is responsible for the consequences of Lena’s actions. In this respect, the telecourse positions Lena as the self-reliant individual, who, by relying on her newly gained resources, can safely navigate multiple discourse communities and raise herself on the economic and social ladder.

Like the melting pot, this trope of the self-reliant individual has a long history in American rhetoric, and the genealogy of the concept can be traced to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century descriptions of hard-working yeomen farmers and commercial entrepreneurs. Space does not permit a detailed genealogical examination of the particularly American conception of “individualism” and “self-reliance,” but we can at least trace this prevalent Anglo-American mythology of self-reliance as a means to economic gain in the writings of John Smith, Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, and Benjamin Franklin. My goal in doing so is to situate the rhetoric of the telecourse within an American rhetorical tradition that glorifies the hard-working individual who rises above his circumstances and succeeds economically. (The gender-specific term “his” in this context is, unhappily, purposeful. As the term American Adam makes clear, the myth of the self-reliant individual is the myth of the self-reliant man, not the self-reliant woman.)³¹
"Only His Own Merit": John Smith and the American Dream

One of the earliest voices of this rhetoric was John Smith. Based on two voyages to North America, the first lasting from March 1607 until October 1609 and the second from March 1614 through August 1614, Smith's voluminous writings present Virginia and New England as places where a man can succeed if he relies for success upon his own skill, effort, and fortitude rather than birthright and native social standing. For example, John Smith’s A Description of New England presents an idyllic image of a landscape particularly suited to the benefits of working for yourself. After describing how “pleasing” and easy it is to catch “one, two, or three hundred Codds” per day, Smith describes the various other jobs that are available in this new landscape: “If a man worke but three days in seaven, he may get more [cod] then hee can spend, unlesse he will be excessive. Now that Carpenter, Mason, Gardiner, Taylor, Smith, Sailer, Forgers, or what other, may they not make this a pretty recreation though they fish but an houre in a day, to take more than they eate in a weeke?” (347). These jobs and others were available to all men in America, and each provided the emigrants the opportunity to “live exceedingly well” by virtue of “their [own] labour” (194). Smith scholar J. A. Leo Lemay, a self-proclaimed “apologist for Smith” (14), argues that Smith was the first to recognize and write that “America provided the opportunity for an individual’s standing in society to be determined by hard work and achievement rather than social position” (5). As Smith declared, “Who can desire more content, that hath small meanes; or but only his merit to advance his fortune, then to tread, and plant that ground hee hath purchased by the hazard of his life” (343). Although Smith’s descriptions are a
promotional tract, designed to convey a pleasing picture of New England so that others would follow from England and thereby increasing the chance that Smith’s financial backers would benefit, of interest to us is that close to 400 years ago Smith chose the rhetoric of occupational and economic self-reliance as his vehicle for persuasion.\textsuperscript{\text{33}}

Smith’s rhetoric prefigures the rhetoric of the American dream that is utilized so often in the telecourses, where any immigrant or birth citizen, of however lowly social status, can improve himself or herself with only the application of academic effort. In his description of America as a place where a man with “only his own merit” may advance himself, Smith anticipates not only the rhetoric of the telecourse but one of the defining voices in the creation of the American myth of individualism, Benjamin Franklin.\textsuperscript{\text{34}}

**The Telecourse and Benjamin Franklin’s “Self-Made Man”**

The rhetoric of individualism can be found throughout the writings of Benjamin Franklin, whether in the well-known proverbs of Poor Richard’s Almanack (such as, “God helps them that helps themselves” or “He that hath a Trade, hath an Estate”), in his autobiography, or in “The Way to Wealth.”\textsuperscript{\text{35}} I will concentrate primarily on the much-anthologized essay “The Way to Wealth” because its opening passages provide us with an ideologically motivated rhetorical strategy that is startling in its similarity to the strategies employed by the telecourses.

Otherwise known as “Father Abraham’s Speech,” “The Way to Wealth” was originally the preface to Poor Richard’s Almanack’s twenty-fifth anniversary issue, entitled Poor Richard Improved, 1758. In “The Way to Wealth,” Franklin has created a
thrice-layered narrative in which his fictional persona, the “*eminent author,*” Poor Richard, describes a scene in which the also fictional Father Abraham, “an old Man, with white Locks,” offers his advice on the current affairs of the day to a crowd of local folk gathered at an outdoors market. Abraham’s advice is riddled with the pithy proverbs from Franklin’s “*Poor Richard’s Almanack.*” Abraham here performs the role of the knowledgeable expert in much the same way the television experts perform their role as well-meaning guides for the television audience. Just as the television experts offer advice that is designed to mobilize the audience into successful students with successful jobs, Abraham offers advice designed to mobilize the reading audience into individual action that will advance their own economic and utilitarian interests.

“The Way to Wealth” opens with Franklin’s Richard relating a question asked of Abraham by one of the men among the crowd. The man calls out, “*Pray, Father Abraham, what shall you think of the Times? Won’t these heavy Taxes quite ruin the Country. How shall we ever be able to pay them? What would you advise us to?*”

Abraham’s response is that we should not worry about the taxes imposed on the citizenry by the government; instead we should worry about our own personal failings because they lead us to behaviors that cost even more money than the government requires us to pay:

Friends, says he, and Neighbors, the Taxes are indeed very heavy, and if those laid on by the Government were the only Ones we had to pay, we might more easily discharge them; but we have many others, and much more grievous to some of us. We are taxed twice as much by our *Idleness,* three times as much by our *Pride,* and four times as much by our *Folly,* and from these Taxes the Commissioners cannot ease or deliver us by allowing an abatement. However let us hearken to the good Advice, and something may be done for us; *God helps those that help themselves,* as *Poor Richard* says, in his Almanack of 1733. (1295-96, italics original)
Abraham’s initial response helps in understanding not only Franklin’s intentions but how the narratives embedded within the telecourses function as models of what Althusser calls “the rules of good behaviour.”

We should notice that in questioning the fairness of high taxes, the man in the crowd voices an oppositional position that challenges the social, economic, and political status quo. The prospects for revolutionary action that arise from this question are tantalizing; as we know from Revolutionary War history, a tax revolt is a good place to begin shaking free the shackles of an overbearing government. In this passage, however, Franklin deflects this moment of potential political defiance by turning the broader social problem into an individual problem: the only way to financial wealth is by attending to your own weaknesses and not concerning yourself with the larger systems of power. The reading audience is meant to follow the fictional audience at the marketplace, nod its collective head, and agree with the point. It is your own fault if you cannot make enough money to pay taxes. Simply work harder, avoid folly and idleness, and you’ll be fine.36 In this respect, Father Abraham can be seen as a version of the telecourse moderators—the wise and kind elders who know so much that we should follow their advice. Just as the message sent by Franklin is that something is wrong with you if you do not follow his preachings, the message sent by the telecourse is that something is wrong with you if you aren’t like the characters on TV. Similarly, just as the marketplace crowd would do well if they listened to Abraham’s recounting of Poor Richard, if we the viewing public want to better ourselves, we should do what our television experts tell us to do.
As this example suggests, Franklin’s text performs a series of rhetorical moves that are similar to those made by the telecourses. One move concerns the structure of the narrative, for just as Franklin layers his narrative so that the primary author’s voice is hidden from the surface view, the telecourses also utilize several layers of narrators. In contrast to my courses, which are transmitted exclusively in my own voice, the academic experts responsible for developing the curriculum for *A Writer’s Exchange, Voices and Visions*, and *Literary Visions* rely on a combination of narrators, hosts, outside scholars, students, and others to present the intellectual material that they think is appropriate.\(^{37}\)

In addition, both Franklin’s text and the telecourse texts enact an ideology that calls for individual responsibility in the face of difficult situations. When the telecourse experts say that we will get a good job if we can write a good cover letter, then we cannot explain our own failings or the failings of others in terms of such cultural troubles as racism or sexism or on such economic systems as the global capitalist economy, NAFTA, or the competition of international industry. If you are having a taxing time in your life, the message is, you must blame yourself and not the larger social, economic, or political systems. Just as we saw in our discussion of the melting pot trope, the message is that it is your fault if you cannot navigate the educational system or the occupational system as easily as the representational characters do.

Third, Franklin uses the rhetorical strategy of authorizing Abraham’s advice with quotations from Franklin’s own *Poor Richard’s Almanack*. The effect is to naturalize the advice so that the ideology supporting Franklin’s position (and Franklin’s desire to have readers purchase the *Almanack*) remains in the background. The telecourses utilize a
similar rhetorical strategy and naturalize their ideologies by not letting opposition voices into the narrative. As I demonstrated above, there are no oppositional voices revealing the many cultural, economic, gendered, and political hierarchies at play in American culture. There are also no oppositional pedagogical voices. As I have tried to demonstrate, the intellectual debates begun by the experts in both the literature and the composition telecourses are genteel, softened by the narrators and with little political passion behind them. In sum, both Franklin and the telecourses deploy the myth of the self-reliant individual who can rise to fame and fortune by using frugality and diligence.

I do not mean to imply that Franklin was not an advocate of individual action to redress social inequalities. Indeed, many of his writings are designed to change public opinion, often in favor of those ill-treated by government. Nonetheless, throughout his extensive public writings, Franklin encourages his readers to transform themselves into American success stories in much the same way that the telecourses encourage their viewers to transform themselves. Indeed, but for the difference of some 250 years, Franklin's "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America," appears directed to the telecourse audience, those working adults with families and little economic security who have returned to school. Consider these two passages: "If they are poor, they begin first as Servants or Journeymen; and if they are sober, industrious, and frugal, they soon become Masters, establish themselves in Business, marry, raise Families, and become respectable Citizens" (979). And immediately following: "Also Persons of moderate Fortune and Capitals, who, having a Number of Children to provide for, are desirous of bringing them up to Industry, and to secure Estates for their Posterity, have Opportunities
of doing it in America, which Europe does not afford” (979). Today’s typical telecourse student who works and raises a family might find inspiration in Franklin’s glowing descriptions. Critic Cushing Strout declares that Franklin’s writings create “the cultural myth of the self-made man’s rise to fame and fortune, emphasizing the Puritan economic virtues of industry and frugality” (10).\(^{39}\)

**Crèvecoeur: “The American, This New Man”**

Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur carries this rhetoric forward into the nineteenth century. Critics have long recognized the ways that Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* mythologizes the American experience. For example, Richard Slotkin suggests that Crèvecoeur presents a “useful compendium of the variety of American heroes, as seen by both Europe and America” (260), including the farmer, frontiersmen, fishermen, and whalemens. Likewise, Annette Kolodny helps us understand that Crèvecoeur recognizes the contradiction between his breathless and extravagant praise for the “new American” and the realities of life on the American landscape: “Crèvecoeur [sic] charted what was to become the central, mythic movement in American history and literature; when the first paradise is stained with blood, one brother asserting his power over another, the American response is to move ever westward” (66).\(^{40}\) For our purposes, I would like to focus on the ways Crèvecoeur mythologizes the self-reliant, independent man who labors with his own means for his own ends because the telecourses mythologize a similar character.
Crèvecoeur's enthusiastically describes "the American, this new man" thusly: "We are all animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained, because each person works for himself[. . .]. Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps the progress of his labour" (67, 70). According to Crèvecoeur the particular landscape of North America is suited to individual effort, as long as one is willing to work hard:

There is room for everybody in America; has he any particular talent or industry? He exerts it in order to procure a livelihood, and it succeeds. Is he a merchant? The avenues of trade are infinite[. . .]. Does he love country life? Pleasant farms present themselves; he may purchase what he wants and thereby become an American farmer. Is he a labourer, sober and industrious? He need not go many miles nor receive many informations before he will be hired, well fed at the table of his employer, and paid four or five more than he can get in Europe. Does he want uncultivated lands? Thousands of acres present themselves which he may purchase cheap. Whatever his talents or inclination, if they are moderate, he may satisfy them. I do not mean that every one who comes will grow rich in a little time; no, but he may procure an easy, decent, maintenance by his industry. (81)

Crèvecoeur's rhetoric is the rhetoric of the American dream. Not only is the landscape open and available to all, but with sober industry, anyone, whatever his "talents or inclination," can procure an easy and decent livelihood. As did John Smith before him, Crèvecoeur stresses moderation. Smith reminds the reader not to "be excessive," and Crèvecoeur points out that his descriptions are for those whose inclinations "are moderate." If we recall the various vignettes and interviews from A Writer's Exchange, we see that this rhetoric finds expression in the telecourse. Do you want to work as an architect? You can; simply complete your English class and you're on your way. Do you want to be a lawyer? Good, study your English lessons, then apply to a law firm as a secretary and begin the educational journey that will take you to your dream job.
However, in the telecourse there are few hints that you can change matters on a larger scale—you can work in a law firm, it is suggested but only in order to support your family, not in order to affect any social justice. Manning Marable’s passionate call to action—“If you go forward to law school or professional school, acquiring skills of advocacy and technical information, speak truth to power by applying those credentials to a fearless examination of inequality and social injustice”—has no place in the televised material. The continuing message is that an individual may be able to exercise some control over private academic and occupational concerns, but that an individual has little ability (never mind obligation) to control the larger social, political, and economic forces at play.

One of Crèvecoeur’s most important contributions to American rhetoric is his willingness to criticize standing social and political systems. In Letter IX, “Description of Charles Town; Thoughts on Slavery; on Physical Evil; a Melancholy Scene,” we find Crèvecoeur’s well-known account of the effects of slavery. When he criticizes “the gay capital” for avoiding the miserable truths of the slave system, he reveals how bankrupt the entire American myth of freedom really is:

Their ears by habit are become deaf, their hearts are hardened; they neither see, hear, nor feel for the woes of their poor slaves, from whose painful labours all their wealth proceeds. Here the horrors of slavery, the hardship of incessant toils, are unseen; and no one thinks with compassion of those showers of sweat and tears which from the bodies of Africans daily drop and moisten the ground they till. The cracks of the whip urging these miserable beings to excessive labour are far too distant from the gay capital to be heard. (168).

Crèvecoeur’s sharp dissent provides a valuable corrective to his otherwise happy and mythic images of the American landscape. I raise the point because Crèvecoeur’s
vigilant observations (like Marable’s and Anzaldúa’s) remind us how important it is to critique the dominant power structures. The neglect of such critique is one of the critical weaknesses in the telecourses. After all, higher education should be about presenting students with the tools to critically examine their culture, to challenge the prevailing cultural norms, to call into question what has been taken for granted. Sadly, however, these telecourses (including much of my own) rarely provide space for such critique. Instead, they reify the common, repeat the conventional, and transmit the usual.

The Paradoxical Discourse of Self-Reliance

"Self-Reliance," John Updike claims, "is perhaps [Emerson’s] best known [essay], and has entered most deeply into American thinking." I have been using the phrase "self-reliance" throughout this chapter as if the term held one static meaning. In truth, though, the concept of self-reliance has come to hold a variety of meanings in our contemporary culture—meanings that are often at cross purposes to each other. As George Kateb writes in the Preface to Emerson and Self-Reliance, "[Emerson is not] exhaustible by even the fullest account of self-reliance [. . .]. He can be enlisted in many causes or none at all" (xxix). Emerson’s texts and the epistemological and ideological formations underlying those texts can be read and interpreted to almost any purpose.

A brief examination of the rhetoric of self-reliance will allow us to understand the implications of the telecourses’ emphasis on self-reliance. Critics often point to the first paragraph of "Self-Reliance" as well-describing Emerson’s belief in the value of the individual to be free. "To believe your own thought," Emerson writes, "to believe that
what is true for you in your private heart, is true for all men,—that is genius. Speak your latent conviction and it shall be the universal sense” (1542). As David Jacobson says, “These sentences describe a hyperbolic conception of freedom, freedom conceived as the immediate expression of personal conviction unconstrained by regulations and rules” (31). This sense of individual freedom is quite different from the freedom espoused by Smith, Franklin, or Crèvecoeur. The rhetoric of these writers is predicated on the belief that in contrast to the post-feudal social hierarchies of Europe, the social conditions of the pre- and post-revolutionary United States offered the opportunity for individuals to strike their own occupational and professional course. Emerson, however, seems less concerned with the freedom to choose a way to make a living and more concerned with the freedom to choose a method of living.

We see this insistence on individualism throughout “Self-Reliance” as Emerson encourages his readers to travel their individual path so that they may find their own particular spiritual destination. Such encouragements are presented by Emerson in his typical homiletic fashion:

- “Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist” (1544).
- “Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string” (1543).
- “To believe your own thought, to believe what is true for you in your private heart, is true for all men,—that is genius” (1542).
- “I must be myself.” (1552).
- “What I must do, is all that concerns me, not what the people think” (1545).
- “I suppose no man can violate his nature” (1547).
These are the sorts of aphorisms that one recognizes as classically Emersonian, bidding the reader to avoid following the pack of common thought. Although the pragmatic, individualistic self-reliance of Benjamin Franklin always places the individual in relation to the larger community ("If they are poor, they begin first as Servants or Journeymen; and if they are sober, industrious, and frugal, they soon become Masters, establish themselves in Business, marry, raise Families, and become respectable Citizens"), the self-reliance of Emerson places the individual at a spatial, temporal, and psychic remove from that same community. We see this remove from others early in Nature, in the well-known description of Emerson's transcendent moment walking the Boston common, "bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,--all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God" (1504). Whereas Franklin's myth of the self-made man includes becoming one of the "respectable Citizens," Emerson's myth of the self-reliant man includes becoming one with oneself as a way of being "part or particle of God."

In contrast to such well-known transcendental passages, there are moments when Emerson emphasizes a more pragmatic side of his philosophy. Specifically, there is an oft-neglected passage in "Self-Reliance" in which Emerson, like Smith, Franklin, and Crèvecoeur before him, advocates an occupational work ethic as the means to self-fulfillment:

If our young men miscarry in their first enterprizes, they lose all heart. If the young merchant fails, men say he is ruined. If the finest genius studies at one of our colleges, and is not installed in an office within one year afterwards in the cities or suburbs of Boston or New York, it seems to his friends and himself that he is right in
being disheartened and in complaining the rest of his life. A sturdy lad from New Hampshire or Vermont, who in turn tries all the professions, who *teams* it, *farms* it, *peddles*, keeps a school, preaches, edits a newspaper, goes to Congress, buys a township, and so forth, in successive years, and always, like a cat, falls on his feet, is worth a hundred of these city dolls. He walks abreast with his days, and feels no shame in "not studying a profession," for he does not postpone his life, but lives already. He has not one chance, but a hundred chances. (1553)

I see this sturdy New England lad as another in the line of fictional embodiments of the self-reliant American individual. This is the American dream as presented in the writings of Smith, Franklin, and Crèvecoeur. Starting as a self-employed small businessman, a peddler and yeoman farmer, this hard-working fellow ends up as a major land-owner and a leader of his social and economic community—a Franklin-esque "respectable Citizen."

We see a similar character in the telecourse vignettes: we see students who raise a family and work in a law office while planning law school; we see students who draft architectural plans while attending classes, who move between school and work in an effort to become respectable citizens and workers.

In the same way that Franklin's Father Abraham tells his audience to focus not on the government's high taxes but on their own character weaknesses, passages like this suggest that Emersonian self-reliance means that an individual must find his own way through the troubles of life without relying on charity from either a local or national community. When joined with another passage from "Self-Reliance"—Emerson's famed outburst against giving "alms to sots; and the thousandfold Relief Societies"—the rhetoric of self-reliance feeds the fuel of economic Darwinism in which the capable have no obligation to the less capable. "Do not tell me," Emerson writes, "as a good man did today, of my obligations to put all poor men in good situations. Are they *my* poor? I tell
thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent, I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong (1545). John Updike criticizes Emerson’s gruded dollar as a “doctrine of righteous selfishness” in which the American myth of “the entrepreneur; the great native creed of Rugged Individualism begins to be heard” (123). Updike’s decidedly pessimistic reading reflects how that rhetoric of self-reliance and individualism can be read to justify a narrow, parochial view of the world in which one must look out for oneself with nary a thought for any others. In the telecourses, televised representations of students such as Lena reproduce the belief that hard work and enthusiasm alone will help you achieve success.

My fear is that the telecourses, my own included, reify this belief system. When we teach students that their personal troubles are their own fault, when we refuse to acknowledge the systemic discrepancies that account for racial, economic, and gendered inequalities, then we are not only doing a disservice to our students but a disservice to our national community. I argue that our telecourses are not only failing to teach students to critique and challenge the systems in which they are enmeshed, but they are teaching them to accept these systems as natural and acceptable.

VI

Conclusion: Rejecting the Ideology of Acquiescence

I am not questioning the good will and the positive effect of the courses that seek to empower their students. On the contrary, I believe that the telecourses do a valuable job of conveying important information to an under-served population. As I said in Chapters
1 and 2, I believe it is important that composition and literature students be taught standard written English as a tool for academic, social, and economic success, and as I have said often in this dissertation, the national courses provide role models of successful minorities and women. These courses are not malevolent representations of the normative subject at which Elizabeth Ellsworth is so angry. I am arguing, though, that rather than teach an ideology of acquiescence to, it is also our responsibility to teach students to critically reflect on the multiple economic, social, and cultural conditions at work in constructing their identity. Students must be taught the tools for critical literacy, they must be taught the ability to find the deeper meanings and root causes that lie behind the surface meaning of the dominant myths and official pronouncements. We need to teach students not simply how to reproduce and transmit information but how to interpret the various rhetorical discourses that persuade or motivate, such as imaginative literature, television, film, radio, politics, academic writings, and so forth. In other words, I want students to come away from a composition or literature telecourse with the reading and writing skills to critique the very same telecourse. They should be able to read the television text and recognize that the material is transmitting the myth of occupational self-reliance. They should be able to understand and articulate the implications of having the code of the melting pot imposed upon them. Ultimately, then, I stand with Gregory Jay's call for a pedagogy that ruffles feathers:

The towers of academe need to be regularly shaken by genuine controversy, not strangled by the vines of utilitarianism and ideology. What more proper place to contest ideas of morality, justice, selfhood, community, truth, and the public good than the college campus? If issues of race and gender and class divide society, then should not these be given full airing and exploration in the curriculum? The
production of a false consensus, whether through the repression of discourse or the imposition of an ideology, is bad education and bad politics. (49)

NOTES


3 In presenting his "theory of ideologies" (159, italics original), Althusser follows Karl Marx in defining ideology as "the system of ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group" (158). Drawing on the works of Marx, Jacques Lacan, and Sigmund Freud, Althusser presents the thesis that "ideology represents the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (164). For Althusser, this "imaginary relationship" is the key to understanding the ways ideology acts upon a subject and is enacted by a society. "What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relations of those individuals to the real relations in which they live" (165).


6 Community colleges are primarily meant to replicate the first two years of a university education. In this respect, by creating standards and denying entrance to those who cannot maintain these standards, the community colleges are not much different from the four-year institutions which also supervise access to jobs and further schooling, whether graduate or professional schools.

7 See Althusser, page 149.

8 See AnnMarie Wolpe's article "Schooling as an ISA: Race and Gender in South Africa and Educational Reform" for an astute analysis of Althusser's position on school as the key ISA. Wolpe applies Althusser to a post-apartheid South Africa, concluding that although Althusser's analysis is valuable, "Where universal education does not exist in an industrialized society, the reproduction of relations of production cannot solely be attributed to either the school/family or the church/family couples" (322). In *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition*. Eds. Antonio Callari and David F. Ruccio. (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan UP, 1996).

9 The historical basis of this connection between viewer and viewed has been discussed in some detail by Karal Ann Marling. Marling, who studied the visual culture of the 1950s—primarily the way the television set and televised images shaped American culture—concludes that "the fictive content of the programming dictated the . . . activity of Americans in physical space" (286). Whether by the force of "magic" as Williams suggests, or by the force of repetition, or by the force of peer pressure, the web of the television apparatus ensnares the viewer. Not only are viewers manipulated into purchasing the various products for sale, but they identify themselves with the various images and characters presented on the screen. As Marling writes, "So the person sitting in the living room watching the [television] set was a kind of minor-league star as well as spectator. Look at me! Look at my house and my new color TV! Life in the 1950s imitated art—as seen on TV!" (6).
It has become a critical commonplace that television carries societal values and beliefs. In discussing a particular car commercial that made its debut in 1984, for instance, Todd Gitlin argues that the "image of the car shares an emotional ideological territory with current trends in prime-time television, fiction, painting, architecture, fashion, film, and other cultural forms—and indeed with the entrepreneurial mystique and the grand political and military illusions of the Reagan years" ("Car Commercials" 140). Gitlin pushes further and says that television advertising presents "something of the prevailing American ethos, its promises and evasions and secret fears" (140). Ever since the introduction of television as a technology in the 1920s, people have been warning against its persuasive charms. Take, for instance, the first book-length discussion of television, *Television: Its Methods and Uses*, written by Edgar Felix in 1931. A central claim of Felix is that the future of television would be driven by commercial advertising: "The prospects that television will be supported by means other than advertising appear exceedingly remote," he says (qtd. in Adler 29). Felix forecasted that television will be used to sell products: "The cigar advertiser who appeals to the young man can actually demonstrate that cigar smoking will make any young man look like a major executive" (qtd. in Adler 30). Even in its nascent stages, then, television was seen as a medium that engenders mimesis: the producer creates an image in the expectation that the consumer will blindly imitate that image. Television theorist Ralph Smith writes, "in no other artistic, informational or educational endeavor have the marts of trade played as obvious a role in this country as they have in broadcasting" (399). Almost seventy years after Felix's prognosis, Leslie Savan reports that Americans who watch television "see approximately 100 TV commercials a day" and that studies indicate that combined with print ads, billboards, and ubiquitous corporate logos, "some 16,000 ads flicker across an individual's consciousness daily" (1). Some like Savan say we are living a bribed life with bribed souls, forced to consume images of products which in turn are simply products of images. In this respect, television coerces us by sheer repetition to accept a world view designed to make us feel inadequate if we do not fulfill the televised ideal. As Savan says, "whether you actually buy a particular product is less important than [whether] you buy the world that makes the product" (8).

As cultural critic Cecilia Tichi says, such programs "purport[ ] to bring the viewer the facts and truths that constitute reality" (169). Tichi provides us with an understanding of how the television set functions as a crucial part of the national culture. The television, she says, functions "as a private monopoly protected by the capitalists' ally, the federal government, and limiting the vast population to the passive role of recipient while the control of TV transmission remained in corporate hands...reproduces capitalist exploitation" (157). According to this vision, the television presses "an ideological program" (43) by functioning "as an agent of continuity in an America whose values remain intact over centuries" (53). The television "embodies values...[and] assigned meanings on patriotism, abundance, family cohesiveness, domesticity..." (53).

I don't think the cultural landscape is as neat as this binary suggests. Consumers and producers are fluid positions, in which one may be a consumer at one moment and in one situation and a producer at another. One thinks of authors who produce their own literature under the influence of previous authors. One thinks, as well, of network television programming that mimics the programming on another network.

Personal interview, quoted with permission.

H.P.'s use of the telecourse accords with Michel de Certeau's assertion that in a "universe of technocratic transparency" (18) where "the machinery he must serve reigns supreme" (25), the individual finds ways "to foil here and now the social hierarchization" (25).

I am indebted to Ken McAllister of the University of Arizona for suggesting that the telecourse "hails" the viewer.

Moreover, these accounts reflect my earlier contention (following the lead of de Certeau) that the consumer can also be a producer. On the one hand, these non-enrolled observers begin the television experience as relatively passive consumers: "I kind of came across it while channel surfing," says one. "I was curious," says another. On the other hand, these viewers "read" the material as they choose: for hints on persuasive writing to write better business letters; for hints on punctuation so as not to appear ignorant when trying to get a letter to the editor published; for entertainment. Indeed, one viewer even says she watches because she feels as if the television teacher is talking directly to her: "What made me stop at the channel was your personality. The math channel was boring." Such an observer connects with the
telecourse the way a viewer does who observes a conversation between a talk-show host and her guest, or the way a viewer watches the evening news. As Andrea Press comments in her study of the ways women utilize television viewing, “Mass media in general and television in particular function complexly and paradoxically in our society, simultaneously fostering conformity and encouraging resistance to it among dominated groups” (177). Such resistance may take the form of changing the channel: math is boring, so I went surfing. English is interesting, so I stayed and consumed the material. The non-enrolled poachers are very much travelers, appropriating the course material to their own needs while on their way to another channel. The remote button is always near at hand and they can always resume their original channel surfing.

17 The term “American” is a vexed one in this context. Much valuable work has been done to redirect the term “American” from a strict emphasis on the Anglo-European presence. For example, José David Saldivar locates “America” not as the United States, but as a “pan-American” “hemisphere” that includes Latin and South America (5). Saldivar appropriates the term “Our America” (Nuestra América) from José Marti to refer to the entire pan-American hemisphere in an effort to move away from “American history conceived exclusively as the story of Anglo-Saxon men from the first settlements in the Chesapeake Bay area in 1607 to the present” (4). As the following chapter makes clear, I am concerned precisely with how conventional “American myths” rooted in the European experience are deployed and transmitted by the telecourse. Consequently, I will use the term American throughout to refer to the materials, characteristics, and experiences concerning the United States and the earlier European settlements along the eastern coast and not the Pan-American hemisphere. See José David Saldivar, The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History. (Durham: Duke UP, 1991).
19 In doing so, I follow the lead of James Berlin who argues that “each of us is formed by the various discourses and sign systems that surround us” (62). Like other poststructuralist scholars, Berlin rejects the notion of a “unified, coherent, autonomous, self-present subject of the Enlightenment [that] has been the centerpiece of liberal humanism” (62). Berlin argues a by-now conventional post-modern belief that the individual subject is “conflicted, incoherent, amorphous, protean, and irrational in our very constitution” (63).
20 See, in particular, pages 91-100.
21 I’ve taken the term “panethnic” from Gregory Jay’s helpful discussion of the problems of representation in today’s multicultural world. Panethnicities include the various categories generally used to designate racial, social, and linguistic features of a cultural group, such as Hispanic, Native American, and African American (Jay 25).
23 According to Annette Kolodny (The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters (Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1975), 53-54) these letters are Crèvecoeur’s attempt “to give his pastoral experiences conscious and coherent form.” Kolodny’s reading of Crèvecoeur is concerned with how Crèvecoeur through farmer James “explores the central metaphor of the American pastoral experience, the metaphor of the land as woman” (54).
24 de Crèvecoeur, Hector St. John. Letters from an American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America. Ed. Albert E. Stone. New York: Penguin Books, 1986. I have chosen to quote from the Penguin Edition rather than more definitive editions for the following reason: My main point is that the telecourses transmit ideologies that are rooted in the rhetoric of early American literature; such rhetoric is widely available today, including in the sorts of texts which college and university students are often exposed to. Culture is transmitted less via the more obscure essays and letters of such writers as Crèvecoeur, Franklin, and Emerson, and more by the most visible texts presented by inexpensive editions and anthologies.
25 See Manning Marable’s Black Liberation in Conservative America (Boston: South End Press, 1997). See also Chapter 8 in Annette Kolodny’s Failing the Future. Throughout this chapter, Kolodny presents a
picture of the "disturbing inequity" resulting from current funding policies for preschool, primary, and secondary school (218-19).


27 Although my salary as a graduate student and community college adjunct do not quite bring me into the middle class and I would not consider myself deeply Christian, Ellsworth's depiction of the normative subject paints a close picture of me.

28 For example, in chronicling her experience as teacher of an upper-division special topics course, Ellsworth explains that she had "expected that we would be able to ensure all members a safe place to speak, equal opportunity to speak, and equal power in influencing decision making" (107). She reports, however, that this was not the case: "Our classroom was not, in fact, a safe space for students to speak out or talk back about their experiences of oppression both inside and outside the classroom. In our class, these included experiences of being gay, lesbian, fat, women of color working for men of color, white women working with men of color, and men of color working with white women and men" (107).

30 As a white, heterosexual male, I have struggled with Ellsworth's critique of the normative subject, and I have come to the conclusion that we cannot allow ourselves to be paralyzed by a fear that based on our own gender, ethnicity, or skin color, we will facilitate racial, ethnic, or gendered oppressions. In terms of the telecourses, I had been hired to develop and teach the course, and I needed to make choices within the confines of that situation. Although I must recognize the implication of teaching from this normative subject position, I cannot let myself become paralyzed by guilt or angst over whatever possible oppressions I may facilitate. On a simple level, we all have our own abilities and privileges, and we should make use of them as best as possible.

31 This myth has been well-critiqued by numerous scholars, among them Linda K. Kerber, whose essay "Can a Woman be an Individual? The Discourse of Self-Reliance" argues that "what we have identified as the classic statements of American individualism are best understood as guides to masculine identity; if we seek to understand a female quest for self-actualization, we must turn to an alternate, competitive literature that is no less 'American'" (202). See Kerber, Toward an Intellectual History of Women. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1997. Annette Kolodny offers an examination of what Kern calls the "female quest for self-actualization" in The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984).


33 Of course, Smith does not only use the rhetoric of occupational self-reliance as a means of persuading his readers. In the last paragraph of A Description of New England, Smith equates the reader with citizens of the former glory states of "the Hebrews, the Lacadaemonians, the Goths, the Grecians, the Romanes" as a way of encouraging settlers to colonize New England (Vol. I, 361). Likewise, he concludes A True Relation of such occurrences and accidents of note, as hath hapned in Virginia [..] (1608) with a call to colonize the region for commercial purposes: "[..] to see our Nation to enjoy a Country, noy onely exceeding pleasant for habitation, but also very profitable for commerce in generall" (Vol. I, 97).

34 I don't wish to make too much hay of this, but there are some interesting similarities between the rhetoric that describes early efforts at settling the eastern seashore and the rhetoric that describes the burgeoning fields of distance education. Smith scholar J.A. Leo Lemay describes early attempts at immigration in a similar manner: "By Smith's time, America had already developed two major (and opposing) images: one was a land of gold, and the other was a fool's paradise, fit only for beggars and convicts" (24-5). I suggest that distance education, like early (and even late) America is actually filled with both dirt and golden nuggets. In this respect, perhaps a further analysis of teaching with technology would find useful the theoretical framework of borderland studies.

36 We should also notice that left unquestioned is the belief that financial wealth itself is of utmost importance. As the title of “The Way to Wealth” makes clear, Franklin’s literary project here is devoted to describing how to best achieve personal wealth. Franklin’s autobiography is similarly motivated, as Franklin makes clear in the opening lines: “Having emerg’d from the Poverty and Obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a State of Affluence and some Degree of Reputation in the World, and having gone so far thro’ life with a considerable Share of Felicity, the conducting Means I made use of, which, with the Blessing of God, so well succeeded, my Posterity may like to know, as they find some of them suitable to their own Situations, and therefore fit to be imitated” (1307). Franklin’s confessed goal in his autobiography and, to a lesser extent, in “The Way to Wealth,” is to create examples of behavior that can be imitated by everyone, from the lowliest to the highest born. Unlike with Emerson or Thoreau, whose writings often seek to motivate the reader to achieve a higher spiritual plane, Franklin’s writings seek to motivate the reader to achieve a higher practical, economic plane.

37 Of course, at the same time that Franklin is so adamant in his expressions of self-reliance, he also has the wonderful ability to not take himself seriously. Indeed, at the end of the essay, Franklin winks at himself in the guise of Poor Richard: “Thus the Old Gentleman ended his Harangue. The People heard it, and approved the Doctrine, and immediately practiced the contrary; just as if it had been a sermon; for the Vendor opened, and they began to buy extravagantly, notwithstanding all his Cautions, and their own Fear of Taxes” (720). While Poor Richard acknowledges that his goal is to sway his readers into action, his gentle self-mockery concedes in turn that his project may fail. However, he remains undaunted in his hope that others will follow his example, concluding his remarks with a promise to himself to be thrifty and a plea to the reader: “Reader, if thou wilt do the same, thy Profit will be as great as mine” (720). Franklin’s corrective use of self-mockery serves to reduce the didactic nature of Franklin’s text.

38 See, for example, “Plan for Improving the Condition of the Free Blacks,” the satirical “Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim on the Slave Trade,” and “Remarks Concerning the Savages of North-America.”


EPILOGUE

IMPLICATIONS: THE ABUSE OF ACADEMIC LABOR

I

My Fears

In this final section, I’d like to unravel some of the implications of telecourses for academic labor. I began this dissertation with a description of my journey through higher education, starting with my days as a passable college student at Wesleyan University and ending with my employment at Pima Community College during the early years of my Ph.D. studies. When I started this dissertation, I had just been “not re-hired” as an adjunct to teach the telecourses that I had developed and taught for PCC for the previous three years. As my tone in the Introduction makes clear, I was angry that the institution for which I had worked so diligently would exploit my labor and put its students at risk in an effort to raise full-time student equivalent rates. In the intervening period, I’ve heard numerous stories of other teachers who have been similarly displaced and replaced.

Although I am critical of the way distance education is used as a profit-center, I don’t blame the technology for these troubles as much as I blame the increasing turn to part-time employment in higher education. I think that higher education faces significant troubles if institutions continue the pattern of combining a reliance upon part-time, temporary, academic workers with educational technologies in order to replace full-time, well-trained, academic professionals.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, instruction is far and away the area of highest expenditure for both public and private institutions.\(^1\) In an effort to cut faculty
costs, higher education has followed the corporate trend begun during the Reagan era of downsizing full-time employees and contracting out for the same labor—at considerably less expense for the institution in regards to health insurance, retirement contributions, and the like. It has been well chronicled that as the number of full-time, tenure-track jobs in English and foreign languages has shrunk, the number of part-time, non-tenured positions has increased. The recent Final Report by the Modern Language Association (MLA) Committee on Professional Employment says that in 1993 “40% of all faculty in higher education were part-time employees” (5). By 1995 the percentage had bumped up, and 41% of all faculty in higher education are employed in part-time positions. Given that between 1975 and 1995, the number of part-timers had increased from 30% to 41%, we can safely say that there is a growing trend toward part-time faculty employment.²

The MLA Report recognizes the problems of this trend: “The disturbingly heavy reliance on part-time faculty that characterizes American higher education today contributes both directly and indirectly to the failures of our academic system” (Gilbert 5).³ I have not been able to find any record of the number of telecourse teachers in the United States. Nor can I find a record of the percentage of telecourse teachers who are part-timers or tenure track.⁴ However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of telecourse instructors are overworked, part-time employees. Their experience with telecourses may be indicated by the following email responses I received to an electronic questionnaire I mailed to a number of telecourse teachers. One teacher wrote, “Sorry, I am teaching in several places, have several stacks of papers to grade, and don’t have time right now.”⁵ A second response well represents the sort of over-burdened faculty
member called freeway flyer, or gypsy teacher: “Thank you for your communication. I have received your message. I am grading as quickly as I can so please be patient.” The fact that this email response was automatically generated by the teacher’s email program suggests that the teacher felt especially overwhelmed by her working conditions.6

Annette Kolodny addresses some of the problems that stem from a part-time academic labor force at colleges and universities, particularly public institutions. In *Failing the Future*, an assessment of the present state of higher education in the United States, Kolodny acknowledges that different sectors in education have different abilities to hire and remunerate faculty. She points out that the “[e]lite private colleges and universities” utilize private fundraising campaigns to cover costs, while the public institutions are forced by “political pressures” to rely more and more on “relatively low-wage adjuncts, part-timers, and term contract instructors or lecturers” (76). She argues that the increasing reliance on such a labor force has disturbing consequences for both individuals and institutions:

Exploited and individually isolated, this growing population of teachers cannot conceivably develop meaningful educational relationships with their students, find the time to pursue any research agenda, let alone harbor a warm departmental attachment or institutional loyalty. Whatever their initial enthusiasm for teaching, they soon burn out [. . .]. A university administration may claim that it has cut costs and gained greater flexibility in meeting student enrollment patterns, but what the school has really achieved is a pliable faculty. Those who can be hired and fired at will generally teach what they are assigned, shy away from experiment and innovation, and avoid risk-taking in their teaching and scholarship [. . .]. (77)

Although Kolodny does not reference distance education here, her points well describe the possible consequences of an institutional reliance on emerging technologies. As my personal experiences and the results of my research make clear, distance education in
general—and telecourses in particular—have the potential to change not only what we consider appropriate course content, but what we consider appropriate academic labor. I have written at length in this dissertation about the conservative nature of the telecourse’s educational experience, and I have demonstrated that the telecourses rarely utilize the sorts of innovative scholarship that pushes the boundaries of our communal knowledge. As much as I think telecourses and other teaching technologies can offer a worthwhile academic experience to students who otherwise would have little opportunity to engage in higher education, I am certain that our discipline and our profession must guard against misusing and abusing educational technologies.

In order to unravel the implications regarding academic labor, we should revisit the notion of academic labor. In doing so, I will utilize two job descriptions of faculty in higher education. The first description is taken from the *Voices and Visions* Faculty Guide, produced by Annenberg/CPB Projects for faculty members who use the *Voices and Visions* American poetry telecourse. Developed by one of the national leaders in distance education, the Faculty Guide presents a clear job description of the work required of telecourse teachers. I will contrast this description with that provided by historian James Axtell in his recent book, *The Pleasures of Academe*, a well-received recent account of the academic profession.7
II

Academic Laboring

According to the rhetoric of the PBS Adult Learning Services, the primary job of a classroom teacher is to dispense information. The *Voices and Visions* Faculty Guide explains that the role of a telecourse teacher is distinct from the role of a classroom teacher:

The duties of a telecourse faculty member are different, but no less demanding or critical, than those of an instructor offering the same course in an on-campus setting. Although a faculty member in a traditionally-taught class may focus primarily on the preparation and delivery of lectures to groups of students meeting on campus, telecourse faculty are more likely to focus on communicating with students in a more personal manner that is often tutorial in nature. 

I will return to the description of the telecourse teacher's job, but I wish to focus for a moment on this description of the work of a traditional teacher at the undergraduate level.

According to the PBS description, teachers of traditionally-taught classes have two main tasks: preparing the information to be delivered in a lecture and actually delivering the lecture. However, the PBS Guide presents a simplistic and inaccurate description of academic labor. Indeed, the work of preparing the information that is to be delivered in a lecture is what I have referred to throughout this dissertation as "constructing knowledge," a difficult task that historian James Axtell describes well. Axtell points out the rigorous work necessary to construct the knowledge that is then passed on in the classroom:

The variety of teaching venues and the different styles of teaching required by them demand considerable versatility and extensive preparation from the professor [. . . and] every course must be continuously updated, reconfigured, and rejuvenated to
take into account new theories and approaches, new audiences, more relevant or engaging data, better audiovisual aids, new pedagogical twists and assignments, and more probing exam questions" (11).

This listing of duties is only partial, and does not address the important task of academic research. Aside from the practical fact that the results of academic research at colleges and universities "account for about one-third of the increases in the gross national product, and have since the mid-1960s" (53), Axtell points out that the effort of academic research benefits the classroom directly:

If professors are to be convincing models of the life of learning, they must first exhibit genuine enthusiasm, however low-key, for their subjects and disciplines [. . .]. Teachers who have no living traffic with their knowledge cannot quicken or inspire their students, which is nearly as important as the transmission of knowledge itself. (61, italics original)\textsuperscript{9}

The PBS Guide for telecourse faculty does not address the importance of either creating knowledge or inspiring students. Indeed, the PBS Faculty Guide directs telecourse faculty into a significantly passive position in which faculty are not asked to update and reconfigure information, but are asked only to shepherd the student through the pre-prepared material in a manner that "is often tutorial in nature."

In contrast to the list provided by Axtell, the PBS Faculty Guide reports the following list of tasks as the "primary responsibilities of telecourse faculty":

- review the course materials, including the video programs
- select and/or develop student assignments
- adapt the course material to local needs if necessary
- prepare new materials as necessary
- develop the course syllabi
- monitor the student progress
- communicate with students through class meetings, mail, phone, and email
- respond to student inquiries
- prepare and conduct class meetings
- prepare and evaluate assignments
· prepare and evaluate examinations.\textsuperscript{10}

On the one hand, some of these tasks seem to offer the teacher a degree of autonomy that accords with Axtell's descriptions of teaching. For instance, the teacher is allowed to develop student assignments and adapt the materials "to local needs as necessary." On the other hand, this job description suggests that the telecourse faculty member must follow a fixed framework. Just as in the composition telecourse, \textit{A Writer's Exchange}, where "the study guide acts as the student's daily instructor" (Brown 14), the telecourse teacher of \textit{Voices and Visions} must follow the course material as detailed in the \textit{Study Guide}, the \textit{Faculty/Administrator's Manual}, and the televised material itself. Many of the verbs on the above list (\textit{review, select, adapt, monitor, respond}) suggest that the teacher's task is to conform passively to the prescribed format, not take the lead in constructing the intellectual material. There is little room for innovation, little room for drawing \textit{ad hoc} connections between the course content and current events that is so crucial to all classroom experiences, whether lecture, seminar, or lab. In short, the telecourse is arranged so that the teacher is but a cog in a pre-arranged process. By encouraging telecourse faculty to be more passive than faculty who teach traditional classroom courses, this job description sets a dangerous precedent for determining the nature of faculty work.

I make the general observation that faculty members in traditional undergraduate and graduate higher education have three main jobs: (1) as researchers, to generate new disciplinary knowledge; (2) as teachers, to design individual course syllabi, to share with students in the creation of knowledge, to participate in the students' intellectual lives; (3)
and as members of an academic community, to participate in the governance of their institutions. My general observations are supported by Axtell, who describes academic labor in some detail. In contrast to the Voices and Visions Faculty Handbook which suggests that traditional teaching requires “the preparation and delivery of lectures,” Axtell details the various tasks that comprise the job categories of teaching, research, administration, and “other.” Axtell reports the following figures as evidence that a faculty member’s job at most institutions of higher education consists of significantly more work than simply delivering lectures:

In all colleges and universities, 56 percent of the average professor’s workweek is devoted to teaching and its preparation, 16 percent to research, 13 percent to administration and committee work, and 15 percent to a category called “other.” These figures, of course, smooth out several significant differences between types of institutions. The faculties of community colleges, for example, spend 71% of their week in teaching and only 3% on research, whereas professors at public research universities devote 43% to teaching and 29% to research. (8)\(^{11}\)

My own experience at Pima Community College accords with Axtell’s observations regarding the sector variation in job tasks. As an adjunct at PCC, I had little opportunity to participate in institutional governance, and neither the professional obligation, the time, nor the funding to engage in significant academic research that might contribute to the discipline and advance the intellectual value of my own courses. In fact, once I had prepared the telecourses, as the instructor of record for each semester’s courses, I had no opportunity to incorporate into my classes the continuing theoretical and pedagogical advances in my field.

Recall my descriptions of teaching the telecourses in Chapter 2. Once I had developed the televised material, my job consisted of sending out the already-prepared
syllabi, sending out follow-up course announcements, calling wayward students, holding poorly attended review sessions, and grading papers and exams for students I rarely, if ever, met. Once the course was developed, I as the teacher had no opportunity to change the syllabus, to alter the course readings, to create new essay topics, to change the exam questions. I had no opportunity to modify the course to fit the needs of the given group of students—indeed, I had such little contact with the students that I had no idea what their individual needs were. I certainly could not teach the sort of course envisioned by James Berlin who, you will recall from Chapter 4, argued that the English studies classroom should be “preeminently participatory and democratic” (101).12 “The success of the kind of classroom I am recommending,” Berlin says, “depends on teachers knowing their students. The teacher must understand the unique economic, social, and cultural conditions of his or her students to arrive at the appropriate forms and contents that dialogue can assume” (104). Although many of us educators thrive on precisely this sort of educational experience, my experience teaching telecourses was nothing like this.

My own experiences accord with the only published description of teaching literature via telecourse that I have found, Donna Lund’s first-hand account of teaching the Voices and Visions telecourse. Her account is instructive because it echoes the PBS claim that the telecourse teacher’s function is “tutorial in nature.” Lund has taught the course both as a college telecourse and “in a non-academic setting in a series of poetry programs for people in the [Oakland, CA] community at the Carnegie Library” (4). When working with the small groups at the library, she says her function “was to circulate the room and facilitate discussion by answering questions or redirecting where necessary” (6). When
working with college students at a distance, Lund simply “made [her]self available for individual conferences and encouraged students to attend the general meetings” (14). Teaching the telecourse in these settings, Lund did not participate in any of the reconfiguring and rethinking of the information that Axtell describes and that Berlin champions. In both cases, her professional role was neither to construct knowledge nor to moderate the communal pursuit of knowledge, but simply to encourage students by making herself “available” for their individual questions. Lund’s description accords both with my tasks as an adjunct telecourse teacher and with the job description as presented by PBS. These descriptions are in sharp contrast to the traditional job of a full-time faculty member in higher education.

I conclude, then, that the drawbacks of a system where undergraduate education is dispensed via telecourse are numerous:

- faculty do not participate in creating knowledge—they merely grade students’ work based on the standards set by the telecourse;
- faculty do not need to keep updated on advances in the field—they merely follow the telecourse material that had been created for them by other academic experts;
- faculty won't teach, but will tutor—not an ignoble role, but not the role for which they have trained;
- faculty won't participate in their students' lives in any personal manner, but will simply be email correspondents or telephone resources
- faculty will not participate in the internal governance of their institution, leaving the management of the institution to an increasingly powerful administration that
is isolated from the personal and professional concerns of both faculty and students;

• faculty will not become personally attached to an institution, but will instead shuttle between institutions that have no personal, professional, or legal commitment to them.

If we are not careful in the way we utilize technology, the job of professional academics will change. No longer will the job consist of constructing knowledge or of participating in the on-going intellectual debates within the discipline. No longer will the teacher’s job consist of engaging students in intellectual study above and beyond the simple; rather, as the PBS web page points out, the job will become “tutorial in nature.” If we follow the lead of the telecourse teacher, tomorrow’s generation of faculty will be simple fact-checkers, hired as temporary workers to help students regurgitate what will quickly become out-dated knowledge.

III

A Warning

As institutions move closer and closer to the corporate model in an effort to decrease expenditures and increase income, they are relying more and more on technologized courses. Such courses require a much different form of instruction than the instruction traditionally paid for on college campuses. Make no mistake about it: online courses and telecourses will become increasingly prominent. For example, Annenberg/CPB is currently developing a range of English telecourses, ranging from a new composition
course to a news writing course to special courses on Charles Dickens, Edith Wharton, Jane Eyre, and contemporary Southern writers. Indeed, institutional web pages around the country are advertising themselves as leaders in televised instruction. Widener College in Pennsylvania, to take just one example, has a series of web pages devoted to explaining their telecourse offerings. With an exciting graphic of a 1950s-era console television whose banner announces salient facts about the college’s distance education program, Widener is clearly marketing itself to students who seek the convenience offered by televised courses.

Lest it appear that I am Chicken Little squawking about the sky falling, I turn to a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. As the 1997 article, "A New Role for Professors in a High-Tech Age?", makes clear, more and more courses are “designed by teams of technology experts and professors, then marketed by publishers or brand-name universities” (Young A27). The *Chronicle* article suggests that if education is created by “teams of professors and technicians working side by side in a publishing company’s offices or on the campus of an Ivy League or Big Ten university,” curriculum development may be “like producing a Hollywood film or a video game” (Young 27). According to this perspective, we may very well create a future in which an elite of educational professionals from select universities will create core material of disciplinary content that will then be transmitted to students via telecourse, CD-ROM, DVD, and the Internet. We already see this to an extent in the telecourses. The teacher of record will no longer be required to know anything about Stephen Crane; after all, Mary Ann Poovey, Gregory Ulmer, and Benjamin DeMott have already interpreted “The Blue
Hotel” for the viewer. When studying Whitman, the work of scholars like William Vance, Gary Schmidgall, Alan Helms, and Herschel Parker will not be necessary: after all, the material in the telecourse is canned and ready to go. Here in Tucson there will be no need to hire new composition teachers: simply hire a grader to evaluate the students who watch me on television.

I am not alone in my fears about the future of teaching with emerging technologies. In the 1997 MLA document on Professional Employment, Association of Departments of Foreign Languages Director Elizabeth Welles is quoted as saying that “changes in the way instruction is delivered or in the scope of requirements could modify the current need for classroom teachers” (13). The MLA document recognizes that new technologies may drastically alter accepted educational and professional practices: “distance learning and/or computer-assisted instruction have often been mentioned as pedagogical strategies that might significantly alter faculty-student ratios by reducing the number of classroom contact hours students need especially in introductory courses” (13). As Welles’s points suggest, there are growing concerns about the uses and misuses of technology. The ratio of faculty to student may increase because institutions can utilize the technology to overload courses with students, thereby weakening the students’ educational experience in ways that I described in my Introduction.15

The Editor's Column of the Spring of 1998 “MLA Newsletter” addresses professional employment and the growing use of part-time and adjunct faculty in higher education. “At issue,” Phyllis Franklin writes, “are future career opportunities for academics. Will we have a small mandarin class of privileged, tenured faculty members who teach
advanced courses only and large numbers of easily eliminated part-time and adjunct faculty members who teach introductory courses and are not expected to be scholars?"

(5). Franklin’s is the perfect question to ask, for if higher education dependent on technology continues to be driven by a profit motive, the job of faculty will change. Faculty will no longer need any depth or breadth of disciplinary knowledge, for their job will be simply to baby-sit as their students negotiate the televised and computerized material and take tests that are administered by outside businesses. No new knowledge will need to be created: after all, it will already be on television, CD-ROM, DVD, and the Internet. We can forget that expensive and annoying classroom, and we can forget the teacher-student interaction that drives the learning process.

Of course, I am being facetious here. There will always be a need for new knowledge. We cannot forget the classroom. And we must never forget the value of personal teacher-student interactions. As Annette Kolodny writes regarding the pedagogical uses of emerging technologies:

The challenge for policy-makers and the general public is to resist the impulse to force colleges and universities into substituting the kind of rote training that technology can cheaply supply for the more expensive education that teaches critical thinking and analytic skills, values and an understanding of complex relationships, which the learned professor in the classroom can facilitate. An exclusively cost-driven dependence on computers and telecourses may instruct students in a subject; but only a professor with passion and disciplinary expertise can help students understand why a subject is important to think about and how to think about it. (36)

Kolodny’s warnings reiterate the point that I have been making throughout this dissertation: the goal of education is not to get students to regurgitate the information that we teachers dispense. The goal is simply to enable students to learn to think on their
own, to challenge the information that we dispense, to learn to ask meaningful questions, and to learn how best to answer those questions.

As I hope to have demonstrated, the increasing reliance on technology to teach is leading us to a growing commercialization of higher education that has the potential to subvert the long-standing and still valuable role of the academic professional in our institutions of higher learning. As we turn to the twenty-first century, classroom teachers may no longer be necessary if institutions can disseminate information with the help of new technologies, hiring inexpensive teachers to be responsible for logistics and assessment. As this trend continues, two things may happen. First, access to knowledge will increasingly become controlled by profit-centered businesses whose concern is not the maintenance and growth of intellectual communities devoted to the free exchange of information and knowledge, but whose concern will instead be the exploitation of intellectual and technical information as a profit center. In this case, higher education will become even more than now a commodity to be bought and sold, pricing the economically underprivileged out of a worthwhile educational experience and replace it with merely functional training. Second, professional academics will become even more under-valued than they are today. Seeking cheap labor, educational institutions will hire a contract labor force to do menial labor such as grading and other logistical shepherding rather than the more demanding labor of professional scholarship and inspired teaching.16

We must not let our departments fall into the on-going trap of the short-term benefit of part-timers doing full-time work. We must not let our administrators fall into the trap of buying the latest technological toys and doing away with personal instruction. And we
must not let our state representatives railroad our institutions into hiring part-timers to fill the vacant tenure-track lines and then overloading students into telecourses and on-line courses. Such a system marks the death knell of Bart Giamatti's vision of an educational institution that seeks "not profit or proprietary rights but the free good of knowledge; not efficiency of operation but equity of treatment; not increased productivity in economic terms but increased intensity of thinking about who we are and how we live in and about the world around us" (36).

Because I have drawn heavily throughout this dissertation on my personal experiences as a student and a faculty member, I feel compelled to address one final issue. Like most graduate students who complete their dissertation, I have entered the academic job market. And like most graduate students in English, as illustrated in the MLA Report on Employment that I have referenced, I have not received a tenure-track job offer. I have, however, been offered a position of significant weight with one of the burgeoning for-profit educational ventures, Magellan University, a business that utilizes online, distance education to provide continuing professional training to working adults in a variety of fields. In contrast to the countless rejection letters that I have received from colleges and universities across the country, I have been actively courted by Magellan to help them maintain educational and intellectual integrity in their online course offerings.

Since taking a position with Magellan, I have been asked if it is not disingenuous for me to criticize the corporatization of the university while at the same time working with a for-profit, educational venture that makes great use of the corporate model. My reply is
that a for-profit, educational business targeted to adults is distinct from public and private universities, and that a comparison of the two is a comparison of apples and oranges. For example, I have argued throughout this dissertation that the composition telecourses that I have studied do an admirable job of providing occupational and functional communication skills. If this sort of occupational literacy is the goal, then the courses achieve that goal. However, I have argued that that should not be the only goal of an undergraduate education. The work of a humanities classroom should be intellectual muckraking, an effort at awakening the critical consciousness of students. However, such an educational experience should not be confused with the type of education sought by working adults who seek professional and economic advancement in their chosen fields. Although I would argue that we all (adults and teen-agers alike) need to have our critical consciousness awakened now and again, I am also convinced that distance education can provide an opportunity to advance skills and gain information. This form of continuing professional education should not be confused with the form of liberal arts education for which I have been arguing throughout this dissertation. Indeed, my fear is that colleges and universities that claim the goal of a liberal arts education shall turn to the corporate model.

Finally, I turn to Woodrow Wilson, past president of both Princeton University and the United States, to provide an appropriate conclusion to our discussion. Writing in 1893, he reminds us that "all essential literature [..] has a quality to move you, and you can never mistake it, if you have any blood in you [..]. It is not knowledge that moves the world, but ideals, convictions, the opinions or fancies that have been held or
followed; and whoever studies humanity ought to study it live” (85). Wilson is right: as much as technology may help us study the complexities and joys of language, we must keep some blood in us—preferably enough for both ourselves and our students.

NOTES

1 Using Department of Education statistics, *The Chronicle of Higher Education 1999-2000 Almanac Issue* (Vol. XLVI 27 August 1999: 40), reports that at public institutions instruction accounts for 32.3% of expenditures, with research, the next highest level of expenditure, accounting for a mere 10%. At private institutions, instruction accounts for 27% of expenditures, again the highest cost to the institution. See the chart on page 40, “Revenues and Expenditures of Colleges and Universities, 1995-96.”


3 The Final Report of the MLA Committee on Professional Employment can be found online at http://www.mla.org under the link to “Reports.”

4 Among other efforts, inquiries to PBS/Annenberg; to the LeCroy Center in Dallas, the largest provider of telecourse instructional delivery; to the technology reporter at *The Chronicle of Higher Education*; and to The University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Distance Education reveal no database regarding for the percentage of part-timers teaching telecourses.

5 Personal email from Joan Gurfield to author. Title: Re: telecourses and a few questions from Arizona. Date: Thursday, 8 October 1998.

6 Personal email from Dr. Phelps to author. Title: Auto Reply Message. Date: Friday, 2 October 1998.


9 Chapter Three of Axtell’s book is titled “Twenty-five Reasons to Publish” and provides professional, personal, and ideal reasons why “genuine scholarship has a vital role to play in the intellectual life of all institutions of higher education” (49).


11 Chapter One of Axtell’s book, “(Mis)Understanding Academic Work” presents a detailed description of academic work by drawing upon personal observations and “representative statistics on the behavior of the national professoriate as a whole” (4).

12 See *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, page 101.


15 In particular, see page 33.

16 It might be argued that not all educational institutions will move toward the model of cheap labor at the expense of quality education. However, the infamous strike by graduate students at Yale University in 1993 and 1996 demonstrates that exploitation of academic labor is not a sector-driven phenomenon. All sectors of higher education are subject to the misuse of academic labor.
For more information, see Magellan's home page at http://www.magellan.edu.
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