The Writing Program Administration series provides a venue for scholarly monographs and projects that are research- or theory-based and that provide insights into important issues in the field. We encourage submissions that examine the work of writing program administration, broadly defined (e.g., not just administration of first-year composition programs). Possible topics include but are not limited to 1) historical studies of writing program administration or administrators (archival work is particularly encouraged); 2) studies evaluating the relevance of theories developed in other fields (e.g., management, sustainability, organizational theory); 3) studies of particular personnel issues (e.g., unionization, use of adjunct faculty); 4) research on developing and articulating curricula; 5) studies of assessment and accountability issues for WPAs; and 6) examinations of the politics of writing program administration work at the community college.

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The WPA Outcomes Statement—a Decade Later

Edited by Nicholas N. Behm, Gregory R. Glau, Deborah H. Holdstein, Duane Roen, and Edward M. White

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Assessing the Impact of the Outcomes Statement

Emily Isaacs and Melinda Knight

The aim of the Outcomes Statement project with which we are in particular agreement is the originating one: that writing programs should articulate what they seek to have students learn, and that these learning outcomes should be tied to research-based findings on best practices for teaching first-year college writing. As Harrington, et al., members of the Outcomes Statement collective, argue in 2001 (when they published the WPA OS in *College English*), “it’s useful to see some common assumptions undergirding all our programs” (322). That there are legitimate conflicts within the scholarly community as to which particular practices are best—for example, focusing on the argumentative genre versus focusing on practicing several genres—is ultimately of less importance than the principle of tying one’s program values to the scholarship-defined values of the discipline of rhetoric and composition. We choose the term “values” here because outcomes statements, as much as mission statements or course descriptions, reveal the teaching, learning, and writing values that the institutions that adopt them hold.

An explicit purpose of the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (WPA OS) was to promote consensus on outcomes for first-year writing. We also believe that a focus on outcomes implicitly suggests directions for teaching methodology and curriculum. Despite the existence of the WPA OS, however, first-year writing and writing programs (and the teachers who work in them) are too often developed without sufficient reference to these agreed-upon values of the field, and that, in turn, has led to an overly large spectrum of approaches to teaching writing nationwide. This is a strong assertion, to which we
imagine many may nod, while others may question both the evidence and whether it is important to even address issues of disciplinary coherence. One might wonder, for example, if any of us in the field can reasonably estimate what percentage of the nation's BA-granting institutions teach writing as a process. Fifty percent? More? Fewer? We just don't know. As a field, we appear unaware of the extent to which most colleges and universities do—or do not—teach first-year writing in ways that reflect the discipline's dominant values as embedded in the WPA OS.

As Richard Fulkerson notes as recently as 2005, "There is no available and current synthetic account of what goes on in college writing classrooms in the United States: the syllabi, writing assignments, readings, classroom procedures" (682). There are, of course, a number of historical or localized accounts, the most useful of which are those written by Albert Kitzhaber and Edward M. White and Linda Polin. Kitzhaber analyzes the "present state of composition studies" in 1963 by collecting syllabi from ninety-five, four-year colleges and universities, visiting eighteen of those schools (8–9). While his data are out of date, he makes a useful set of recommendations regarding administration (class size and teaching load), exemption, faculty status, assignment design, commenting, and standards for evaluation—categories that have become part of our larger study. In a 1986 report funded by the National Institute of Education, White and Polin examine the effectiveness of college writing programs in California, with a focus on administrative structure, composition faculty and the composition program, and students. In their five-year study of all nineteen campuses, they used questionnaires, interviews, outcome measures, and other data points, producing a "California Construct" of six instructional approaches to teaching composition (38–54). The most recent systematic and large-scale study of college writing programs appears to be Richard Larson's 1994 report to the Ford Foundation, which we discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

Increasingly, efforts towards gaining greater knowledge of what it is that is "done" in the field have been demonstrated through publications on particular issues (Lunsford and Lunsford's "Mistakes Are A Fact of Life," most notably) and ongoing research projects (e.g., CCC's Professional Database, analyzed by Gere, which focuses on survey data from CCC's members, and Thaiss's WAC/WID mapping project). Nonetheless, there is an enormous amount of work to be done if we are to be able to provide the kind of report called for by Fulkerson, echoing Richard Haswell.

In partial response to this dearth of knowledge, this chapter investigates to what extent there is a "widespread understanding of these outcomes," as WPA OS initiator Edward M. White ("Origins") 7) hopes, by those programs that are judged "best in class" in various institutional types (classes are diversely defined, as detailed below) by the U.S. News and World Report, and by our own professional organization, the Conference on College Composition and communication. It is the purpose of our research project, "Top College Writing Programs" (from which this chapter is drawn), to offer scholarship that empirically explores how first-year writing is taught in the United States. In this chapter, we specifically address the question of how and to what extent the WPA OS, other outcomes, or the values embedded in the WPA OS, have been adopted (or adapted) in 101 four-year colleges and universities, selected as type-representatives from the approximately 2,500, that currently grant BAs in the United States today (Carnegie Foundation). In determining our categories of analysis and the particular data points we have collected, we used earlier research as an initial guide (Kitzhaber; Larson, and White and Polin in particular).

Whether we like it or not, ranking schemes play a major role in public discourse about the value of post-secondary education, both in the United States and throughout the world. The Institute for Higher Education Policy, for example, in a report funded by the Lumina Foundation, discusses how rankings might, in fact, play a positive role in institutional decision-making in the four countries studied (2). Despite the scorn often heaped upon the surveys reported by U.S. News and World Report and Business Week, among others, consumers and policy makers do indeed pay attention to them, and almost all universities and colleges cooperate in the data collection process. Schools proudly announce how they are ranked, and there is great anticipation about each new release of rankings. U.S. News and World Report even has a countdown clock in days, hours, and minutes on its main website to alert visitors when the next year's rankings will be released.

To develop a sample for our study, we chose as a starting point the annual rankings published by U.S. News, not because we endorse their selections and methodology, but because of the stature and power of these lists for prospective students, administrators, and decision-mak-
ers. *U.S. News* purports to measure reputation for academic quality, via a set of indicators from seven categories (assessment by administrators at peer institutions, retention, faculty resources, student selectivity, financial resources, alumni giving, and the publication’s determination of graduation rate). Significantly, we have chosen not to find out what is happening at the "average" institution, but rather at various types of "bests"; our belief is that this sample allows us to see what trends are occurring in highly regarded national and regional institutions of various types. More specifically, to develop a representative sample for our study, we made our selection of schools based on several different *U.S. News* 2009 rankings categories. While the *U.S. News* survey may be best known for the overall college rankings, the annual report breaks down the lists by many categories, allowing us to select among the lists to create a broad view across four regions of public and private spheres and of different types of institutions: BA-focused, Master’s (term used by Carnegie, formerly known as comprehensive), and doctorate-granting. The specific 2009 *U.S. News* lists we drew upon are as follows: top national—ten schools; top public—twenty; top liberal arts—ten; top Master’s—five in each region (North, South, Midwest, and West); and top BA—three in each region (“America’s Best Colleges”).

We also selected schools from two other lists: “Top Historically Black” (the top five schools in the list), and all the “writing in the disciplines schools” (WID) mentioned in the list of “academic programs to look for.” While we focus on first-year writing in this study, we believe the WID list captures schools that otherwise might not have made it into our sample. Further, we believe it is important also to include programs rated highly by our own discipline. To that end, we included schools within the United States whose writing programs have been awarded the CCC Writing Program Certificate of Excellence from 2004—when the award was established—through 2009. Our exclusion of schools in other countries in this group relates to the focus of this study, which is to look at first-year writing programs located within the United States. Clearly, much exciting work in rhetoric and composition is being done outside the United States (see Susan Thomas’s chapter in this collection), although the concept of first-year writing is by no means a universal curricular paradigm throughout the world. All these selection criteria (and some schools fit into more than one category) resulted in a sample size of 101, which we believe offers a rich trove of data for discussion and analyses. We began our data collection in the fall of 2008, and continued for the next year. The findings we report in this chapter are current as of summer 2009.

Once we selected our sample, we then began to investigate schools by examining what is publicly available on websites, replicating and expanding an approach first used to examine professional schools (Knight). We wanted a methodology that would be comparable across schools, and we believe that how an institution presents itself, how it demonstrates what it values, gives us the best indication of the extent to which the WPA OS has had an impact. For this chapter, therefore, we focus on the first-year writing requirement itself, course descriptions, mission statements, policies, catalogs or bulletins, program reports posted on websites, and any other documents posted or linked. We essentially reviewed all information available to the public. Although retrieval was often challenging and occasionally difficult, we were careful to crosscheck for accuracy within a website wherever possible. This methodology is very different from traditional surveys sent to WPAs, where the response rate can have an impact on results, and where it can be difficult to compare and crosscheck data.

Our method is a critical part of our research design, as we wanted to see how schools presented themselves to the public, including the ways in which an institution represents itself to important stakeholders. A public affirmation of first-year writing outcomes can be a powerful indicator of consensus building in the discipline. With higher education under increasing duress because of demands for accountability and transparency, we would argue that it is important to consider how information is presented and to whom. Because of the dominance of the various rating schemes, some schools have taken it upon themselves to provide verifiable data as a counterpoint. Consider, for example, the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), which provides "basic, comparable information on the undergraduate student experience to important constituencies through a common web report—the College Portrait" ("Home"). One goal of the VSA is to measure "educational outcomes and facilitate the identification and implementation of effective practices as part of institutional improvement efforts" ("About VSA"). Our own findings for first-year writing programs, we believe, will also provide important information to stakeholders, including the ways in which research in rhetoric and composition has, or has not, had an impact on how programs represent themselves, including: we would hope, an indication of actual teaching and curricular practices.
Perhaps the greater concern that those of us active in the field have is the extent to which, in practice (not in theory), the field is dominated by what is most frequently called current-traditional or traditional approaches to teaching writing. The available evidence suggests that the current-traditional model of teaching writing continues to dominate first-year writing instruction (Burhans; Connors; Larson). It's useful to recall that in 1983, Clinton Burhans' review of 263 college and university catalog descriptions of first-year writing courses led him to conclude that between eighty-three percent and eighty-nine percent of courses were taught in a "traditional" model, with only one-to-five percent employing "contemporary" pedagogies (645). A decade later, Larson's research finds that thirty percent of programs teach "the writing process," but that, at most schools, the focus is on attention to formal aspects of writing and that approaches are widely divergent, and reflect little current scholarship in the field (24). With the proliferation of graduate programs in composition/rhetoric, and with writing programs' increased influence on graduate students' pedagogical practices, it is reasonable to assume that the field has progressed in translating knowledge from scholarship to pedagogy, though significant barriers to broad adoption of best practices undoubtedly remain present (Bartholomae; Isaacs).

Part of the reason we have an apparent disconnect between theory and practice is that we have had a relatively short timeframe to establish ourselves as a discipline, and with the majority of programs in first-year writing still within other established departments, which may have other concerns and priorities, changing curricula and pedagogies is extremely difficult. Additionally, providing training for the faculty that must teach millions of students is, to say the least, challenging, particularly when we consider that most first-year writing faculty are contingent and turn over with great frequency. As David Bartholomae notes, the impact of the discipline is primarily trickle-down, as allocations for tenure lines has decreased, so that writing specialists are primarily running programs, conducting research, and teaching pedagogy courses, not actually teaching first-year writing sections in significant numbers (1953). Of course, a commonplace view is that the translation of theory into practice would seem to require a half-century. Beyond these practical challenges that have impeded the widespread adoption of agreed-upon values in the classroom, however, are some genuine disagreements among those who are conversant with rhetoric and composition research and theory as to how first-year writing should be taught and whether or not we should, in fact, even have a broadly unified position on teaching first-year writing. Significantly, we have largely originated within a discipline (English) that eschews regulation, standardization, and anything that might compromise what is often characterized as "academic freedom." Sometimes, it seems to us that academic freedom is raised overly broadly, inhibiting institutional efforts to provide students with a common set of expectations, experiences, and learning outcomes. Note that even within the WPA OS community there is considerable anxiety about standardization. In Chapter 17, Judy Holiday is concerned about the WPA OS leading to a "one-way acculturation process" and "little rhetoric" at the expense of "big rhetoric"—largely because of what she perceives as an implicit call for standardization from the WPA OS. Similarly, Mark Wiley is greatly concerned about what he sees as potential misuse of the WPA OS, writing, "It is possible that at some institutions these outcomes will be misinterpreted precisely in order to impose a uniform curriculum upon the composition program. Individual teachers might be forced to use a common syllabus, text, and a reductive form of assessment to evaluate student writing at the end of the term" (27).

To this, we respond that with the exception of the "reductive form of assessment," all of these uses Wiley suggests are reasonable and even laudable from a student learning perspective. In any event, we hope it is clear from this example that the entire issue of establishing shared content and pedagogy is vexing for many of us, and in particular, we would assert, to those of us who originate from the humanities and carry with us that distaste for standards—a term the framers of the WPA OS explicitly rejected—of any sort.

James Williams notes that the discipline's valuing of individual perspectives has led to the "deprofessionalization of the field," a strong statement for which we have considerable sympathy (223). Notably, even among the WPA Outcomes Collective—a relatively homogenous group compared to a randomly selected pool of academics (WPA or otherwise) responsible for "running" (we use the term loosely) writing programs—there are significant problems with agreement. Keith Rhodes, Irvin Peckham, Linda Bergmann, and William Condon, in their history of the development of the WPA OS, note, "we confronted an unpleasant fact: the term first-year composition varied widely in meaning" (12). In 2005, Fullkerson, based on his review of several
popular "how-to-teach expository writing" books by major figures in the field, advances an even stronger assertion of his point of view that the discipline had become increasingly fractious, haphazard, and disjointed in its approach to teaching writing: "We differ about what our courses are supposed to achieve, about how effective writing is best produced, about what an effective classroom looks like, and about what it means to make knowledge" (680–81).

Fulkerson's dismal conclusion comes from a non-empirical review of the field: a review of several general texts on teaching writing. We characterize Fulkerson's conclusion as dismal because we are in dissent, though this is not to say that we are not aware that many in higher education value diverse approaches to teaching as a strength. Our concern is with the broad degree of disparity in approach, and in particular, with approaches that are contrary to cumulative research and which indicate that important developments in the field are virtually unknown or ignored at many institutions. Fulkerson's conclusion is supported by empirical data for a similar conclusion by Larson in his 1994 report, Curricula in College Writing Programs: Much Diversity, Little Assessment. Under commission from the Ford Foundation, Larson sought to "describe [the nation's college] writing programs, locate their underlying assumptions, identify the theories on which they were based, and understand main features of the context within which they operated" (3). Using a voluntary survey methodology in which 575 data requests (randomly selected from 3,000, with the addition of a dozen or so specially selected schools) yielded 240 usable surveys. Larson analyzed documents that program administrators sent him: sample syllabi, internal memos, and other documents describing programs and policies (5). Larson found great diversity in approaches to teaching writing, declaring that the Ford Foundation's contention that there was no "center of gravity" was well-supported by his study (18). To the extent that he did find consistency, it was in an emphasis on "formalism" and, in particular, a "predominant emphasis on teaching forms of writing, patterns of arrangement, compliance with formal requirements (in paragraphs and sentences)" (18). In this 1994 report, there is no mention of outcomes or standards per se, although Larson examines program documents for evidence of concern for the development of students' skills in rhetoric; critical thinking, reading, and writing; and processes. Larson ends by asserting that it would be a waste of the Ford Foundation's money to invest in the "improve-

ment of college writing programs" on the grounds that there is overly "wide disagreement on what a college writing program should be or should teach" (40). Finally, as precursor to the assessment movement that we have seen develop in recent years, and of which the WPA OS is a part, Larson calls for accountability and program review, declaring that "one of the most troubling findings from the study was the almost complete absence in most institutions of any effort to determine whether the first-year writing program is achieving its purpose" (46–47).

Central to the WPA OS project is, of course, accountability through assessment, as well as the broader goal of developing a set of expected outcomes that individual institutions and the broader public can consult as a reference and comparative appraisal. Beyond local value, the WPA OS's success at creating unity in the ways that Fulkerson, Larson, Williams would admire is contingent upon whether widespread adoption of the WPA OS occurs. Patricia Freitag Ericsson documents the impact of the WPA OS in a chapter for The Outcomes Book collection. Ericsson's methodology for assessing the extent of the adoption of the WPA OS was to review the WPA Liserv archives (where the WPA OS originated and has been frequently discussed since then) to identify individuals who described or mentioned using the WPA OS at their schools and to additionally query the WPA Liserv. From these methods, Ericsson developed a list of individuals to contact, resulting in a list of fifty-nine institutions whose responses to surveys led Ericsson to state that the "Outcomes Statement technology has been broadly adapted and successfully implemented in a wide variety of venues" (105). At the outset of our research, we wondered if this was an overly optimistic conclusion, even considering that Ericsson's methodology was not comprehensive and was conducted not long after the Council of Writing Program Administrators adopted the WPA OS and took steps toward promoting it. With our research and analysis now complete, however, we have found that the WPA OS has had little influence on the 101 institutions we reviewed. That being said, we do see some influence of the larger outcomes movement that has reverberated through higher education, and finally, we notice significant dispersal of the WPA OS's "values," a finding we believe Fulkerson, Larson, and Williams would find uplifting.

Before sharing our data, we must briefly share our challenges with terminology. Kathleen Blake Yancey makes an important distinction between standards—which define levels of achievement—as opposed
to outcomes—which define what we would like students to know or do. She further notes a significant difference between objectives, which "tend to be very specific statements of achievement," whereas outcomes "do not specify how well students should know or understand or do what the curriculum intends" (21). This distinction seems simple enough, until one starts looking at 101 first-year writing programs that do not always use these terms precisely. The slipperiness of the terminology made it a challenge to determine exactly what schools in our sample were doing and the extent to which the WPA OS has had an impact. We address this challenge by developing the following six categories that best represent how first-year writing programs have been engaging in the issues raised by the WPA outcomes movement. We assign schools to each of the categories.

1. No first-year writing requirement: 8 schools
2. First-year writing requirement
   a. No outcomes; no goals or objectives: 29 schools
   b. No outcomes; no goals or objectives, but WPA skill areas in course description: 19 schools
3. First-year writing requirement—standards, as opposed to outcomes (note that a standard could be an outcome achieved at a particular level): 6 schools
4. First-year writing requirement—concept of outcomes or equivalent absent, but goals and/or objectives present
   a. No connection to WPA: 0 schools
   b. 1-to-3 WPA OS outcomes embedded: 20 schools
   c. 4-to-5 WPA OS outcomes embedded: 8 schools
5. First-year writing requirement—outcomes or equivalent
   a. No connection with WPA OS: 1 school
   b. 1-to-3 WPA OS outcomes embedded: 3 schools
   c. 4-to-5 WPA OS outcomes embedded: 6 schools
6. Adopted WPA OS: 1 school

The first category was, for obvious reasons, very easy to determine. Some of these schools have first-year seminars, although we make distinctions between those that focus on teaching writing and those that are merely topical or thematic. For subsequent categories, it is important to note that first-year writing requirements are not always met by

The second category indicates whether or not these schools' first-year writing requirements had any language related to outcomes or goals or objectives present at all in course descriptions and other publicly available materials. In the schools categorized as 2a, we find no language relating to outcomes, but in 2b, one or more of the WPA OS's areas (rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; processes; knowledge of conventions; or composing in electronic environments) may appear in descriptions of course content or activities. (Thus, in this category, institutions may describe what will be covered in a first-year writing course, but do not articulate outcomes, goals, or objectives.) For example, a course description may indicate that the course is about critical thinking, but does not indicate what students will learn; or, the course approaches writing as a process, but doesn't specify what students will be able to do or learn as a result. The third category includes institutions that indicate standards, levels of achievement to be measured, in addition to or in place of outcomes or goals or objectives.

The fourth and fifth categories make a distinction between schools that use the term "outcome" specifically and those that do not; the latter group most often uses the term goals or objectives or both, and from here on we use the phrase "goals/objectives" for simplification. In both of these categories, we further distinguish among schools that do not use any of the language or concepts of the WPA OS and those that do. The sixth and final category indicates the wholesale (word-for-word) adoption of the WPA OS. With all these categories, we are making assumptions about what first-year writing programs value.

We were not surprised that most of the eight schools in category 1 (no first-year writing requirement) represented elite liberal arts colleges (Amherst, Sarah Lawrence, Kenyon, Oberlin, among others). Most of these, nevertheless, did stress the value of writing in courses throughout the curriculum, although there appeared to be no active instruction in writing. Additionally, a total of six schools fell into the third category, stressing standards as opposed to outcomes. Notably, of the schools with a first-year writing requirement, fifty-four—more than half—did not give any indication of specifying outcomes. Within that
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group, nineteen used some of the concepts in the WPA OS in a description of course content, but not in terms of outcomes or goals/objectives. In our sample of 101, thirty-nine schools listed goals/objectives or outcomes. However, only eleven schools specifically referred to outcomes. One school clearly indicated that it adopted the WPA OS (the statement appeared word-for-word on the website), and three others made reference to its existence by simply directing readers to it for more information or indicating that it had been used in crafting program outcomes.

Our study reveals a wide range of approaches to what students should learn or do in first-year writing programs. With only eleven schools using the term “outcome,” it would appear that the WPA OS has not (yet) had the intended impact. On the other hand, twenty-eight schools consider goals/objectives important, and given the imprecision of these terms, that means thirty-nine out of ninety-three schools with required first-year writing courses are emphasizing more than course content or a description of activities in their public discourse. To give a fuller picture of our findings, we offer some snapshots of schools in each of our categories.

As mentioned earlier, most of the schools without first-year writing programs are what could be considered elite liberal arts colleges. Students at Amherst, for example, are required to take a first-year seminar that introduces students to liberal studies. Amherst has a writing center, as do most other schools in this category, but the notion of a required first-year writing course is absent. In these schools, while writing may occur in the seminars, it may be only one of the capabilities emphasized. Oberlin, also in this group, has a graduation proficiency requirement, which can be met in several ways, including writing certificate or intensive courses, but the instructor’s judgment is the basis for fulfilling the requirement. Yet, Oberlin also has a writing center, a writing associate’s program, and a separate department of rhetoric and composition. Thus, these schools, while typically articulating value for student writing, do not define academic writing very closely, much less define outcomes.

Our second category proved challenging. Here we find schools with a first-year writing requirement, but hardly any discussion of this requirement. Bowdoin (2a), another selective liberal arts college, requires a first-year seminar with a focus on writing about a particular topic, a practice that is clearly intended to provide an introduction to a discipline. More typical of the 2a category are schools that describe their courses as intended to help “students express themselves effectively in writing,” as is the case at Gonzaga University (“2007-09 Undergraduate” 70). Harvard, a school that has been part of an influential movement of theme-based first-year writing courses, has little to say about goals. In the 2b category, we do not find outcomes or goals/objectives, but we do find significant discussion of the requirement, and in this discussion we observe embedded WPA OS skill areas. Several schools in the UC system bear mention. Berkeley describes the first of its two-semester sequence as “designed to offer students structured, sustained, and highly articulated practice in the recursive processes entailed in reading, critical analysis, and composing” (“CWR4A”). Further, “students will write a minimum of thirty-two pages of expository prose during this semester” (“CWR4A”). This description tells a reader exactly what will happen and what are the expectations for measurable course work, but it does not specify what students are expected to learn, or do—which is the essence of defining outcomes. Key areas such as critical thinking, reading, and writing processes, and knowledge of conventions may be mentioned as part of a description, but not as intended outcomes. A critical marker for this category is what a course or program offers.

Category 3 includes schools with first-year writing requirements that have standards as opposed to outcomes, a focus on measuring achievement via exit exams, review of portfolios, or common grading schemes. A surprise for us was Carleton College, recognized for its superb portfolio initiative. Here, faculty members have agreed upon criteria for good writing, which reflect the values of the WPA OS. For example, students’ writing at Carleton are expected to demonstrate an appropriate rhetorical strategy, with a thesis developed with coherence, logic, and evidence and a clear, concise, and interesting purpose, and the writing is to be edited to address surface errors. These criteria, however, do not emphasize what the writer should be able to do, but rather how the paper should look. This distinction is important. The program mandates three papers, revision, and instructor feedback, but processes themselves are not considered in the evaluative criteria. It might be possible to argue that Carleton more properly belongs in category 4b, but its focus on achievement assigns Carleton to category 3. One could also argue that Carleton doesn’t have a first-year writing requirement, since the writing requirement for graduation, which must
be completed between the third and sixth terms, is a combination of a grade in a writing course and review of the portfolio; there is a first-year course, but it is not required. Clemson presents a similar challenge for categorization. ENGL 103 (for first-year students) provides “training in composing correct and effective expository and argumentative essays, including writing documented essays,” and a portfolio is required for graduation, though the purpose of that is much broader, focusing on general education (“Undergraduate Catalogs: 2008–09”). We believe that the decision of the Outcomes Statement Collective to value outcomes over standards is important, as it speaks to our field’s long commitment to teaching writers how to be writers, not just to help students produce the best written products.

Categories 4 and 5 are distinguished by whether the term “outcomes” is actually employed and of specifying the extent to which these institutions share WPA OS’s values. The University of Massachusetts, Amherst, classified as a 4c school, focuses on first-year writing course aims, and this school’s website pays particular attention to the philosophy underlying these aims, as well as to a well-articulated mission statement. Duke, which has a thematic approach to first-year writing and relies on post-doctoral fellows, also fits into 4c for emphasizing that students learn how to engage with the work of others, articulate a position, and situate their writing within specific contexts, while practicing research, participating in workshops, revising, and editing. Absent in all of the schools in this category is attention to the fifth (and most recent) area, composing in electronic environments; as a result, category 4c indicates attention to the first four areas in the WPA OS. Finally, we did not find any schools that would fit into category 4a—programs that indicated goals/objectives, but without any WPA OS values embedded within them. In this data, we find reason for optimism. Schools that have first-year writing requirements with courses that have established goals and objectives also have significant shared values with those articulated in the WPA OS. The WPA OS was not devised to “impose unsuitable restriction” (WPA OS)—and so, the fact that several institutions have developed outcomes and courses that have only partial similarity to the WPA OS would, we believe, be seen by the Outcomes Collective as appropriate and positive, rather than as lamentable.

Category 5, with eleven schools, includes first-year writing courses and programs that specifically employ the term “outcomes,” and all but one of these schools includes areas from the WPA OS. The one school in category 5a, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, specifies institutional outcomes to the effect that “Graduates shall be able to write clearly, concisely, persuasively, and grammatically,” along with some outcomes related to reading, speaking, and listening (“Catalog of Courses 2008–09”). Category 5 represents quite a diverse group of institutions (Elon, Georgia Tech, Princeton, among others). As one example, we find the University of Denver, a CCCC award winner, which, while not making explicit reference to the WPA OS, provides a very detailed set of outcomes for the sequence of two courses. This is a program that has given a lot of thought to what students are expected to learn and how. The University of Denver Writing Program also lists eleven features common to both courses, and includes a very specific mission statement: The program aims “to create a robust culture of writing on campus, developing strong student skills through multiple writing experiences guided by the best research and pedagogy” (“Mission”). Four of the five WPA areas are emphasized, and the website includes much information about the program, its goals, course outcomes, and overall mission; yet, we note without criticism, there is no reference to the WPA OS.

Eastern Michigan University is another university that provides very detailed information about outcomes, and these have recently been revised, as discussed elsewhere in the collection (Chapter 15), with the aim of focusing on six key areas: investment and engagement, autonomy and authority, sense of perspective, reflection, competence and confidence, and resource use. The previous version more directly paralleled the WPA OS, reflecting close familiarity with that text; this new version indicates how the statement can be adapted to fit local needs and concerns—thus fulfilling the intentions of the WPA OS framers. The revision also details what students’ writing should be able to demonstrate in critical reading and analysis, research practices and processes, writing processes and representation, use of evidence, and syntax and mechanics. We wonder, of course, what led the school to move from using the language of the WPA OS to this new version, especially in the use of evidence and syntax and mechanics; all four of these areas of demonstration focus on proficiency, which suggests standards of achievement, as opposed to outcomes. As with the University of Denver, reference to the WPA OS is absent.
As mentioned earlier, only three schools explicitly refer to the WPA OS (Princeton, the University of California, Irvine, and the University of Florida). The only school that has adopted the WPA OS and posted it publicly on its website is the University of California, Irvine. This composition program is housed in an English department, and its courses are primarily taught by graduate teaching assistants and lecturers. We are not making any judgments regarding what it means for only one institution to adopt the language of the WPA OS, or for only eleven schools in our sample of 101 to use the term “outcome.” We do suggest, however, that the very concept of outcomes in first-year writing program is not universally accepted.

We believe our research—limited as it is by sample size and choice, temporality, and dependent on individual schools’ abilities to disclose their programs via the Web—enables us to make several tentative conclusions. First, the WPA OS has not been broadly adopted or even adapted by our nation’s colleges and universities. That said, we also have found that despite laudable efforts to distinguish standards from outcomes—that is, between institutions that define first-year writing as a kind of minimum competency exam and those that define first-year writing as a place where university students are trained in the intellectual and practical processes and habits of academic writers—these distinctions are extremely slippery and also contestable. In the extremes, it’s easy. Of course, we do not support focusing on defining courses for their gate-keeping function, as is the case at many of the institutions we studied, and that is exemplified by course descriptions that emphasize the grammatical and mechanical conventions of Standard American English. However, beyond these extremes are many programs that have not adopted the language and philosophy of outcomes, and we suspect these are conscious, thoughtful decisions, as is the decision to choose more closely defined objectives (or goals) over outcomes. Our second conclusion is that outcomes have not entered into the discourse of how writing programs represent and define their mission. We understand the political choice to use the term “outcomes” by the WPA OS collective, but we are concerned that a kind of “outcomes” language bandwagon is gathering more momentum, when the more specific, student-focused language of objectives and goals, perhaps with some standards as well, is often very appropriate, holding faculty, administrators, and students accountable.

Third, it concerns us that so many of our top 101 schools fall in categories 1 (no first-writing requirement), 2a (requirement, but no outcomes, goals, or objectives that even share WPA OS’s values), or 5a (requirement and outcomes, but no connection to WPA OS’s values)—for a total of thirty-eight, more than one-third of our population. In these schools, it appears that little of our discipline’s values are shared. Put another way, only fifteen schools (categories 4c, 5c, and 6), about fifteen percent, have courses or programs that are aligned with the WPA OS.

A fourth conclusion is that the fifth area of the WPA OS, “composing in electronic environments,” has had virtually no impact at all. We find this unfortunate given all the public pronouncements and NCTE policy statements regarding the importance of taking into account Web 2.0; these results suggest that even Web 1.0 has not had much effect on actual practice. More optimistically, it may be that technology should be a shared responsibility across the curriculum, and not one specifically connected to first-year writing.

Finally, more optimistically, despite these findings, we nevertheless note that the values of writing and writing pedagogy—presumably propagated via the publication of the WPA OS as well as more broadly through the professionalization and proliferation of rhetoric and composition—have been adopted much more so than Burhans, Fulkerson, Larson, or Williams feared. As we searched the Web pages of schools with which we were quite unfamiliar as well as those of our nation’s elite schools, we found evidence of the deep reach of such core ideas as drafting, peer and instructor feedback, and writing as process not product.

**Notes**

1. For more information on the *U.S. News and World Report* selection process, see Morse. The results are posted online first, followed by a cover story in the print edition. For the 2009 rankings, see also the September 1, 2008 print edition of *U.S. News and World Report*, as the story is no longer accessible on the Internet.

2. See Townsend’s 1999 Survey for the Coalition for the Academic Workforce for specific data on percentage of tenure line faculty teaching first-year writing.