

# Local Knowledges, Local Practices

## *An Introduction*

---

JONATHAN MONROE

Director, John S. Knight Institute  
for Writing in the Disciplines

Readers familiar with William Strunk and E. B. White's classic, *The Elements of Style*, may still associate Cornell and the teaching of writing—even over three-quarters of a century after its initial publication in 1918—with that book's enduring legacy. Yet in the past thirty years, Cornell has been the site of a remarkably sustained and successful experiment that the book's legendary authors could scarcely have anticipated. Administrative arrangements for the teaching of writing at Cornell have evolved from the Freshman Humanities Program (1966), to the Freshman Seminar Program (1974), to the John S. Knight Writing Program (1986), to the John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines (2000). During each phase, Cornell faculty and graduate students have contributed to an increasingly rich appreciation of the diversity of writing practices across the disciplines.

In 1984, the first published evidence of this experiment became available in the form of *Teaching Prose*, a collection by eight teachers and administrators affiliated with Cornell's Freshman Seminar Program. Edited by former director Fredric V. Bogel and then associate director, now director of First-Year Writing Seminars, Katherine K. Gottschalk, *Teaching Prose* served for fifteen years (before going out of print in 1999) as a valuable resource for the program's training course for graduate students, *Teaching Writing*. Although, by the early 1980s, the Freshman Seminar Program already included courses from a wide range of departments beyond the original nine involved in the Freshman Humanities Program first offered in 1966, *Teaching Prose* included no mention of disciplines

or disciplinarity. With two exceptions—Russian professor Patricia Carden and Writing Workshop senior lecturer Keith Hjortshoj, a Cornell Ph.D. in anthropology who has served since 1988 as director of Writing in the Majors—the volume’s contributors all had their primary academic training and institutional affiliations in the field of English. As valuable as *Teaching Prose* proved to be, it left untapped and unexplored the particular, discipline-specific cultures of writing in fields other than English, which for over three decades have given the teaching of writing at Cornell its most distinctive character.

In conceiving within this context the purpose and potential value of *Local Knowledges, Local Practices*, my perspective has been shaped by two experiences in particular. First, as an assistant, then associate, professor from 1986 to 1992, I served my home department of Comparative Literature as a faculty course leader for graduate students teaching First-Year Writing Seminars. Second, during my first term as director of what was then the John S. Knight Writing Program, from 1992 to 1995, I served as a section leader and codesigner, with First-Year Writing director Katy Gottschalk, of Teaching Writing, which enrolls some forty graduate students each summer and thirty more each fall. It was especially in negotiating the very challenging demands of teaching graduate students from a range of disciplines how to teach writing that I came to appreciate firsthand the importance and potential benefits of cultivating and foregrounding more effectively the program’s distinctive multidisciplinary character. Beyond the perennial challenge of balancing theory and practice—a binary that has lost some of the fierce bite it once had in the eighties and early nineties—the most pressing issue that needed to be addressed between 1992 and 1995 was the perception on the part of many graduate students from fields other than English that the writing practices and perspectives of their particular disciplines were either underrepresented or wholly absent from our training materials. Having supervised roughly a dozen comparative literature TAs each semester for six years, and served for three years thereafter as my home department’s director of graduate studies, I was struck especially by the frustrations of two graduate students with whom I worked in the summer of 1993 who expressed vehement resistance to *Teaching Prose* and the dominance of what they felt to be an English department perspective and pedagogical agenda in our assigned reading materials, syllabi, and assignment sequences. Although the heated opposition of these two graduate students was exceptional, they were not alone among their peers, especially those from non-literature departments, in feeling that the writing program’s goal was to turn all new instructors, from any department, into English teachers. Given the apprenticeship status of graduate students in relation to their own disciplinary cultures, and the complex processes of acculturation they must negotiate into the discipline-specific writing prac-

tices, protocols, and conventions of their chosen fields, it is not surprising that this perceived goal registered with some frequency as an unwelcome detour and distraction.

Bringing the rich potentialities of Cornell's multidisciplinary approach to articulation more fully, and putting this approach into practice more effectively, required some significant revisioning. Above all, we came to understand the importance of cultivating more extensively and incorporating more inclusively the discipline-specific experiences, insights, practices, and authorities of Cornell faculty representing a wide range of disciplines. What attracted me initially to the Knight Writing Program was its rich array of course offerings across so many fields. Yet the full implications of this shared responsibility for the teaching of writing across the disciplines had remained, until the late 1980s and 1990s, more latent than manifest, more curricular fact than programmatic reflection, more departmental and individual commitments than collective, institutional conversation within a national and international context. As director of the Knight Writing Program, now Institute for Writing in the Disciplines, for the past eleven years, I would identify our increasingly explicit attention to questions of disciplinary and more inclusively multidisciplinary orientation as the single most needed and significant change during that time. Demonstrating the rare mix of disciplinary cultures that make the teaching of writing at Cornell what it is, *Local Knowledges, Local Practices* offers the fruits of this multidisciplinary decentering and discipline-specific explicitation through examples of what Donald Schön has called "reflective practice." This book represents over a dozen different disciplines, each with its own locally determined dialectic between theory and practice, research and teaching.

The distance traveled from *The Elements of Style*, which some teachers of First-Year Writing Seminars at Cornell continue to use as a reference, to *Teaching Prose*, which also remains for us a useful resource, to *Local Knowledges, Local Practices*, speaks volumes about the history and current state of the art of writing instruction not only at Cornell, but throughout the United States and abroad. With its seven undergraduate and four professional schools and colleges, and its uniquely hybrid status as private and public (as part of the State University of New York system), Cornell has been called the most complicated university in the country. Given this complexity, and the widely varied demands of writing across so many disciplines at an institution where "any person may pursue any study," it is perhaps not surprising that Cornell should have evolved a content- and discipline-based approach to the teaching of writing roughly a decade before the terms "writing across the curriculum" (WAC) and "writing in the disciplines" (WID) began to gain currency. Because of Cornell's long-standing tradition involving courses from so many distinctive disciplinary cultures,

it seemed clear by the mid-1990s that there could be substantial benefits from a volume that would engage, more self-consciously and deliberately, this rich diversity of perspectives. In tandem with the efforts that have resulted in the present volume, the second most important inflection of the Knight Program during the past decade, which led to its renaming in 2000 as the Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines, has been toward an increasing awareness of, and engagement with, the larger context of WAC and WID approaches throughout the nation and abroad. It was, above all, as a result of our annual consortium's contributions to this ongoing conversation, and to the increasing influence of WAC and WID movements generally, that copublishers *Time* and *The Princeton Review* named Cornell, in the 2001 issue of *The Best College for You*, their College of the Year among private research universities.

In the spirit of continuing innovation as well as respect for the received traditions that I had the good fortune to inherit as director from my two immediate predecessors, and indeed from the writing program's entire thirty-seven-year history, *Local Knowledges, Local Practices* shares with its companion volume, *Writing and Revising the Disciplines* (Cornell University Press, 2002), the goal of encouraging faculty from a wide range of fields to represent themselves, to speak and write in their own voices about what it means to practice and teach writing from the varied perspectives of their distinctive disciplinary cultures. Based on the Knight Distinguished Lecture Series, which I organized at Cornell in the fall and spring of 1998–1999, *Writing and Revising the Disciplines* includes chapters by nine of Cornell's most distinguished faculty, three each in the physical sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. They offer a combination of career autobiographies and state-of-the-discipline addresses focused on the role of writing in each scholar's field at the turn of the millennium. Integrating scholarly reflection on their particular fields with more concerted attention to pedagogical practices, *Local Knowledges, Local Practices* offers practical examples of the wide variety of ways in which Cornell faculty encourage their students not merely to assimilate and reproduce their particular disciplinary writing practices, but to explore and question these in ways at once respectful and open-ended. Exemplifying that broader understanding of scholarship, which Ernest Boyer has characterized as encompassing the discovery, integration, application, and sharing of knowledge, the two volumes together offer a forum for Cornell faculty to represent the scholarly and pedagogical concerns, the specific conjunctions of local knowledges and local practices, that make up their distinctive contributions to writing, the production of knowledge, and the teaching of writing within and across their respective fields.

*Administering Writing at Cornell*

Appropriately, since the history of graduate student training in the teaching of writing at Cornell could not be written without her, Katherine Gottschalk, Walter C. Teagle Director of First-Year Seminars, offers a brief history of writing instruction at Cornell focused especially on her role in developing Teaching Writing, a course she first pioneered with former Freshman Seminar Program director, professor of English Rick Bogel, and has since overseen through many iterations both with my predecessor, Harry Shaw, and with me. As Gottschalk's chapter makes clear, the training of graduate student teachers at Cornell, coordinated closely with faculty-taught seminars, is one of the university's most important functions. Recognizing graduate student teachers as, in Gottschalk's words, "a wellspring of the Knight Institute's vitality," Teaching Writing plays a critical role in preparing Cornell's graduate students to become leaders in the future professoriate. In taking the Knight Institute's discipline-specific approach with them to other colleges and universities, they have the potential to have a far-reaching impact on the role of writing instruction throughout the nation. Putting into practice on the front lines the tenacious attitude, as Gottschalk puts it, "that studying writing means not just the study of form and grammar but the development of ideas and inquiry through writing," Teaching Writing continues to evolve to meet the needs of the many disciplines that make the Knight Institute such a dynamic part of the university. Through close work with faculty "course leaders" from all participating departments, the vast majority of whom teach First-Year Writing Seminars themselves, and the TA Peer Collaboration Program, the Knight Institute offers an important opportunity for faculty and graduate students to work together in a common enterprise that values the diversity of perspectives and contributions each discipline has to offer.

As Keith Hjortshoj makes clear in "Writing without Friction," his account of the fifteen-year history of Writing in the Majors, of which he is the director, ongoing innovation and an inductive, experimental approach have from the outset shaped and informed that program's reason for being. In contrast to the Institute's much larger-scale First-Year Writing Seminar program, through which students fulfill a two-course requirement, the Writing in the Majors program has to date, as Hjortshoj points out, no "general standards for writing and teaching across the curriculum," preferring instead to trust faculty to "put work with language into solution with learning," so that writing might be experienced "as a privilege, not as a burden." Writing in the Majors has developed on a case-by-case basis through courses self-selected by faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates. It has drawn voluntary participation thus far from over one

hundred faculty members and has successfully avoided the tensions sometimes associated with WAC programs. The effectiveness of this approach, which has allowed Writing in the Majors to grow over the past decade from a pilot program of fifteen courses on soft funding to a permanently funded program of thirty courses annually, has led to new challenges. Among these is the challenge of engaging and evaluating more programmatically and systematically—without losing the approach’s adventurous, experimental edge—what Hjortshoj refers to as the “great variation in the roles of written language among disciplines and levels of instruction,” as well as “striking patterns across the curriculum—patterns obscured by the assumption that academic disciplines or clusters of disciplines represent separate realms of discourse.”

In expanding the Institute’s investment in Writing in the Majors over the past five years, particularly in the sciences and the social sciences, one of our primary interests has been to encourage an appreciation for the rich diversity of writing practices not only among but within particular disciplines, including that quality of serious play that Hjortshoj has called the “exploratory sense of the term ‘experiment’: to try something new and see what happens.” Like our First-Year Writing Seminar and Writing in the Majors programs, the Institute’s new Sophomore Seminar program, now in its second year of implementation, is governed by respect for the autonomy of individual faculty and participating departments. As Stephen Donatelli, Sophomore Seminar Coordinator, and I work to develop the discipline-specific, student-centered approach this new program is designed to make available, we will continue to emphasize an exploratory sensibility through interdisciplinary clusters of seminars focused on particular issues (e.g., ethics, the environment, race and ethnicity) that will excite the imaginations of faculty and students alike. Taught by members of Cornell’s tenure-stream faculty working in close collaboration with one another, and with a ceiling of fifteen students per course, each Sophomore Seminar is intended to serve as gateway course into a particular discipline within an expressly interdisciplinary context. With approximately fifteen such courses representing over a dozen departments already approved for 2003–2004, the Institute is well on the way to achieving its goal of thirty Sophomore Seminars annually by 2005–2006.

Too recent a development to be represented by a contribution to the present volume, the newly emergent Sophomore Seminar program shares with both Gottschalk’s and Hjortshoj’s chapters, and also with Harry Shaw’s “Finding Places for Writing in the Research University: A Director’s View,” an emphasis on the value Cornell attributes to the particularity and diversity of writing practices across the disciplines. Shaw further highlights the Institute’s capacity, by means of discipline-specific approaches to the teaching of writing at all levels of the curriculum, to provide a counterweight to institutional and disciplinary

pressures toward intellectual isolation and the fragmentation of knowledge. In preferring to focus on “concrete, institutionally situated (which is to say, historical) practices,” Shaw understands the writing program administrator’s ideal as to “let others do the talking” while making a few “expertly chosen institutional changes.” Like Shaw, I have felt exceptionally fortunate in having as my predecessor someone who placed such a premium on the role of listening. All of us in the Knight Institute, as well as many faculty members at Cornell, have benefited a great deal in this regard from another expert listener, Georgetown University’s James Slevin. Shaw brought Slevin to the program in 1986 to direct the annual Faculty Seminar in Writing Instruction, from which dozens of Cornell faculty, including myself, have since drawn insight and inspiration. As the “keystone of the course” for the past fourteen years, Slevin’s one-on-one work with Cornell faculty each summer has continued to inspire recognition that, in Shaw’s words, “attention to writing can enrich learning in all the disciplines pursued at a major research university.” By supplementing Slevin’s efforts in recent years with visits to the Faculty Seminar by such nationally known figures as David Bartholomae and Nancy Sommers, I have sought to expand the Knight Program’s dialogue with other influential voices in the field of writing instruction in ways that will, in Shaw’s words, help “capable people deal with real problems.” This goal is also addressed through the two yearlong postdoctoral fellowships we have awarded each year since 1997 with Knight Foundation funding.

In conceiving and launching *Writing in the Majors*, Shaw proceeded on the basis of a principle that continues to inform our approach to this day, namely that the way to “get instructors interested in making writing a focal point of courses they already teach” is “to make it appear plausible that by concentrating on writing, they could . . . teach the subjects of their expertise more successfully.” By “turning writing over to people in various academic fields,” as Shaw puts it, *Writing in the Majors* has been able to make inroads into disciplines that once might have seemed unlikely prospects for sustained interest in questions of writing. In recognition of the Institute’s expanded influence in this regard, and its growing role throughout the university community as a result of the new Knight funding, the directorship of the Institute has recently been redefined and reconfigured within the College of Arts and Sciences, as of fall 2000, under the title of associate dean. While this newly expanded role reflects the Institute’s increasing impact on the lives of Cornell faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates, its primary function continues to be, in Shaw’s words, “to create places where others [can] address substantive problems.”

### *Writing and Teaching Disciplinary Cultures*

*Local Knowledges, Local Practices* attests to the Knight Institute's commitment to listen to the disciplines themselves—to encourage faculty from these disciplines to speak of writing and the teaching of writing in their own terms and in their own voices. With this fundamental principle and guiding purpose in mind, I invited this volume's contributors to make presentations at the June 1999 consortium as the basis for the chapters included herein, and deliberately offered very little in the way of specific instructions. Intent on avoiding a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all response that might in any way compromise the imaginations of the contributors and the disciplinary effects that might emerge, I preferred to allow faculty of such diverse talents and interests to give shape to their own concerns. Thus, I asked colleagues from participating disciplines to write what I referred to as "thought pieces" or examples of "reflective practice" based on their experiences teaching First-Year Writing Seminars and/or Writing in the Majors courses. These pieces, I hoped, would open onto issues concerning the relationship between scholarship and teaching in varying disciplines and how each scholar perceives his or her field's disciplinary culture and writing practices. Since all of these colleagues were scheduled to teach Knight Program-sponsored courses that fall or spring, I suggested they might draw especially on those most recent experiences, including such materials as the course syllabus, writing assignment sequences, a specific assignment or two, and samples of student writing representing the quality and style of learning they wanted to model and encourage. Given the range of fields participating in the Knight Institute in both first-year and upper-division courses, my objective was to allow the variety of forms and contents of the contributions to exemplify the diversity of concerns and approaches that give writing at Cornell its particular richness and texture.

Organized alphabetically by field, the chapters that follow demonstrate remarkable commonality, as well as diversity. I have said that the Knight Institute views its most important function as the task of listening to faculty from across the disciplines. In *Local Knowledges, Local Practices*, the faculty have spoken. When we listen to faculty from such a range of disciplines talk about teaching writing and what's in it for them, what do they say? What do the chapters in this collection tell us? What do faculty get out of teaching these (admittedly labor-intensive) courses? Why does participation in the Cornell program remain strong?

According to the evidence assembled here, First-Year Writing Seminars and Writing in the Majors courses share at least three primary functions, each of which is emphasized to varying degrees by virtually all of the volume's contributors: a) to improve student writing for both specialists in particular fields and a broader public; b) to introduce students to received disciplinary forms and norms



not merely for the sake of imitation and replication, but to call these practices and their underlying assumptions into question; and c) in the process, to open up the discipline itself to other disciplinary perspectives and real-world concerns felt all too often by the faculty to be bracketed or ignored as a result of the university's compartmentalizing, often isolation-enforcing disciplinary structures.

### *Writing in the Sciences*

Speaking to these concerns, Elizabeth Oltenacu values her First-Year Seminar as a place to affirm “the discipline imposed by the constraints of science,” but also the importance of how those outside of animal science perceive the field, and of conveying “technical information into layperson’s terms.” She wants to emphasize, as well, how “issues of importance to the layperson will force animal scientists to think and write differently about their field . . . reflect more on the ethical implications.” Finally, she wants her First-Year Writing Seminars to help students “integrate subject areas and skills that will face them in the working world” and work against compartmentalization of learning.

This collection’s most striking example of resistance to such compartmentalization is perhaps Michael Spivey’s Writing in the Majors course in cognitive science, which places a premium on interdisciplinary conversation involving five distinctive disciplinary cultures—psychology, neurobiology, computer science, philosophy, and linguistics—as well as “interdisciplinary subfields.” Spivey asks his students to do journal entries, formal debates, and a major term paper, and sees it as his primary task to teach students about the five disciplines and “what the field of cognitive science knows about the major cognitive skills,” while introducing students to “fundamental methodologies and perspectives of the five contributing disciplines.” As is compellingly evident in the excerpts he includes from a prize-winning piece of writing by senior Elizabeth Tricomi, Spivey is successful in encouraging his students to include “logical argumentation,” “compelling linguistic examples,” and “scientific experimental evidence.”

Spivey’s emphasis on cultivating an interdisciplinary writing culture that will “*question* the facts” is a value that is affirmed in Paul W. Sherman’s “Teaching Behavioral Ecology through Writing.” In his Writing in the Majors course on behavioral ecology, a branch of evolutionary biology, Sherman wants his writing-intensive section to offer students “multiple, unhurried opportunities to synthesize and demonstrate their knowledge,” a challenge he says they are so eager to accept that his writing-intensive courses and sections are “consistently oversubscribed.” Noting that writing has become integral to pedagogy in all his courses as “an essential part of scientific communication,” he, like Oltenacu, wants his students to learn to address not only colleagues but also “the broader

scientific community and the public.” Having begun teaching writing-intensive courses out of frustration and dissatisfaction with traditional teaching of science, he now regularly assigns oral participation and frequent writing projects, “pounces” on first drafts, strongly encourages collaboration among classmates, reviews five hundred to six hundred short essays per term, builds in peer reviews and peer editing as part of the scientific process, and has his students work on grant proposals (for example, to the National Geographic Society) incorporating everything from hypotheses and methodologies to appropriate data, bibliography, and budget. Integrating more writing allows him to track the development of his students in real time, engage them in an ongoing dialogue, help them generate their own research questions, and see how they are progressing with “thorough information gathering, careful thought, and clear and concise exposition.” Emphasizing the importance of distinguishing “levels of analysis,” a concern similar to government professor Matthew Evangelista’s emphasis on competing/alternative explanations and interest in conversation across the disciplines, Sherman demonstrates an acute awareness of the different writing demands students face every day in moving across the curriculum. Like Oltenacu and many other contributors to the volume, he is deeply concerned with relevance in what he calls the “‘real world’ of science,” focusing, for example, in the last three weeks of each term on Darwinian medicine and staging “a student-led symposium” in which students “use their ‘basic’ knowledge to address ‘applied’ problems.”

### *Writing in the Humanities*

While the Knight Institute has found remarkable and inspiring interest among scientists in developing innovative assignments and uses of writing in the service of learning at all levels of the curriculum, funding constraints have, by and large, limited support of writing-intensive efforts in the humanities, where an interest in writing would be more readily assumed, to First-Year Writing Seminars. Such an interest is in evidence in the chapters by English department colleagues, Daniel R. Schwarz and Paul Sawyer. Focusing on questions of “citizenship, value, and self-understanding,” Paul Sawyer’s “Freshman Rhetoric and Media Literacy” explores the relationship between “specialization and liberal education” and the role of the university as “a place not of liberal but of professional education.” Seeing his course as a “place for exploring the nature of rhetorical engagement in general,” dealing with “context, audience, and occasion . . . communities, genres, and interactions,” he concludes his chapter with excerpts from a prize-winning student essay on Jonathan Kozol’s *Amazing Grace* that links “rhetorical readings to political meanings,” moves beyond

“the expertise of any single discipline,” and questions “the conventional limitations of politics-as-usual as constructed by the mass media.” Daniel R. Schwarz, meanwhile, argues for the value of his advanced First-Year Writing Seminar in “The Reading of Fiction” as a place to teach students close reading and the ability to “think independently and challenge accepted truths,” skills “transferable not only to other disciplines but to . . . future careers.” Echoing the concerns of anthropology professor Billie Jean Isbell and government professor Mary Katzenstein, Schwarz’s goal is not to create more professors within his field but to make students “productive citizens,” in part through consideration of such writing issues as “formal problems of point of view,” and in part through creating “a community of inquiry where each student understands learning as a process, takes responsibility for being prepared each day, takes his assignments seriously.”

As is clear in linguist John Whitman’s “Translation and Appropriation in Foreign Language and Writing Classrooms,” First-Year Writing Seminars work especially well as sites for serious disciplinary and cross-disciplinary play. Asking what useful commonalities there are “between the teaching of foreign languages and teaching writing,” Whitman argues that the “broad sense of translation provides models for a type of language appropriation . . . important for teaching academic writing.” He discusses the role of writing in foreign language learning through the linguist’s distinction between “procedural” and “declarative” knowledge, and in so doing, provides an excellent example of useful thinking about writing generated from within his own particular disciplinary frame of reference, with his own disciplinary terminology, a distinction also strongly manifest in the chapter by sociologist Michael Macy. An especially compelling consequence of Whitman’s reflection in this regard is his recognition of the difficulties involved in applying assessment models for what counts as good writing across disciplinary boundaries. Distinguishing the “appropriation” model of language teaching from the “initiation” model of teaching writing, of “appropriatory versus initiatory thinking,” Whitman explores the benefits of transferring “the activity of language appropriation to writing entirely within the world of English.” To that end, he has his students do rewriting exercises and especially exercises in inter-genre translation, as, for example, in the recasting of the Orwell essay, “Shooting an Elephant” into play form, with students performing roles in skits they have written. These exercises in rewriting, genre appropriation, and “dramatic adaptation” give students a sense of power, Whitman discovers, freeing them to rewrite even canonical materials in ways that help them understand that “any type of language learning involves establishing ownership . . . appropriation.”

Like Whitman's focus on Orwell in India, Ross Brann's *Writing in the Majors* course in Near Eastern studies, described in his "Writing Religion at Cornell (Reflections of a Penitent Professor)," opens onto questions of cross-cultural translation and appropriation. Stressing "the critical function of student revisions" in effectively cutting across the disciplines—and through cultural biases—his course on North African Islamic culture emphasizes writing "not properly considered a skill at all but a significant, transformative vehicle for thinking and learning itself." Tensions concerning the transformative power of language and thinking, "good" writing, and disciplinary appropriation surface as well as concerns in Jennifer E. Whiting's chapter, "Cultivating Dialectical Imagination." Calling into question the disciplinary specificity of the goals of "precision, clarity, and rigor" in philosophy (as compared, for example, to legal writing, or "writing in the natural and social sciences"), Whiting notes that much great philosophy, such as that of Wittgenstein or Nietzsche, takes the form of "cryptic or paradoxical remarks." In that context, she fears that an unquestioned emphasis on these traditional values of "good" writing in general and good philosophical writing in particular might "encourage reductive habits of mind." Since truths, she writes, "may be messy or paradoxical . . . vagueness and indirection may in some cases serve truth-respecting and/or communicative functions." For Whiting, "philosophical writing" involves an "articulation of one's own views in response to imagined views," and the cultivation of "philosophical imagination." Accordingly, in her First-Year Writing Seminar, she explores issues of voice, character, and claims, challenging students, like government colleague Matthew Evangelista, or biologist Paul Sherman, to cultivate "appreciation of views opposed to one's own," to "recognize the complexity of issues and to resist superficial solutions to deep problems," and to value "intellectual integrity" and "rigor." Echoing Whitman's notion of translating between genres—here between dialogue and a "straightforward argumentative piece"—she invites her students to cultivate "dialectical discussion with themselves and with each other" that will draw them "into dialogue . . . with the broader philosophical community." Seeing philosophy as, in the words of one of her students, "just like one big conversation," she enacts the primacy of dialogue within, between, and among the disciplines that lies at the heart of what the Knight Institute is about. Exploring her field's "distinctive 'disciplinary culture,'" she concludes by affirming that "philosophy, perhaps more than any other discipline, is fundamentally dialectical." Drawing, interestingly, on terms that have a complex (inter)disciplinary pedigree, she wants her students to become "participants and not simply observers," acutely aware of issues of disciplinary positioning.

Such positioning is a source of rich reflection in Romance studies professor

Marilyn Migiel's "Writing (Not Drawing) a Blank," which begins by recalling a student's pointed question about her own disciplinary identity: "What *are* you?" the student asked. Echoing again the resistance to disciplinary confinement so prevalent among the volume's contributors, she answers: "I would prefer to escape . . . a restrictive notion of what it means to immerse oneself in the study of a foreign language and culture" (in this case Italian studies). Having come to feel less comfortable after her first decade in the profession, Migiel credits her First-Year Writing Seminar with moving her toward "a massive paradigm shift: teaching centered not on what I knew but what somebody else needed to know." Like such colleagues as Isbell and Sawyer in this respect, she wants to offer students the possibility of reclaiming their language. Focusing on the topic of her current research, the *Decameron*, because it "takes as its subject language itself," her course syllabus documents "two crucial shifts in my pedagogical approach: one in the sequence of assignments, the other in use of writing assignments that are personal and creative rather than traditionally 'analytic.'" To illustrate the possible consequences for students of her desire to "mirror the nonlinear processes of composing, revising, and rewriting," Migiel includes in her appendix a paper by Jessi King, the very student who asked her who (or rather "what") she is. What both Migiel and her student share in the end, what the First-Year Writing Seminar allows both teacher and student to explore with each other, are their interdisciplinary interests, their resistance to disciplinary confinement. While Migiel resists this confinement by teaching a First-Year Writing Seminar in her area of professional expertise, the student does so by entering Cornell's College Scholar Program. Migiel's course thus becomes the place where a student interested in "philosophy, government, and psychology" can learn to integrate "the various languages and modes of argument" in these various disciplines, a path "outside rigid disciplinary boundaries" perhaps too seldom found in today's multiversity, even one such as Cornell, where "any person can pursue any study." Offering an occasion for the student to discover "that the acquisition of knowledge . . . is not limited to a single discipline . . . the presence of multiple answers is not proof of no answer," her First-Year Writing Seminar exemplifies the function of writing courses not to settle on a premature "thesis," as if such a thesis were a final resting place, but to explore question after open-ended question.

### *Writing in the Social Sciences*

In 1997, the Park Foundation awarded a five-year grant targeting the development of Writing in the Majors at Cornell, specifically in the social sciences. Thanks in part to this grant, the past five years have yielded an impressive array

of courses in two areas that are represented with particular strength in the present volume, anthropology and government. As anyone with a Ph.D. in virtually any field understands, the sometimes monolithic appearance a discipline may have to those outside the discipline can be wildly misleading. Colleagues in the same field may look more like colleagues in another field, as government professor Matthew Evangelista observes of his political scientist colleagues, than like each other. In including chapters by several colleagues in the same field, *Local Knowledges, Local Practices* offers students and faculty alike a chance to explore what members of a disciplinary culture have or don't have in common in their writing practices, not only with colleagues from other disciplines, but among themselves. The process of observing differences within, among, and between disciplines may be one of the more liberating, if also one of the more vexing, experiences university students (and faculty) may encounter.

Noting the recent crisis in anthropology as a discipline that has arisen through acute self-consciousness about "the role of writing in its intellectual project," Jane Fajans understands her First-Year Writing Seminars and Writing in the Majors courses as occasions to exoticize the familiar and familiarize the exotic through a focus on food. Seeking to help students become more analytical and less descriptive than they tend to be in first drafts, she wants to improve students' "conceptual and communicative skills," help them understand the "correspondence between thinking and writing," and gain an understanding of anthropological writing as a "complex genre of research and analysis." Like English colleague Paul Sawyer, Billie Jean Isbell sees her First-Year Writing Seminar in anthropology as an occasion, above all, to think about "the kind of citizens we are producing in an increasingly interconnected global environment." Focusing on materials from three Latin American countries: Guatemala, Chile, and Argentina, she wants her students to focus on issues of "difference and equality" and "the imperatives of freedom and justice" and wonders whether students remain "isolated from world events across the disciplines as they complete their degrees." Isbell questions what role disciplines play in encouraging global citizenship from the perspective of the intensely interdisciplinary mix of students in her class, who typically come from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the College of Engineering, as well as the College of Arts and Sciences; as part of this exploration, she asks her students to pretend that they are members of an international organization of global managers meeting to discuss common issues. Constructing writing assignments that situate her students in contexts beyond the academy, she asks them to write about the effects of their decisions as engineers on corporate policies. Such concerns are, for her, a pervasive reason for faculty participation in First-Year Writing Seminars and Writing in the Majors. Like Sawyer and Whitman, Isbell encourages her students to explore

various genres as preparation for real-world engagement after the university. One powerful example of her work in this way is her attention to the genre of the “testimonio,” which raises questions of the relationship between individual and collective authorship, culture, and authority, in ways that open onto broader contexts. In asking her students to follow the Rigoberta Menchú controversy through *Active Voices*, the on-line journal of *Cultural Survival*, Isbell brings her students to think about the relationship between writing and culture with a particular sense of urgency. In following the popular press and journals, her students gain a sophisticated sense of questions of genre and audience, reading, writing, politics, and mass media. Her focus on the testimonial as a literary genre and its relation to anthropological writing allows her students to explore “collective autobiographical witnessing” and “coauthored texts,” to ask who has the authority to create a narrative or a history, and engage the complex disciplinary questions of a “postmodernist anthropology” through a matter as apparently “simple” as pronoun usage.

As Kathryn S. March makes clear in “Writing from (Field) Experience,” writing is “pivotal” to learning in all her upper-division classes. Typically cross-listed with anthropology, women’s studies, and Asian studies, March’s courses seek to move students away from the conventional term-research paper toward a more complex understanding of the processes of writing as “entangled in every stage of the enterprise, from observing to recording, testing to verifying, disseminating and critiquing, revising and finalizing.” In emphasizing these more “interstitial moments, where writing is integral to the larger tasks of seeing, recording, understanding, and communicating the world around us,” she, like Isbell, wants to move her students “beyond textual learning into the practical world.” Joining “the recent anthropological call for a better understanding of disciplinary practice” with her understanding of writing as the cornerstone of “enhanced critical awareness,” she works with her students to unlock the “paralysis that this new critical awareness seems to produce.” In examining the limits of disciplinary self-critique, the ways “knowledge is inherently adverbial,” her readings range from the feminist critique of anthropology, to history of science and “the fundamental relativity of scientific truth(s),” to “feminism and the problematics of ethnographic authority,” including the “tangible practices in writing”—such as uses of quotation marks, qualifying phrases, point of view, passive voice—with which these issues articulate themselves.

The government department’s three contributions offer a particularly thought-provoking set of examples and perspectives on disciplinary writing practices within the same discipline. Noting that political science or government includes “people who act very much like economists or sociologists, statisticians or historians,” as is true also in his own subfield, international relations, Matthew

Evangelista affirms the value of his Writing in the Majors course for exploring interdisciplinary identities. Given this complex makeup of his field, he wants to expose students to an “extensive range of writing styles,” including those of game theorists, statisticians, and postmodern scholars. Charting “a middle course” among various options, he argues that despite their differences, political scientists are united by their shared desire to “account for some political behavior . . . by developing competing explanations and evaluating the evidence.” Writing “short opinion pieces on topical issues, or even letters to the editor,” as well as pieces in other genres, Evangelista’s students unlearn high school lessons concerning outlines, first person, and passive constructions, and learn to think of writing as an integral disciplinary concern. Maintaining an editor’s emphasis on “clarity, consistency, and organization,” he attempts to balance portability and professionalization, encouraging students to reconcile “redundancies and contradictions” and deal with “problematic evidence and alternative explanations.” While he admits to a bit of a “cookbook quality” in his writing guidelines, he has thought carefully about them. His self-avowedly formulaic approach, concerning, for example, introductions and conclusions, contrasts with the approach of his government department colleague, Mary Katzenstein, whose sense of what constitutes good writing tends to emphasize a more exploratory and aleatory approach. Stressing “clear presentation and coherent argumentation,” Evangelista understands that the purpose of Writing in the Majors is “to integrate the teaching of writing with the substantive study of an academic discipline.” In this vein, he offers his students opportunities to use “primary sources, such as newspapers; secondary historical accounts; and theoretical discussions,” and argues, like sociologist Michael Macy, that learning to read critically is an important way to improve one’s writing skills. Since in fields “as varied as political science or international relations, what qualifies as good writing may be a matter of dispute,” he exposes students to theoretical abstractions, but also “real-world politics.” Evangelista shares with many contributors, including, for example, Jennifer Whiting in philosophy and Mary Katzenstein, a concern to make his teaching of writing at once discipline-specific and portable to other disciplines. To do so, he stresses “clear organization and exposition; relating evidence to arguments; and evaluating competing explanations” as “the necessary core of good writing practices in the discipline.”

Mary Fainsod Katzenstein’s “Writing Political Science: Asking a Question then (Actually) Answering It” questions what we are training students to write *for*. Are faculty within her discipline training students to be “bonsai political science professors (diminutive replicas of ourselves)?” She understands her First-Year Writing Seminars and Writing in the Majors courses in government, as Migiel understands hers in Romance studies, as places to ask hard questions



about disciplinary identity and belonging. Preferring to err on the side of the “indisciplined,” she emphasizes “open-ended assignments,” abandoning sequencing questions, and encouraging students to find their own way. Recalling that the first essay she ever wrote as an undergraduate of which she felt real ownership was one she wrote in her junior year comparing and contrasting two authors on the issue of community and individualism, she wants her students to feel, as Whiting also emphasizes, “a personal stake . . . in a collective conversation.” In this regard, she sees a clear difference in the writing of first-year and upper-division students. Where the latter find it harder “to come up with ‘the’ question, but easier to make it interesting once they do,” first-year students find it “easier to define the question, but harder to get beyond the prosaic.” Concluding with two opening paragraphs from a freshman essay, Katzenstein echoes Whiting’s call (and Sherman’s, and Schwarz’s), for writing to open onto a “perpetual dialogue.” Like Sherman and Evangelista, she emphasizes the importance of falsifiable queries and of the ability to account for “possible alternatives” as a hallmark of the capacity to distinguish a good from a bad question.

In “The Politics of Writing,” government colleague Rose McDermott is concerned first and foremost with the challenges involved in integrating scholarship and teaching and distinguishing the needs of different levels of students. Including sections of her course syllabi, writing assignments, and student work, she argues that First-Year Writing Seminars offer a rare opportunity for faculty to explore the relationship between research and teaching in ways that “reconnect with what they originally found compelling and engaging in their own field,” including current events. With undergraduates, she writes, “the wedge into consciousness is not the door of abstract theory, but the window of these concrete events and circumstances from which the academic discipline also extracts facts, evidence, and arguments.” Wanting to emphasize “questions and problems in the world,” she sees her First-Year Writing Seminar as a place for teachers to “discover ways to reformulate abstract theoretical constructs into more accessible, useful, and interesting arguments.” The First-Year Writing Seminar is, for her, a hinge between the culture(s) of a discipline and the broader culture, an opportunity for faculty both to “have an immediate impact on student understanding and to refine and extend the meaning and value of their more abstract work in their own writing.” Exposing her students to “several kinds of political writing,” including journalism, reporting and analyzing, professional political science writing, and political journalism, she hopes, like Isbell and other colleagues from across the disciplines, to create “sophisticated and active members of a democratic civil society.” The First-Year Writing Seminar offers a rare opportunity, she writes, to work against those “academic incentives” that “reward the theoretical, not the political.” Attentive to “the disciplinary argot of political

science,” she nevertheless wants to widen “the scope of how we define our discipline.” Convinced that “truly great writing surpasses disciplinary boundaries,” she wants to offer, like Evangelista, Sherman, and others, alternative explanations and a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

Like Brann in *Near Eastern studies*, but from the perspective of a professor in city and regional planning with a focus on North American cities, William Goldsmith takes cultural difference as the topic of his First-Year Writing Seminar. Like Sherman, Whiting, and others, Goldsmith credits his seminar in his chapter, “The Invisible City of Color, or ‘I Thought This Was a Course on Writing!’” with transforming his teaching at all levels of the curriculum. Using “fiction, essays, and journalism on race, inequality, ‘invisibility,’ and the city,” he works to help each student learn to “write for the public” within a field that is broadly interdisciplinary.

In his *Writing in the Majors* course called “Group Solidarity,” sociologist Michael Macy values the opportunity to work against the anonymity of the lecture class to create the kind of interaction English colleague Schwarz calls a “community of inquiry,” an emphasis that will be integral in years to come to the development of the Knight Institute’s Sophomore Seminars, with their limited enrollment of only fifteen students per course. Like John Whitman’s chapter on teaching writing in the foreign language classroom, Macy’s piece is striking in its use of the terminology of his own discipline to talk about the teaching of writing, as in his helpful distinction between “instructionist” and “constructionist” approaches to learning and his application of “game theory” to the pedagogy of writing instruction. Articulating an appreciation of reading and the teaching of writing from within a sociologist’s frame of reference and with a sociologist’s terminological tools, Macy demonstrates a keen interest in the construction of multiple meanings and the usefulness of writing to guide, rather than stifle, critical inquiry. Of a piece in this sense with the similar emphases and different tactics of Katzenstein and Evangelista in asking and answering good questions, Macy’s chapter proposes that the purpose of a “carefully structured writing exercise” in a *Writing in the Majors* course is “not to teach writing but to teach sociology.” Accordingly, he uses writing in *Group Solidarity* to move more effectively between “highly theoretical accounts” and “empirically grounded case studies.” Requiring a short paper every three weeks, he asks students to take on the author’s voice, rhetoric, and style, and criticize a previous reading assignment. Whether exploring point of view, as in Schwarz’s English course, or issues of authority, as in Isbell’s and Migiel’s, Macy understands frequent feedback as a crucial feature of Knight Institute–sponsored courses at all levels of the curriculum, one that helps students move “beyond rote exegesis,” linking social science to science. Macy shares Evangelista’s emphasis on ask-

ing students “to read not as a reader but as a writer,” and appreciates Migiel’s focus on the interpenetration of reading and writing skills as students explore nonlinearity in the *Decameron*. In writing of a text as a “toy,” and asking his students to engage in playful disassembly and reassembly, as for example from the point of view of a game theorist, Macy comes close to Whiting’s and Katzenstein’s emphases on open-ended questions. At the same time, the “concise but highly effective argument” and use of sociological terminology documented in the student paper excerpts he has included recall Evangelista’s similar point. Macy writes, “I am not trying to teach students to write, or for that matter, to write like a sociologist. I save that for graduate seminars. Here, I am using writing exercises to teach students to *read* like a sociologist. . . . Real learning begins when students are able to reconstruct what they read, and to that end, writing can be an effective tool.” Allowing multiple iterations for students to learn and improve, the short writing exercises he assigns indicate how seriously he takes the issue of student writing as part of the learning process. At the same time, encouraging an awareness of outcomes and meaningful evaluation, his longer assignments ask students to apply theories, like Migiel and McDermott, in ways that reinforce reading and writing as complementary skills.

In offering these brief accounts of some of the more striking particulars of the wide-ranging chapters that follow, I have attempted to give some sense of the variability of response they may engender in accordance with the three major traditional divisions of academic knowledge and practice. Taken together, the chapters clearly resonate with one another in ways that resist overly narrow disciplinary appropriations. As productive as it may be to compare and contrast approaches to the teaching of writing within a discipline, as in the examples from anthropology and government, or from discipline to discipline, as between, say, city and regional planning and Near Eastern studies, it may be equally fruitful to juxtapose essays moving within the same level of the curriculum, or from a First-Year Writing Seminar to a Writing in the Majors course. The chapters contained herein attest to the endless possibilities every undergraduate, every graduate student, and every faculty member encounters—at least potentially—every day within a university’s curriculum, possibilities that call us back to the fundamentally open-ended richness and variety of each discipline’s local knowledges and local practices.