

# Introduction

## WORKING PAST THE PROFESSION

Very much depends upon what we select from which to start and very much depends upon whether we select our point of departure in order to tell . . . what . . . *ought* to be or what *is*.

John Dewey in 1954, *The Public and Its Problems*, 9.

### MY HISTORY OF COLLEGE

English studies begins by looking past the rise of the profession in the last century to explore how the teaching of English in American colleges has been shaped by broader developments in literacy since the colonial period. Reflecting upon those developments can help us to come to terms with the changes in literacy that are redefining what we teach and how we study it. Most English departments have come to include a diverse array of critics, compositionists, writers, applied linguists, and educators who sometimes seem to share little more than a mailing address. If English is a discipline, what are its parameters and priorities, and how does it encompass the varied subjects that are taught in courses that run the gamut from first-year composition to graduate seminars in literature and ESOL? The incoherence of the field is amply documented in the bundle of courses that make up the traditional undergraduate major in English. Rather than being guided by research on students' changing needs, curricular requirements often reflect historical compromises and accommodations. As detailed in the national surveys that will be examined in later chapters, a traditional literature major generally includes a token course on language and an advanced writing course, though many departments have responded to the popularity of writing courses by adding a parallel major or track in creative writing, and perhaps business or technical writing. Rarely do the transcripts of English majors provide any cohesive sense of the range of concerns that are

addressed in departments that have expanded to include studies of world Englishes, online literacies, and the other areas of English studies that have grown up around a modern sense of literature. This incoherence is a product of our history, and I believe that a review of that history can help us make sense of what college English is, and perhaps what it ought to be as well.

English departments generally include a collocation of subject matters that can be grouped into four general areas: literature, language, English education, and writing. Each of these areas includes varied subspecialties. For example, writing is a disjointed area of study divided up by the developments in composition and creative writing that have tended to set them at odds. Because our concerns are so wide ranging, the historical developments of the four corners of our field have largely been examined in isolation from each other. The best-known account of our discipline is Gerald Graff's recently rereleased history of "the profession of literature," *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*. As Graff acknowledges in the preface to the new edition (2007), the reduction of English studies to literary studies has tended to marginalize the teaching of writing, language, and English education. For their part, histories of rhetoric and composition have tended to concentrate on the development of composition courses, and have paid little attention to the efforts of teachers of fiction and poetry to distinguish themselves from journalists and other teachers of writing. Few histories of English have attended to the development of grammar, philology, or linguistics within English studies, in part because linguistics is presumed to have its own disciplinary history (even though departments of linguistics are generally confined to research universities). The institutional history of English education has also not been studied, though that is changing as historians have begun to reexamine how English education became peripheral to English studies.

Each of these areas has a history that predates the establishment of English departments, and those histories are integral to the institutional development of the teaching of English in American colleges. I integrate those areas' histories into that institutional development by characterizing English studies not as literary studies but as literacy studies. I realize that using the term *literacy studies* in this way is problematic. With the "New Literacy Studies," literacy studies (like cultural studies) has become an interdisciplinary, even postdisciplinary movement. Literacy studies cannot really be claimed by any particular discipline—and if it could, professors of education could make a better claim than professors of English.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, defining English studies as literacy

studies provides a frame of reference that connects the teaching of English to broader trends in literacy and the literate. Attending to those trends can help us see our discipline's concentration on a modern sense of literature as one chapter in a history that extends back to previous eras when literature was defined in religious, oratorical, and belletristic terms. Each of those historical formations has included different modes of reading, writing, and teaching with their own distinctive epistemologies, technologies, and political economies. In each case, literature was upheld as the paragon of literacy that was defined by genres and modes of expression that were taken to represent the literate in highly valued ways.

Literature, literacy, and the literate define each other within a shifting field of cultural production whose structure can be framed by drawing on the theories of Pierre Bourdieu. As Bourdieu discusses in *The Field of Cultural Production*, a field of literary or artistic production differs from a field of study that has obvious use value (such as the teaching of basic reading and writing) because an aesthetic field has to distinguish not only its objects of discourse but also the values that legitimize the distinctions it draws around those objects (164). The "symbolic capital" of any artistic field has economic and political value, but that value accrues only through long-term investments that enable an individual to assume the prestige vested in the aesthetic object (7). Through experience and instruction, practitioners in a field develop "a feel for the game," often tacitly, as they acquire a sense for what makes a story or stance interesting or useful (17). In the process, practitioners come to distinguish themselves from amateurs and others who put their objects of study to different uses (*Practical Reason* 102). A discipline's generic expectations form the competencies and capacities that constitute its field of cultural production (*Field* 176). In this sense, the *discipline* of college English studies is broader and more mutable than the *profession* of college English as we generally understand it. Our profession is but one institutional formation with its own distinctive conceptions of literature and literacy that are integrally involved with how literacy is acquired and evaluated—which are in turn shaped by broader developments in educational access, changing technologies of literacy, and the modes of self-representation that are valued by the literate classes in a particular period.

This framework can help us to look past some of the assumptions that have limited our perspective on our field of work. Even our best histories have tended to view our past from the standpoint of research universities. Research universities tend to be central to our professional sense of self because they

are where most of us acquired the professional credentials to do what we do. However, when we center “our” history on research universities, we tend to overlook much of our field of work, and many of our coworkers. If we consider changes in literacy as a framework for disciplinary developments, then we would expect to see those developments emerge not at the centers but at the boundaries of the field—in more accessible institutions where literacy changes as privileged forms are put to new uses by less assimilated populations. Yet much of our thinking about disciplinary developments still tacitly presumes that theory is disseminated from research institutions down to practitioners on the ground. Hence, histories of ideas within disciplines have tended to center on leading thinkers as the sources of change. This stance is understandable because “our” histories are generally written by those of us who have been granted time to do research, and those of us who occupy positions that provide time to do research would like to think that what we write shapes what we do. How that actually works remains an open question. Commentaries on the discipline generally ignore how its changing assumptions are shaped by development in its social engagements, institutional practices, and critical capacities.

If we define our field of study by the work we do, we may be able to acknowledge that changes in the discipline are less akin to the history of ideas than to changes in languages and literacies. Languages and literacies change in broadly based, socially negotiated ways—through use, particularly in spaces and institutions where received modes of expression are inflected by new users. To understand disciplinary changes at work, we need to hold our theories accountable to the transactions of teachers and students at work in class, where literate forms change in tandem with the uses that are made of them. In broadly based institutions, literate conventions are explained to those who have not acquired them as part of their natural upbringing. In the process, conventions may come to seem less “natural” as they are questioned and explained in ways that may or may not make sense of the experience of others. In such spaces, which Mary Louise Pratt has taught us to see as “contact zones,” the discipline has evolved at an elemental level as it has been pressed to come to terms with the experiences of those who make their way through our gateway courses. In such spaces, college English has been inflected by the idioms and aspirations of those working through it. Canonical texts have been reinterpreted through shifting registers of experience in a process that Pratt has termed “transculturation.”<sup>2</sup>

Attending to those points and processes can help us come to terms with the expansive institutional base of college English studies. English is the most widely taught subject in American schools and colleges. Our field extends from teaching people how to articulate their aspirations to interpreting the classics of the literate culture and preparing the literate to write for popular and specialized audiences. The profession has discounted these expansive engagements in ways it has come to regret as more than “service” courses have been temped out to paraprofessionals. Most college English classes are now taught by “temporary” faculty and teaching assistants. This development has pressed the profession to take account of its broader responsibilities. According to the Association of Departments of English (ADE) Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing in 1999, “The institutionalization of a multitiered faculty that is sharply divided in its levels of compensation and security of employment” threatens “the capacity of the academic profession to renew itself and pass on to the future the ideal of the scholar-teacher—the faculty member who, while pursuing new knowledge, takes active responsibility for the institution, the department, and all parts of the curriculum” (4).

This capacity can be strengthened by investing more of our intellectual energies into our expansive power base. One way to think about that need is to think about English studies as literacy studies. English is taught from grammar to graduate school, but English professors rarely attend to their expansive educational base because academics have historically claimed professional standing not as educators but as disciplinary specialists. College English studies have been particularly debilitated by academics’ tendency to distance their professional purposes from their service duties. English departments have had to discount broadly influential areas of their work to disarticulate their specialized expertise from their expansive engagements with general and teacher education. The hierarchies that have structured the profession have systematically ignored writing, teaching, and teacher preparation—a curiously dysfunctional structure given the fact that these are precisely what are involved in the “capacity of the academic profession to renew itself and pass on” its distinctive forms of expertise. Our disciplinary expertise is centrally concerned with studying and teaching literacy, insofar as many undergraduates and most graduate students in English will teach for a living—though you would hardly know that from most of the programs of study that prepare them for that work.

Literacy studies provides an integrative framework that founds work with literature, language, writing, and teaching on an equal footing by providing a

bottom-up perspective that focuses on the expansive power base of our discipline. Literacy studies synthesizes histories of the teaching of literature, language studies, English education, and writing in American colleges. A broadly based historical perspective on college English studies is needed to provide a more coherent sense of what English departments are about, and for. As I and others have noted, English departments have become bastions of the culture of the book as they have assumed a position with respect to the literate culture that parallels that which classics departments came to with the transition from classical to modern cultural studies a century ago. Teaching close reading can be a radical undertaking in a culture beset by attention deficit disorder, but we need to develop more expansive and integrative accounts of what English departments do. Such accounts may be able to foster a shared sense of purpose that is responsive to the technological and social changes that have redefined what it means to be literate. English departments are not as stable as they were when the classics of literature were viewed as central to the education of every literate person. Rhetoric and composition programs may well follow the centrifugal trajectories that took speech, drama, and journalism out of university English departments as they came to define themselves by a modern sense of literature. English departments are losing their hold on professors working with projects ranging from ethnic to media studies. The centrifugal forces that are pulling college English apart are paralleled by the centripetal pressures that are converging on its institutional base. Both sets of forces are coming from social and institutional changes that can best be addressed by developing coalitions with other teachers of English. Such coalitions have proven effective at other historical junctures when literacy studies have been pressed to adapt to broader changes in literacy and the literate. Reviewing what English studies have been about can help us assess what they are about to become.

### *Histories of the Four Corners of the Field*

Historic transitions in English studies arise at critical junctures when developments in literacy studies, literacy, and the literate converge. A pragmatic stance is attentive to the possibilities for change that emerge at junctures where expanding disciplinary trends connect with social and technological shifts in literacy. Those shifts sometimes converge with institutional changes, especially those that shape educational access to the literate classes. These socio-

institutional developments have been touched upon by some of the most useful research on the historical development of studies of literature, writing, language, and English education. This research has contributed to the pragmatic stance that the profession has adopted in recent decades as institutional resources have declined and the profession has been pressed to account for itself in more practical terms. Those declines have pressed the profession to attend to the debilitating disjunction between its traditional research mission and its basic institutional duties. In response, our histories and professional commentaries have begun to pay more attention to institutional processes such as professionalization and articulation. Stanley Fish was one of the most visible representatives of the pragmatic turn that was adopted in response to first the collapse of jobs and majors in the 1970s and then the “culture wars” in the 1980s. This pragmatic stance has become increasingly important as the numbers of professional positions in the field have continued to decline. This pragmatic stance provides a focal point for converging trends in several of the best-known histories of the teaching of literature, language, English education, and writing.

The pragmatic turn of the 1980s shaped the institutional focus of our most noted disciplinary history: Gerald Graff’s *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*. Graff surveys how professional practices have been shaped by the debates among shifting alliances of humanists, philologists, teachers, and critics, with each generation failing to make practical use of its generative oppositions. Successive generations were accused of “elevating esoteric, technocratic jargon over humanistic values, coming between literature itself and the student, [and] turning literature into an elitist pastime for specialists” (4). Graff offered incisive assessments of the pragmatics of institutional change, including the tendency of departments to accommodate change by adding isolated courses in areas such as feminist theory. Graff called for professors to make use of their differences by “teaching the conflicts” among schools of criticism. Graff claimed that teaching the conflicts would help departments develop cohesive programs of study without marginalizing differences. On this and other points, Graff set out practical strategies for intervening in institutional change. Graff’s own engagement with the pragmatics of professionalism have expanded in ways that parallel developments in the careers of other noted commentators such as Robert Scholes, Stanley Fish, and Richard Lanham. After gaining recognition in the 1970s with works on literary theory, Graff and these other critics turned in the 1980s to position disciplinary debates in institutional

contexts, and then they expanded their focus still farther afield to explain the discipline to broader audiences, as in Graff's *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind* and the textbooks he has published to provide students with heuristics for reading academic conventions. In the writings of such commentators, one can see how our discipline's focus has shifted from traditional objects of study to the institutional practices of the field, and then to articulating the work of the field to broader audiences.

One of the most insightful examples of the pragmatic turn in literary studies in the 1980s was Evan Watkins's *Work Time: English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (1989). *Work Time* has some of the limitations of other accounts that equate English studies with literary studies, but in other respects, the work has a considerable range and depth of vision. Watkins examines English departments as "a site of cultural production" that is positioned within economies in which the values of literary studies circulate as evaluations of students' literate abilities (8). With a theoretical sophistication that is quite instructive, Watkins acknowledged that the professed values of literature occupy a "marginal position in the circulation of ideologies," as compared to television, film, and advertising. However, English departments have a "relatively crucial position in the social circulation of people" through education (25). Watkins called upon the discipline to attend to the circulation of its work through the lives of those who work through it, particularly those spaces where the critical responses of students can exercise practical agency. Watkins attended to the pragmatic conditions and consequences of what gets done in English departments. He recognized that students often see a critical analysis of a literary work as an "empty" promise because they do not have free time to reflect upon the politics of signification in the ways that professors do. Unfortunately, Watkins did not consider that many teachers of English are also denied the time to reflect upon what they do by the institutional economies at work in English departments. Watkins strategically presumed upon the fact that virtually all college students are required to take composition courses to argue that literary studies has a "crucial" position in the circulation of literacy. This presumption has been critiqued by Richard Miller in "Fault Lines in the Contact Zone." *Work Time* calculatedly explained the pragmatics of literary studies without acknowledging their dependence on composition, which in the eighties had grown from a peripheral service area with only 4 percent of job listings in MLA postings to become the single largest area of professional hiring. In 1987, there were twice as many MLA postings for rhetoric,



composition, and technical writing (30.3 percent) as for all periods of British literature (15.1 percent) (Huber, Pinney, and Laurence). By 1989, graduate programs in rhetoric and composition had been added to one-third of doctoral institutions, with public universities three times more likely to have added such programs (Huber, “A Report on the 1986 Survey of English Doctoral Programs in Writing and Literature”). Those programs are one of the clearest examples of how shifts in our institutional base have bubbled up to force changes in professional structures, rather than trickled down from elite institutions. In fact elite research universities have programmatically ignored the expansion of graduate studies to include studies of rhetoric and composition, and have confined the teaching of writing to service units, sometimes led by a token faculty member with professional expertise in rhetoric and composition.

The pragmatic turn in the 1980s deepened as the exclusion of writing teachers from the “profession of literature” began to be reassessed. Where Graff saw the profession arising out of a moribund classicism and outmoded belletrism in nineteenth-century colleges, Susan Miller and other historians of composition and rhetoric blamed the profession itself for reducing rhetoric to ancillary courses in stylistic formalities that were divorced from the broader concerns of classical rhetoric. In *Rescuing the Subject* in 1989 and then two years later in *Textual Carnivals*, Miller argued for recentering disciplinary studies on acts of student writing in order to redress the presumed opposition of subjects and objects of literacy. As Miller discussed, the moments in which writers develop their intellectual capacities through collaborative mediations are central to realizing the critical potentials of literacy studies. In his 1994 article criticizing those who have failed to attend to the pragmatics of pedagogy, Richard Miller concludes that the history of our discipline needs to be rewritten from the standpoint of how student writing has been “solicited, read, and responded to” (175).<sup>3</sup>

This pragmatic standpoint was set out in David Russell’s history of writing across the curriculum in 1991. As Russell discussed, disciplines are rhetorically composed through the writings that make up the field—beginning with student examinations and theses, proceeding through the publications that yield promotions, and culminating with the research that composes the field’s body of knowledge. Like Graff, Russell offered topoi that have proven their explanatory power in how they have been used to explain institutional forces at work. Russell’s concept of “the rhetoric of transparent disciplinarity” helps to explain why academics have paid so little attention to their work with teaching

and writing. The process of composing disciplinary expertise tends to be conceived as simply a matter of writing up research, because acknowledging that expertise is rhetorically negotiated raises critical questions about whose purposes that knowledge serves. Russell's history shows how disciplines reduce their learning capacities by treating writing as a basic skill to be mastered elsewhere. "Content" faculty become detached from the pragmatics of what they do if they fail to attend to the rhetorical forms and collaborative processes that shape their work. Because our discipline has such an expansive involvement with writing and teaching, it has been especially incapacitated by failing to attend more fully to these forms and processes. Part of what has been missed is the historical contribution of women to our work. Teaching was the first area of the public sphere that opened up to women. The "feminization" of teaching shaped the development of English education, and English departments' reactions to it. Teacher education has been the primary conduit for women, workers, and people of color who looked to education as a means to social advancement, and professors at vital junctures in the development of our discipline have looked down upon teaching in part because they saw it as women's work.

A similar reaction against popular needs and aspirations has shaped the history of writing instruction, most obviously the distancing of creative writing from journalism and other areas of writing studies. Writing for the public has generally been discounted because academics define their standing by their specialized expertise rather than by their ability to communicate that expertise to others, but the interactive technologies that are transforming literacy are giving renewed significance to the discipline's engagement with writing at work in public life. Redressing the disjuncture between creative and other writing courses can foster vital intradisciplinary alliances, as Mayers discussed in *(Re)Writing Craft: Composition, Creative Writing, and the Future of English*. In the only book-length history of creative writing classes, D. G. Myers has examined how they emerged out of advanced composition courses in the Progressive era (see also Adams, *A History of Professional Writing Instruction in American Colleges*). According to Myers, creative writing was welcomed as a means to engage with "the literary act, not the literary record" by humanists such as Norman Foerster, who founded the noted program at Iowa to prepare writers to promote the humanities to the public (31). Courses in creative writing and journalism set out historical alternatives to the modes of authorship that academic critics used to set themselves above journalistic critics. Such

hierarchies need to be reevaluated. The discipline's historical concern for writing for public audiences is one of its most powerful capacities, and the Progressive era provides one of the most telling examples of the political potentials of journalism and journalism majors. The Progressive tradition in creative writing has generally been ignored because it treated the creative experience as part of everyday life, and did not give literature the special standing that the profession was building for itself, as reflected in works such as Dewey's *Art as Experience* and *Experience and Education*.

Little attention has been given to the pragmatic alternatives that were available to college English at the origins of the profession, and even less has been given to the public engagements of the third corner of the field, language studies. The civic potentials of language studies have been insightfully explored in Andresen's *Linguistics in America, 1769–1924*. Andresen looks past the origins of the profession to locate the historical sources of the discipline in republican efforts to codify the national language, its literature and teaching. Language conventions were only one domain that reformers organized into an area of expertise as the sphere of educated discourse expanded beyond the republic of letters in which the literate had represented the public. Noah Webster and his contemporaries formalized linguistic and literary conventions in order to provide standards that upheld the authority of the literate. Unlike their better-known European contemporaries, antebellum linguists were more pedagogical and less intent on making language into a science. As Andresen details, this “conventionalist” conception of language was engaged with language use and learning in ways that were lost when linguistics (and literature) became conceived as autonomous disciplines divorced from their educational sources and applications. Andresen centers the history of linguistics on sociolinguistics and the other applied studies that have taken on renewed importance with the rise of ESOL programs within English studies. Andresen's analyses are aptly complemented by histories of attitudes toward literacy and literature, such as those of Cmiel, Zboray, and especially Lawrence Levine. These histories will provide the context for my analysis of how a modern sense of literature became instituted as a subject of study in reaction to the cheapening of literacy by the spread of the periodical press and common schools in the antebellum period.

Historical studies of literature, linguistics, and composition take on broader significance when they are brought to bear on the least professionally visible

and most broadly influential corner of the field, English education. The history of English education has been examined by Arthur N. Applebee's *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English: A History*. In the decades since Applebee's history was published in 1974, we have come to think differently about the institutional and ideological dynamics of education, though we sometimes still tacitly perpetuate the sort of assumptions that Applebee worked from. For example, Applebee's chapter on "The Birth of a Subject" begins with the commonplace that before it "could emerge as a major school study, English, and in particular English literature, had to develop a methodology rigorous enough to win academic respect" (21). Such assumptions locate historical agency in researchers and leave teachers as consumers of knowledge composed elsewhere. English teachers have sometimes been generations ahead of English professors in elite institutions, as Lucille Schultz has examined in her account of how nineteenth-century teachers developed process-oriented models to teach writing while professors perpetuated the formalism of "current-traditional" rhetoric. A more richly conceptualized view of pedagogy is provided by the works of Salvatori and Carr, Carr, and Schultz. Such archival research is vital if we are to expand our understanding of how knowledge is socially constructed and institutionally negotiated, particularly in the traditions of women, laborers, and minorities who have historically been denied access to the educational centers of the elite culture.

In English education, as in other strategic areas, the development of the discipline has been interlaced with the anxieties and aspirations of teachers and writers, of women and working people, and of those who work with them in less prestigious areas and departments. Those anxieties and aspirations converge on introductory courses. From the start, the profession has looked down upon such menial matters and set higher purposes for itself. Unfortunately, the profession's worst fears have limited some of the discipline's best hopes for articulating its practical benefits in ways that might have strengthened the positions of practitioners in the field. To expand our historical frame of reference beyond the politics of the profession, we need to look not up to trends in elite institutions but down to elemental changes at work in classrooms. We need to question many of our historical assumptions, including the self-serving tendency of researchers to center "our" history on advances in research. Many useful insights into our work have been provided by Graff and others who have drawn upon studies of the sociology of professionalism, such

as Bledstein's noted *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America*. I will draw upon such sources as I examine what has now become the most pressing trend in our field: deprofessionalization. We need to acknowledge that we have contributed to this trend through our own historical failure to integrate our institutional duties into the professional apparatus of our discipline, including the graduate programs that prepare practitioners and the publication venues that we use to articulate our intellectual work. This failure has been compounded by how English departments have devalued their public engagements in ways that follow academics' general tendency to discount writing for popular audiences, applied research, and collaborations with schools and other public agencies.

Bledstein and other researchers on the sociology of professionalism have helped us to become more attentive to how universities have served to instill professionalism as the unifying ideology of the middle classes. English studies have been instrumental in instilling that ideology, as becomes more broadly apparent when we attend to the educational experiences of "traditionally underrepresented" populations. Colleges for workers, women, and minorities have been examined by Susan Kates and other historians, such as Karyn Hollis. Kates has expanded our historical alternatives by looking past the rise of the profession to explore how teachers and students from various backgrounds have made use of the discipline in ways that enabled them to exercise rhetorical agency in their own lives. As one can see in the historical work of representative figures such as Mary Louise Pratt, Anne Ruggles Gere, Victor Villanueva, and Jackie Royster, perspectives on literacy studies have expanded as women and scholars of color have moved into leadership positions. Consequently, the discipline has begun to come to terms with the fact that its least respected work has traditionally been done by women, often in writing and general education courses.

Much of that work is concerned with articulating the discipline to broader audiences, often in gateway courses and sometimes in outreach programs offered in collaboration with high schools. Articulation is central to the concerns of both rhetoric and composition. Rhetoric has long been concerned with the art of persuasively articulating oneself to public audiences, while compositionists are often involved in the articulation programs through which college requirements are disseminated and credits are transferred. As a director of a writing program, I helped oversee articulation agreements and participated

in articulation conferences with teachers and community college representatives. These networks are part the articulation apparatus of broadly based English departments. The professional apparatus of English departments includes the same elements as other academic disciplines—graduate programs that initiate students into the discipline, journals and conferences that advance the discussions that define the discipline, the undergraduate programs of study that disseminate the discipline’s distinctive modes of inquiry, and collaborations with practitioners who do related work outside the academy. English is more broadly based than most academic disciplines because work with literacy is an elemental part of teaching students how to articulate themselves as they move from grammar to graduate school. English courses have traditionally been involved with writing at work in public life, including journalistic and literary genres that range across personal, professional, and political domains of experience.

Articulation theory provides a frame of reference for assessing how literacy and literacy studies have developed in tandem with transitions in what has been considered literary and who has been considered literate.<sup>4</sup> The conjunctions between literacy, literacy studies, the literate and literary take on historic significance at pivotal points where technologies and economies of literacy contribute to transitions in broader class formations. “Articulation” is concerned, according to Stuart Hall, with the transmission of prevailing ideologies and social practices through the conjunctions between established institutions and broader social movements. Those conjunctions provide coherence to historical formations by circulating cohesive accounts of shared needs and purposes:

A theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated at specific conjunctions, to certain political subjects. (Hall 53)

The conjunctions between literacy and literacy studies turn critical when the relations between learning and the learned, between literacy and the literate, become redefined in ways that reconfigure not just subjects of study, but also the subject positions that students are taught to assume. Those pivotal junctures will be examined in later chapters. Before surveying those historical transitions, I will outline a framework for what Stuart Hall has termed a “conjunctural history” of college English studies as literacy studies.

*Literacy, Literacy Studies, the Literate and Literary*

Ethnography provides a way of thinking about literacy that has been vital to the “New Literacy Studies” and to broader trends in literary, cultural, and linguistic studies (see, for example, Street’s “What’s ‘New’ in New Literacy Studies?” and Atkinson’s *The Ethnographic Imagination*). More anthropological models of literacy have become common as we have moved away from the sense of literature and literacy that was invested in the experience of books as individual artifacts. As Street and others have discussed, literacy and literature ceased to be seen as autonomous objects of study as conceptions of literacy shifted with broader changes in literacy. In the 1970s, literature and literacy became understood as socio-institutional constructions as people began to recognize that “the function of literature and the role of English teachers cannot be understood except within the context of a given society and politics” (Ohmann, *English* 303). *Literature* became more of an anthropological category, which was imbedded in the pragmatics of how people read, write, and teach the forms that constitute what is taken to be *literary* in a particular period, as Terry Eagleton discussed in his influential account of the theoretical trends that contributed to reassessments of the pragmatics of reading and writing in the 1980s (24). Over the last three centuries, the most valued forms of literacy have evolved from religious literature through an oratorical concern for style and delivery to a modern sense of literature as nonfactual works of the imagination. Literature has changed as access to education expanded and the educated came to play new roles in an increasingly diversified public sphere. While literature and the literate have always defined each other, the modern conjunction of literacy and schooling only became established when public education became state mandated. Out of that conjunction emerged a modern sense of literature.

In the antebellum period and at other junctures in the history of literacy and literacy studies, the literate have distinguished themselves by being able to distinguish the virtues of literature. A century ago, English education and literary criticism became academic subjects of study, and the opposition of the latter to the former came to structure our profession. A noted college textbook on methods for teaching English was Percival Chubb’s *The Teaching of English in the Elementary and Secondary School*. Chubb also published articles for teachers such as the “Blight of Bookishness,” which blamed “the tyrant print” for closing “our ears to the music of words and minstrelsy” (15). Chubb’s

idea that it is voice that distinguishes the power of literature was a throwback to the elocutionary tradition. However, oral modes of interpretation were still a recognized disciplinary methodology at the formation of the profession of literature. A prominent proponent of oral interpretation was Chubb's contemporary Hiram Corson at Cornell, who taught literature entirely through dramatic readings (see Payne, *English in American Universities* 60–65). With Corson as an authority, Chubb argued that “the book lies between us and the essentials of literary beauty.” According to Chubb, “literature is to be read with the ear, as a great conductor reads a musical score,” for only in well-orchestrated gestures can the “emotional appeal of literature” return us “to our senses!” (“Blight” 19, 22). Disparaging the “fashionable worship of Ph.D.-ities,” Chubb exhorted teachers to look back to “the fairy princess, Song,” in order to save their students from the “uniform vulgarity of the culture of the slums” (18). Chubb was just the sort of passionate pedagogue who embarrassed those who were establishing literature as a professional specialization. Chubb was an anachronistic figure. He was part of an older tradition in which the literate distinguished themselves by delivering an impassioned reading. In elocutions, as in essays, students deliver a reading to demonstrate that they have internalized the “feel for the game.” At different points in our history, the literate have distinguished that “feel” for literature with acts of sacred devotion to the Word, with elocutionary performances, and with essays tracing out the nuances of a poem.

Students' writings document how modes of reading and reasoning have shifted at historical junctures in the development of learning and the learned. English exercises were included in American colleges from the founding of Harvard in 1636 to prepare preachers to teach the Word. While English was included in classroom exercises, students displayed their learning in Latin disputations before the assembled college, and at graduation before the learned community. Colonial communities were as closed as the “circle of learning” embodied in the deductive syllogisms composed by students. Colonial colleges and communities were scribal information economies in which books were rare and writing served primarily as an aid to memory. Between the populist evangelism of the 1740s and the American Revolution, scholastic disputations were replaced by forensic debates in English as the ability to write persuasively gained currency with the spread of the periodical press. As elsewhere in the British provinces, the transition from ancient to modern cultural studies turned on the introduction of courses in rhetoric and belles lettres.<sup>5</sup> That transition



was shaped by the emergence of the essay as a vehicle of popular instruction. Belletristic essays helped to mediate polite tastes through the spread of the periodical press, as I discussed in my history of English studies in the British cultural provinces. In antebellum America, the essays of popular lecturers such as Emerson circulated through lyceum networks and then were reprinted in magazines and the first anthologies of American literature. These anthologies provided students with models for their own compositions, for *literature* was still understood to be something that students might not only read but also write.

As I will discuss in the first chapter, the scribal literacies of the first century of college English studies document the schematics of literate technologies and economies in their starkest forms. Scribal literacy was acquired through apprenticeships with masters, who composed compendia from a book or a predecessor's notes and then passed that distillation down to students, who recited what they had been read. Writing was recorded speech and was acquired and put to use orally. "Books" of commonplaces served as an aid to memory, because a literate person was understood to be a "walking library" or *obambulans bibliotheca* (Meriwether 76). Students' efforts to reduce all that was known to what could be remembered are documented in the writings of students. Through the intricate intimacies of learning systems of thought by heart, the schematics of learning became overlaid on the workings of the mind, with the science of *technologicae* charged with charting the relations of mental faculties to all the arts and sciences. The primary technology of literate inquiry was the deductive syllogism, with a deductive "system or synopsis" serving as the archetype for graduate theses. Some students stayed on after being ceremoniously granted "the privilege of reading in public" at graduation, but when graduate tutors at Harvard first tried to gain recognition as part of the teaching staff in the early eighteenth century, the administration recommended they be viewed as servants, not faculty.<sup>6</sup> While graduate students are still treated as apprentices in labor negotiations, the deductive field of scribal literacy broke up with social diversification and the spread of print. The expansion of literacy and literacy studies is apparent in the disappearance within decades of the syllogistic modes of reasoning that had for centuries distinguished the learned by their ability to reason deductively from ancient traditions to individual experiences.

In the second chapter, I will connect with some of the developments that I explored more fully in my history of English studies in Britain. In America, as in Britain, especially Scotland, the shift from a deductive to an inductive

epistemology as the paradigm for literate inquiry was fundamental to the “new learning,” and what was popularly known at the time as “experimental religion.” The transition in students’ writings from syllogistic disputations to forensic debates documents the historic shift in epistemologies, technologies, and social relations that gave rise to the first college courses in English literature, rhetoric, and composition. The introduction of modern cultural studies contributed to a fundamental reformation of the trivium by what Hume characterized as “the science of human nature,” as I discussed in *The Formation of College English*. The transition from Aristotelian logic and Ciceronian rhetoric to empirical reasoning and an unadorned style occurred almost simultaneously in American, Scottish, and Irish colleges and English Dissenting academies, as W. S. Howell has most fully detailed. These shifts in the three disciplines at the center of the liberal arts mark the historic transition from classical to modern cultural studies. From the center of the learned culture, the breakdown of the classical tradition was looked down upon as a literacy crisis quite comparable to that which is bringing an end to modern literary studies. While the schematics of scribal literacy provide the clearest example of shifts in literate technologies, the “new learning” provides a complex but well defined model for reflecting on how literacy studies as a field of cultural production was transformed by the emergence of modern psychologies and political economics.

The continuities and discontinuities between educational reforms in pre-Revolutionary America and post-Union Scotland are most pointedly apparent in the courses in rhetoric and moral philosophy that became the culminating studies in the Revolutionary curriculum as it began to accommodate increasing numbers of lawyers and others not intent on becoming ministers. The college at Philadelphia that Benjamin Franklin helped establish in 1755 included the first professorship of English in America.<sup>7</sup> At the newly founded colleges in Philadelphia and Princeton, Scottish college graduates taught courses in rhetoric, composition, and criticism in conjunction with moral philosophy courses that combined civic humanist and natural law doctrines with the epistemology of Newton and Locke, along with some practical advice on such legal and ethical matters as drawing up contracts. The rhetoric and moral philosophy courses of John Witherspoon at Princeton are notable because he was a classmate of Hugh Blair, a teacher of James Madison, and a signatory of the Declaration of Independence. The College of Philadelphia had a similar significance, and a different sort as well. It included a Young Ladies Academy that offered the first rhetoric courses for women. Priscilla Mason used the opportunity of her gradu-

ation oration in 1793 (and its publication) to condemn “despotic” men for denying women access to public forums where they might use their developing skills to speak for the public good (qtd. in Connors 40–41; see also Kerber, *Federalists* 221–22). Women were at the time testing the limits of “republican motherhood” (Eldred and Mortensen).

The College at Philadelphia was the sort of hybrid institution that became common in prosperous midwestern towns in the antebellum period. As I will discuss in the third chapter, more colleges were founded in the first half of the nineteenth century than in any other period in American history. Most were liberal arts colleges with denominational affiliations. Such colleges commonly served as all-purpose institutions that offered secondary instruction along with a seminary, women’s academy, and teacher’s institute (which were sometimes all but one and the same).<sup>8</sup> With the spread of common schools and the emergence of the first mass media (the penny press), the public sphere expanded and became more diversified. Books ceased to be objects of devotion and became a popular pastime, creating a “revolution in reading” (see Davidson). The establishment of a national reading public and state-mandated schooling provided unprecedented numbers of positions for journalists, lecturers, and teachers, enabling women, minorities, and working people to earn an independent living by working with their minds instead of their hands. One of the first surveys of American literature, Duyckinck and Duyckinck’s *Cyclopedia of American Literature*, observed in 1866 that “it is only of late that a class of authors by profession has begun to spring up” (v).<sup>9</sup> Looking back upon that development a half century later, Payne’s *American Literary Criticism* concluded that “not until early in the nineteenth century did literature in America become what we commonly understand by the term—a product in which artistic considerations prevail over all others” (4). Teaching and writing for the periodical press were integrally involved with literary criticism until the latter established itself as an academic specialization that was divorced from such popular concerns.

Payne published the first survey of college English departments, *English in American Universities*, which I will discuss in chapter four on the Progressive era. I will examine how the profession was configured in the two professional organizations that were established in this period. In the Modern Language Association, professors organized themselves as researchers, while professors made common cause with teachers in the National Council of Teachers of English. From its start in 1883, the MLA largely excluded literary journalists

and practicing critics, for its members were more likely to have academic affiliations than comparable disciplinary associations such as those formed by historians and social scientists (Veysey 70). Within two decades, the MLA consolidated its standing by narrowing its purposes to advancing research. MLA ceased publishing the articles on pedagogy that had comprised most of the first issues of *PMLA*, and it closed down its pedagogy section, which had conducted national studies of working conditions and institutional trends in areas such as composition (Graff 121). Fred Newton Scott and others with an interest in such broader issues formed NCTE to organize coalitions with teachers. NCTE was an avowedly Progressive organization that drew most of its college members from public institutions in the Midwest, while the leadership of the MLA came largely from elite institutions in the East (Graff 34–35). NCTE was specifically set up to provide a representative assembly where teachers could consider collective action against oppressive workloads and assessment priorities. NCTE is the largest association of English teachers in the world, but as a teachers' organization, it has not had the sort of professional standing that MLA has had among research faculty, who control the graduate programs that produce the faculty who set the priorities for departments in diverse institutions. The origins and development of these two associations provide contrasting sets of possibilities for organizing our field of work.

As I will discuss in chapter five on recent developments in our field, the historical points where teachers and professors have worked together often mark generative junctures where basic changes have emerged in the teaching of English. One of those collaborations was the Dartmouth Conference in 1966 that is often seen as a formative source for modern composition studies (Harris, "After Dartmouth"). That conference opened with one of the leading rhetoricians of the period, Albert Kitzhaber, giving a plenary entitled "What Is English?" Kitzhaber reviewed the answers provided by a decade of unequalled federal funding, which had enabled professors and teachers to create regional curriculum centers. From those efforts, Kitzhaber concluded that English studies should build in an integrated and cumulative manner through studies of language, literature, and composition. While Kitzhaber drew on some of the most broadly based research ever conducted on the teaching of English, his approach did not prove to be compelling to the British and American teachers and professors who gathered for three weeks at Dartmouth. His question got lost in the discussion when James Britton responded by shifting the focus from what English should be to what students should be doing. As Zebroski dis-

cussed in his response to Harris's insightful analysis of how Dartmouth set out a model for the scholarship of teaching, the historical impact of the Dartmouth Conference arose from how it shifted disciplinary deliberations to focus on learning and writing processes. As evident in the influential collaborations at Dartmouth, that focus has gained historic power when professors and teachers have been pressed to work together by broad changes in literacy that raise basic questions about what English studies are to be and do.

In the decade following Dartmouth, the profession saw a dramatic drop in its fortunes. In the 1970s, our profession experienced a historic collapse in BAs, PhDs, and tenure-track jobs, which were all cut in half within the decade. As discussed in chapter five, majors in English were overshadowed by the rising popularity of more practical programs of study, including some that had previously been housed in English departments, most notably communications. Research universities continued to prosper, but disciplines became increasingly stratified, along with the rest of the higher educational system.<sup>10</sup> The "profession of literature" suffered along with other established professions as the services of professionals began to be evaluated in market terms.<sup>11</sup> As Brint discusses in *In an Age of Experts*, professions came to be seen as merely commercial enterprises, while professionals themselves began articulating their distinctive standing as simply a matter of expertise. Less emphasis was given to the traditional idea that professions provide a public service that would be compromised if not protected from market forces. This shift away from "social trustee professionalism" was part of a historic "splintering of the professional stratum along functional, organizational, and market lines." While some professions continued to distinguish themselves by articulating "work as a calling," those with more direct use value tended to identify themselves as simply experts (Brint 5–7). This same splintering of professional functions emerged within our own field in the divisive conflicts between critics and compositionists in the 1980s. As becomes evident at such critical junctures, the history of our profession turns out to be part of the broader history of professionalism, in large part because English has traditionally played a fundamental role in credentialing professionals.

The history of college English is also integrally involved with the history of literacy, as we are being pressed to acknowledge by changes in literacy that have traditionally been ignored by the profession. While the profession has not considered research on the public standing of literature to be part of its concerns, surveys of American reading habits have been undertaken by the

National Endowment for the Arts. Drawing upon census surveys conducted in 1982, 1992, and 2002, *Reading at Risk* reported historic declines over the last three decades in the reading of books and works of “literature” (including popular genres as well as poetry and drama). This definition of *literature* excludes nonfiction in a way that may detract from the validity of the study, but which is consistent with how literature has traditionally been defined in English departments. In 1982, 56.9 percent of respondents reported they had read a work of literature in the last year that had not been assigned in school, while in 2002 that number dropped by 18 percent to 46.7 percent. The steepest decline was in the age group who sits in our classrooms: 59.8 percent of 18–24-year-olds reportedly did “literary reading” in 1982, but only 42.8 percent said that they had done such reading in 2002. Women were 25 percent more likely than men to report that they had read literature in the last year. While the reading of literature seems to have dramatically declined, the writing of literature was actually found to have significant standing: 7 percent of the respondents in 2002 reported that they did creative writing, and 13 percent said that they had taken a creative writing course. That would add up to some 27 million Americans. Nine percent of the respondents reported having used the Internet to read and research literature.

Like *A Nation at Risk* twenty years earlier, *Reading at Risk* was meant to energize the literate by underlining deepening threats to their values. Unlike scholarly organizations such as the MLA, which have long bewailed declines in learning and literacy, the NEA took public action to intervene in a locally situated and nationally orchestrated way. The NEA launched “The Big Read,” a national initiative that enlisted more than five hundred communities in organizing reading groups to focus on a selected literary work. This initiative was seen to have contributed to the turnaround in “literary reading” that was reported in *Reading on the Rise: A New Chapter in American Literacy* in 2009: while the respondents who stated that they had read a poem, novel, play, or story in the last year dropped by 14 percent between 1992 and 2002, between 2002 and 2008, that number rose 7 percent (with 54 percent reporting they had done literary reading in 1992, 46.7 percent in 2002, and 50.2 percent in 2008) (4). Even with that upturn, the 2008 results were still almost 15 percent lower than the percentage of respondents who reported they read literature in 1982 (59.8 percent). The increase may also have been due to changes in the survey items, for the 2008 study gave more attention to reading online, with 15 percent of the respondents reporting that they read literature online. These trends highlight developments that need to be considered if we are to make

productive use of the historic changes that confront English departments. Literary reading has clearly declined in dramatic ways in recent decades. If we are to intervene in that decline, we are going to have to develop much more broadly engaged coalitions with librarians, teachers, and reading and writing groups in our local communities, and toward that end, we are going to have to adopt a more pragmatic engagement with the potentials of interactive technologies. Those technologies are fundamental to the historical shift from reading to writing that we can witness every day in virtually any public place, including the virtual public places that we increasingly inhabit.

These reports and the other surveys that I will cite in later chapters provide benchmarks for reflecting upon how the standing of English departments has been undercut by changes in literacy that the profession has tended to discount. The debilitating impact of this tendency has been compounded by the profession's failure to invest its intellectual capital in its institutional work. This failure is epitomized by the equation of English studies with *literary studies*, in the modern sense of that term. English departments in elite universities have been insulated from broader changes in literacy and education, and such departments have also been isolated from the partnerships that might enable the discipline to respond to those changes. Broadly based departments of English include a rich array of applied linguists, English education specialists, compositionists, journalists, creative writers, and scholars involved with ethnic, media, and gender studies. We need a vision of the discipline that includes the expansive possibilities of these areas of study. Literacy studies provides a model that encompasses research and teaching in all four corners of our field: literature, language, English education, and writing. The basic distinction between teachers and researchers is fundamentally disorienting because we are all teachers. The real question is whether our programs of study will attend to that fact. As I have tried to set out in this introduction, insofar as the profession has not taken this basic reality into account, it has incapacitated the discipline by misrepresenting what practitioners do. Looking at our history from the bottom up can help us think through our disciplinary capacities in more productive ways. Given our deepening labor problems and the expanding changes in literacy that confront us, we need to reassess our historical alternatives in order to develop a more productive engagement with our rich institutional base. We have an expansive power base, and we need to invest more of our collective intellectual energies in exploring how to harness the power of what we do.