This review of current trends and concerns in Advanced Composition is intentionally more impressionistic than analytic and more qualitative than quantitative. (Unfortunately, I suspect it may also be more subjective than objective, which was not intended but was hard to prevent.) I chose an impressionistic approach because I wanted to cover more ground than I could in a controlled analytic study and because I wanted to be free to discuss trends too tentative for quantitative detection.

Most of the information was gathered from three sources: the comments, concerns, and topics of interest listed on about 200 membership applications to the Association of Teachers of Advanced Composition (ATAC); more than 300 syllabi, course descriptions, and letters voluntarily contributed to ATAC's information file; and an uncounted number of personal discussions with colleagues throughout the country. Because this information came only from people who chose to contribute, I made no attempt to determine the prevalence of a particular attitude or practice beyond vague indicators such as "a few," "some," and "many." However, since the sample was broad, I treated the information as a reasonably accurate indication of the range of current attitudes and practices.

The first general impression is that Advanced Composition is growing rapidly in appeal to students and in prestige. In fact, it seems to be experiencing a renaissance. Those who contributed information for this review did so with an unexpected enthusiasm and creative vigor, often reporting that advanced writing has become a more important part of their college curriculum than it has been for decades. Others said that students who for years could neither be tempted nor coerced into advanced writing classes are now begging for a space on a waiting list and that a writing major or concentration is being considered.

The second general impression is not as bright. Many of the fundamental issues that led to the organization of ATAC -- most importantly those related to level, goals, and course content -- are still unresolved and now need resolution more urgently than before. The growth in enrollment, the increasing number of people teaching advanced writing for the first time, and the proliferation of specialized writing courses.

Enrollments

Many people report steady -- sometimes dramatic -- increases in enrollment in all upper level writing courses and almost without exception attribute the increase to an influx of students from disciplines other than English, but no one seems to know the reason for this new interest or why it seems to have developed in some disciplines and not in others. A few correspondents suggest that because of the somber spirit of the times, students are more serious about acquiring marketable skills and have been convinced by the media that writing ability is one of those skills. A few others think the impetus might be coming from faculty in other disciplines who are pressuring students more vigorously than before either because, as advisors, they are worried about their graduate in a tight job market or because they themselves have been influenced by the media and now demand a better quality of written work. A few credit the increased enrollments at their own colleges to some innovative practice unique to them. But although these few correspondents are willing to speculate, far more ask whether anyone knows the reasons, and some express uneasiness.

One correspondent asked that his concern be reported here. He said he is enjoying the new interest in his advanced writing course too much to see the course
become, once again, the under-enrolled orphan of the English Department. His point is that until we know with certainty what needs are sending students to advanced writing, we are only guessing when we design our courses to include certain topics, forms, and principles rather than others. Our guesses could be right, but they could just as easily be wrong, and if they are wrong, student interest will slacken more quickly than it developed.

A different correspondent, prompted by the same uneasiness, suggested an ATAC coordinated survey of students in advanced writing to determine why they enrolled, what they hope to learn, what disciplines they come from, and why competent writing is important in that discipline.

Level

Problems related to the level of Advanced Composition are mentioned more often than any other problems. Many ask, "Can we have meaningful dialogue and progress when to one instructor advanced writing means worthy of publication in a national journal and to another it means the ability to write 750 words with no more than six grammatical errors and six awkward passages?" Other questions range as follows:

--- How advanced is advanced?
--- Are certain writing techniques more advanced than others, and if so, which ones are they?
--- Does "advanced" mean greater refinement and skill in a few basic forms of writing or does it mean moderate refinement and skill extended to include a greater variety of forms?
--- Is instruction in advanced writing intrinsically different from freshman instruction or does the difference actually lie in the student's improved ability to comprehend instruction?
--- Is merely passing a freshman course with a low C or D a sufficient prerequisite for advanced writing?
--- How much, if any, of the course work should be devoted to basic concepts of grammar, syntax, diction, and usage?
--- What is the purpose of Advanced Composition?
--- Should we be preparing students for undergraduate academic work or career work?
--- Should Advanced Composition precede or follow special focus advanced writing courses?
--- How does an undergraduate Advanced Composition course differ from a graduate writing course?

Unfortunately, the material available to me reveals little about the level of advanced courses except that most courses so titled make no mention of grammar and punctuation in their syllabi and state either a strong preference or a prerequisite for two semesters of introductory composition plus junior or senior stan-
ding. In addition, the courses seem to be staffed most often by full-time faculty (many with associate or full professorships) rather than adjunct faculty or graduate students.

Another indirect indication of level is a marked decline in the number of complaints about remedial students in advanced courses. As many of us remember, it was common practice in the past to recommend Advanced Composition to students who earned D in Freshman Composition on the assumption that, despite the title, the advanced course was nothing more than the freshman course all over again at a slower pace. This assumption was supported by the wording of the 1967 "Guidelines and Directions for College Courses in Advanced Composition. It in its general form the advanced course may be viewed as covering the range of the freshman course but in greater depth."

Just two years ago many instructors, especially those from schools with a limited composition sequence, complained of their inability to determine and teach an appropriate level because so many of their students were still struggling with basics. In the past year, however, there were far fewer complaints; instead quite a few people report that both their departments and their administrations have finally begun to differentiate between upper level remediation and advanced writing and now offer some form of sophomore remedial instruction for students who need more preparation before attempting either a competency exam or an advanced writing course. Apparently neither the general faculty nor the students at those schools confuse the two levels of instruction or expect one level to substitute for another.

If this is a trend (and it continues), we no longer have to consider the entire continuum from functional illiteracy to ready-to-public when wrestling with the problem of level, but we still have a problem - a problem in urgent need of resolution. Many who teach a general rather than a special focus advanced writing course described the problem. If the school has a full program of advanced writing course, those teaching the general course, usually titled "Advanced Composition" or "Advanced Exposition," are not sure where in the sequence their course belongs or what material the course should include. Those whose schools offer only the general course are not sure how much material their course should cover or what its focus should be.

Some of these people say they are currently focusing on principles that govern all writing regardless of the special demands of form or profession and are teaching them as general principles, that is, as tools that can be applied to any specific professional requirement. This practice suggests that although the question of where in a writing sequence Advanced Composition should be placed has not been resolved - in fact, has not even been clearly addressed - some instructors are beginning to treat the general course as an introduction to professional writing in the same sense that Freshman Composition is, in theory, an introduction to undergraduate academic writing. One correspondent, in elaborating on the design of her courses, described a sequence similar to the sequencing that seems to be developing at other schools as well.

Step One:

**Freshman Composition I and II**

Step Two:

**Intermediate (Remedial) Composition**

Drill and review for those who need additional work in basics. Some schools offer a remedial lab in lieu of a course.
Step Three:

Advanced Composition
Heterogeneous classes that teach advanced principles of organization, strategy, and style applicable to all professions and forms.

Step Four:

Specialized Writing
Special focus writing courses that apply the general principles to the specific requirements of particular forms (such as proposals, reports, research papers) and professions (such as business, law, science, technology, and journalism).

Content

Discussion of level invariably slides into discussion of focus and content, and for that I had a fair amount of material but a difficult task. No two courses are alike, very few courses are clearly one type or another, and no two instructors use exactly the same descriptive terminology. If I have interpreted the course descriptions correctly, most instructors are designing courses I would call "eclectic" for lack of a better label, that is, innovative mixtures of topics and techniques from rhetoric, psychology, journalism, logic, business, and any other field that offers something that can be used to good effect. Quite a few of these courses stress writing as a process, frequently combined with analytic thinking problem solving. Interestingly, although very few instructors seem to teach rhetorical theory, quite a few do include communication theory -- a practice common in business writing.

Style is the topic stressed most often regardless of the thrust of the course or the forms included. In fact, several courses seem to be devoted almost entirely to aspects of style as are some of the newer texts. The stylistic objective named most often is clarity, and to reach that objective, jargon, inflated diction, and wordiness are most often singled out for attack. Many people listed questions related to style they would like discussed:

Is there a dominant style today, and if so, what is it?

In teaching style, how much should we bend to current practice and how much should we defend "correct usage"?

What style(s) should we stress?

How far can we go to purge legal and business languages of their stylistic offenses?

What are the most effective ways to teach style?

Should we insist on the MLA style sheet or allow students to work from the style sheets appropriate to their major disciplines?

Instructors tend to emphasize either career-related forms of writing or academic forms, that is, either analytic and evaluative reports, articles, and reviews or rhetorically patterned essays, arguments, and research papers, but some include both types and others assign a broad range, such as the personal
narrative, popular article, character study, and issue-oriented position statement. A few people even include fiction and poetry writing, while others include letter writing.

Most instructors seem to require between six and ten short papers (500 to 1,000 words each) plus a larger project, such as one substantial paper that is developed and polished to publication standards through the course of the semester. Practically everyone stresses revision and professional-looking papers. I recall only one person who permitted handwritten out-of-class papers, and I remember (with admiration and awe) one who settles for nothing less than “letter-perfect copy.” That instructor’s syllabus states clearly that not a single error in mechanics or transcription will be tolerated.

Format and Texts

Very few courses descriptions indicate format, but from what I could infer, most instructors include some workshop sessions focused on student generated material, and some rely on this format entirely. Several think the workshop format is essential because it dramatizes audience awareness and develops critical editing skills. Most instructors also include individual conferences, but while some make conferences an integral part of the weekly schedule, others confer with students individually only once or twice in the semester. Several whose courses serve pre-professionals from a variety of disciplines use conferences as small group meeting in order to tailor the general instruction to the student’s professional needs.

The lack of textbooks designed specifically for Advanced Composition continues to be a common complaint, but this problem seems to be easing. The publishers have become aware of the growing interest in advanced writing, and I know several are planning to issue the type of texts needed. One person suggested that JAC publish an annotated bibliography of recommended texts and include in each issue descriptive reviews of appropriate texts as they are published.

Writing Programs

Perhaps the strongest evidence that advanced writing is growing in both strength and complexity is the increasing number of colleges which have recently introduced, are about to introduce, or are thinking about a non-fiction writing concentration for both English majors and students from other disciplines. Unfortunately, I have very little to report since most of my correspondence was from people requesting information rather than from people requesting information rather than from those with experience to share. However, a summary of the questions asked most often gives some idea of the topics that need discussion:

--- What courses should a writing concentration require, and what other courses should it offer?

--- What should the developmental order be?

--- What disciplines have a career market for professional writers trained in both the discipline and writing?

--- How much rhetorical theory and/or communication theory should be included?
Should advanced grammar and/or linguistics be included, and if so, how much and on what level?

Should the history of the English language be included, and if so, should it be required of pre-professionals as well as English majors?

Can the same program serve the English major preparing for secondary school teaching or graduate school and the non-English major preparing to write for a profession?

What credentials should advanced writing faculty have?

Can regular English faculty with expertise in composition teach pre-professional courses, such as pre-law or science writing, without special training in the discipline?

If not, where and how can established faculty retrain themselves?

Judging by the tone of several of the letters, those who are designing programs often have to act quickly; therefore it seems to me that many of these questions should have priority in our discussions and research efforts.

Conclusion

The inferences I drew from my sources differ from the findings reported in Michael Hogan's 1979 survey in several minor but only a few significant details. Hogan's study, a controlled, analytic survey of 374 teachers of Advanced Composition, showed that only seven percent require both Freshman Composition and advanced standing as prerequisite for advanced writing courses, while many of the course descriptions I received listed both as either a preference or a prerequisite. Hogan's survey also found that about twenty-five percent stressed improvement in punctuation, grammar, and mechanics as a major objective, while very few of my sources even mentioned these basics.

These differences may be entirely the result of the differences in the types of materials used in the two reviews and the ways in which Hogan and I evaluated our materials. Hogan's survey was focused on specific questions and, therefore, the responses could be quantified. In contrast, my material was wide ranging, and since it covered only what each contributor chose to send, the responses had to be interpreted and estimated. In addition, Hogan used objective analysis to arrive at his findings, while I allowed myself the luxury of unscientific impressionism. This last difference alone could account for the differences in our findings.

On the other hand, the differences might also be the result of dramatic change in a rapidly developing specialty. If growth and maturation are at least part of the explanation, the prognosis for Advanced Composition is bright. We may have more questions than answers at the moment and some pressing fundamental problems to resolve, but we seem to be surprisingly unified in our developing trends, in our perception of the problems, and in our notions of what solutions should be sought first. We need dialogue and research in many areas, but most urgently we need to address the following:

- An updated set of guidelines.
- A sharper delineation of the level of writing implied by the title "advanced."
The sequencing of writing courses.

The reasons for the new student interest in advanced writing.

The curricula most likely to prepare students for the writing requirements in specific professions.

The career writing opportunities in specific professions.

The components of a sound writing program.

The problems of training new faculty and, above all, retraining established faculty.

Some of these concerns are projects that should be undertaken by ATAC, but others are topics that individuals can address through articles submitted to JAC.

University of Albuquerque
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ATAC MEMBERSHIP GOES OVER 300

The ATAC was formed at the 1979 meeting of the CCCC and has held its annual meetings in 1980 and in 1981 at the CCCC conventions as an official special interest group. The membership has grown steadily. The principal activities of the ATAC are to organize panels on the topic of advanced composition at the CCCC conventions and at other major national meetings such as the MLA and NCTE, to maintain what we call an "archives" or resource collection of data and materials related to advanced composition, to publish a journal twice a year, and to conduct other activities which membership thinks useful, necessary, or appropriate. Please join the ATAC by using the special form printed on the last page of this issue of the Journal of Advanced Composition.
Notes

1 "Guidelines and Directions for College Courses in Advanced Composition," College Composition and Communication, XVIII (December, 1967), 266 - 268.