Special Issue:  
*Gender, Culture, Ideology*

Guest Editorial

"Writers," Karen Burke LeFevre suggests, "do not invent in a vacuum." Her sentiment might well serve as an epigraph to this issue of *JAC*, a collection of essays that focuses on issues of gender, ideology, and culture in composition studies. As this special issue suggests, the social, political, and economic contexts of writing are important areas of concern for compositionists, for reasons that Marilyn Cooper expresses better than I can: "Whenever ideas are seen as commodities they are not shared; whenever individual and group purposes cannot be negotiated someone is shut out; differences in status, or power, or intimacy curtail interpersonal interactions; cultural institutions and attitudes discourage writing as often as they encourage it; textual forms are just as easily used as barriers to discourse as they are used as means of discourse."

This special issue brings together a number of essays that address the "politics" of writing and teaching writing in academia. While the perspectives they present range widely and sometimes clash, these essays nonetheless illuminate important issues that have come to define, in part, the shape of cultural studies in composition. Certainly, they do not represent every viewpoint in this important area of study, for, like feminism, cultural studies is constituted of many diverse perspectives. Nevertheless, they highlight several central issues that compositionists struggle with as a matter of course in teaching and doing research on writing.

In this issue, I am also pleased to expand *JAC*'s traditional feature interview with a scholar outside of composition whose research has important implications for the work that we do by including two interviews: conversations with Mary Belenky and Gayatri Spivak, both influential scholars doing significant work in areas addressed in this special issue. In juxtaposition, these interviews illuminate some of the points of controversy that characterize cultural and feminist studies in composition.

I'd like to thank several people at the University of Idaho for their assistance with this special issue of *JAC*, especially Gary Williams, Chair of
the Department of English, for his generous encouragement and his support of my efforts in putting this volume together and his ongoing financial support of JAC. Thanks also to Kurt Olsson, Acting Dean of Letters of Science, for his financial support; and to David Barber, Director of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies, for establishing the JAC internship program. In addition, I'm grateful to Dene Kay Thomas for her assistance and encouragement and, especially, for agreeing to collaborate with me on the interview with Mary Belenky, a task I wasn't willing to face alone. Finally, I'd like to thank Mary Ann Judge and Molly Mansker, graduate interns, and Jayne Moneysmith, all of whom made this project manageable.

For JAC, I'd also like to acknowledge the continued financial and moral support of William T. Ross, Chair of the Department of English at the University of South Florida. For myself, I'd like to thank Irene Gale, whose friendship and advice I now enjoy from afar, and finally, Gary A. Olson, for extending this opportunity to edit this special issue of JAC, for his wise counsel as I worked on it during the past year, and for years of support and guidance. Putting this volume together was truly a collaborative project, in every sense, and I invite JAC readers to continue this collaboration by reading and responding to the essays that appear here.

Guest Editorial


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