Collaboration as Political Action

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Although the idea of collaboration has been enthusiastically embraced by most of our colleagues, we have noticed that the actual practice of genuine collaboration rarely occurs. Why? In "A Mindless Man-Driven Theory Machine," James J. Sosnoski suggests that the answer lies in the image of the "Magister Implicatus":

He is the image we see when we look in the distorted mirror of our résumés. . . . He is the unified personification of the ways professional critics are taught to portray themselves in official documents—vitaes, grant applications, course descriptions, and so on....

The Magister Implicatus is the ghostly patriarchal figure who haunts our job descriptions, our textbooks, our examination committees, and other quarters of the institution of literary criticism. Not surprisingly, given the history of the institution of criticism, his profile is masculine. Because careers allow for professional advances along a ladder of institutional success (degrees, salaries, ranks and so on), the Magister through his exemplariness inspires critics to compete with one another for awards. (48)

The Magister Implicatus, in short, is the sum total of performances now demanded for success in the academic world. Through the force of tradition, "he" is generally thought to demand the best, most rigorous, "truest" forms of scholarship.

Other kinds of performances, however, can and do exist—even within academe. Sosnoski, for example, proposes five alternatives to the elements of competitive, single-authored scholarship: compassion, commitment, collaboration, concurrence, and community. Collectively, these terms manifest themselves in a notion of "communal excelling," which assumes that the value of collaborative scholarship need not come at the expense of high academic standards. Our revisioning of academic structures shares this assumption. Martha A. Ackelsberg and Kathryn Pyne Addelson, furthermore, advocate an anarchist creation of "new social realities" through direct action. Our investigation shares this commitment to action and change.

This essay, then, will look at institutional structures within the academy which suppress collaborative relationships and scholarship. Interweaving personal experience and observation, interviews, and document analysis, we will examine the discourses and practices of selected conventions of schooling at the University of Arizona—primarily, though not exclusively, at the graduate level. These include professional development procedures and
expectations, mentoring (both for faculty and graduate students), and (briefly) physical structures of the university. By doing so, we hope to show how scholars are initiated into hierarchical frameworks that encourage us to compete against each other, and how those frameworks could be structurally revised so that collaboration is valued and rewarded. More than mere discussion, our goal is political action. For while we think that collaboration has intrinsic worth, it also represents a way for us to assume responsibility for the structures of our own institutions, structures that determine our professional identities and activities. In proposing specific alternatives to current academic structures, we draw extensively upon feminist critiques of disciplinary standards and assumptions (especially in science and philosophy), and radical feminist epistemologies, which advocate a "remaking from the root."

We wish to announce two disclaimers from the outset: first, that we are not suggesting that the University of Arizona suppresses collaboration to an unusual degree, but rather to a typical one; second, that our feminist perspective does not imply a belief that women are "natural" or "better" collaborators, as some essentialist arguments have proposed.

How Academic Structures Suppress Collaboration
Traditionally, the structures of the academy have been organized around the notion of "epistemological individualism," based on the Cartesian cogito: a solitary, dispassionate, "objective" thinker who detaches himself from the phenomena of the physical world (including the body) in order to perceive a fixed, unchanging truth. We use the masculine pronoun deliberately here, not because women necessarily subscribe to a fundamentally different epistemological model, but because historically women have been defined in opposition to the principles of Cartesian epistemology—as wholly "ruled" by their emotions, desires, and bodily functions (pregnancy and menstruation, for example); as subjective and personally (that is, inappropriately) engaged with objects of observation; as closer to "nature" and thus excluded from the superior realm of "culture"; and so on. In short, women have been defined by philosophers and scientists, especially, as inherently incapable of entering the objective, ordered world of "pure," abstract reason. (For detailed discussions of this historical phenomenon, see Code, Harding Whose Science, Jaggar and Bordo, Keller, and Lloyd.)

The end result of all this quasi-scientific rationalizing about the absurdity of female knowers is that the features of the cogito remain central to our ideas about what makes good scholarship: to do our best work, it is widely believed, we must withdraw from real-world distractions and immerse ourselves in solitary study. This is the rationale behind a sabbatical, for example. Collaborative work, by contrast, is frequently interpreted as an intellectual weakness (emotions, personal experience, family obligations—that stuff just gets in the way). Critics may conclude that one or both of the contributors "couldn't handle the work alone" or that the research is somehow tainted or
less authoritative because it was negotiated by contributors. These attitudes were illustrated recently in a profile of the University of Arizona's new Vice President for Student Affairs, Saundra Lawson Taylor. One colleague is quoted as saying, "She does try to collaborate with other people... Not everyone's comfortable with that style. I'm not sure people would say that she can't make the hard decisions, but they might say she's reluctant to make them and they're not as comfortable with the (lack of) speed" (qtd. in Kornblum 2, ellipsis in original). Although met with some skepticism, Lawson Taylor's collaborative "style" has nevertheless earned her significant professional success. But many scholars devoted to collaboration aren't so fortunate: it is not uncommon for them to be asked to account for their independent contributions to collaborative projects (by "claiming" specific percentages or page numbers, for example, or by producing more work in order to "compensate" for their collaborations). This attitude encourages scholars to hoard ideas and compete against each other for the "best" knowledge, that which functions symbolically as "capital" within the academic arena. By rewarding these solitary, competitive approaches to scholarship, the academy suppresses collaboration. We know of no scholars awarded sabbaticals in order to work together on a project, for example.

Many scholars in rhetoric and composition and in education have acknowledged the potential difficulties, as well as the potential benefits, of collaborative scholarship (see, for example, Cochran-Smith and Lytle, Ede and Lunsford, Lunsford and Ede, McNenny and Roen). Few, however, have offered critiques of the epistemological and discursive structures that suppress and discourage scholars from working collaboratively. We hope to offer such a critique by examining our own and others' experiences within the academy and the institutional documents which structure those experiences, and by interpreting them through the lens of recent work in feminist epistemology. This critique will provide the basis for the recommendations for action that we articulate in the second section of this essay.

Academic and Professional Development. We turn first to a series of documents from the University of Arizona that detail policies and expectations for students and faculty, and that also promote solitary work. The first set consists of a trial revision of the "Code of Academic Integrity" (specifically, the plagiarism policy) and its implications for the Composition Program curriculum as described in A Student's Guide to First-Year Composition. The second set includes "A Handbook for Completing the Steps to Your Degree" and "Manual for Theses and Dissertations," prepared by the Graduate College, and the "Revised Guidelines for Ph.D. Students," prepared by the Department of English. The third covers the "Guidelines for the Promotion and Tenure Process and the Preparation of Dossiers," prepared by the Office of the Provost, and "Program for the Assessment of Institutional Priorities (PAIP)," prepared by the Task Forces on Mission, Criteria, and Process.
Similar to most universities, the University of Arizona's "Code of Academic Integrity" outlines academic expectations for students and the possible consequences to students who don't fulfill them (for example, failure to maintain a minimum GPA results in academic probation). In response to a campuswide survey of faculty and students that suggested a serious cheating problem at the University, the "Code's" plagiarism policy was recently revised to give more responsibility to department chairs in disciplinary matters and to make students more aware of the appeals process. Obviously, plagiarism is a serious offense, but the chair of the Committee on Academic Integrity, Franklin Flint, defines plagiarism in disturbingly sweeping terms: "Cheating doesn't have to be just copying on a test . . . it can be working together on certain projects or studying together for a particular class" (qtd. in Nardone 1; ellipsis in original). The message of Flint's definition is clear: collaboration is a suspicious activity and may open a student to plagiarism charges; it's best not to do it. This threat is especially serious when department chairs have more power to define plagiarism, because many, if not most, have been initiated into academic structures that discourage and punish collaboration. To many experienced scholars, in other words, the word collaboration is almost as dirty as the word plagiarism.

Things get even stickier when we juxtapose this policy with the English Department/Composition Program currently in place. English 101, a general composition course which all first-year students are required to take, devotes approximately half the semester (two units) to the research process, including a collaborative investigation of a topic chosen by each group. While students are not expected to do any collaborative writing, they are expected to meet regularly to discuss problems and progress, to share resources, and to prepare an integrated group presentation. According to A Student's Guide to First-Year Composition, "forming small research groups . . . can be an effective way to conduct research because each member of the group can benefit from the related work of the other group members" (90). It is not difficult to see how these requirements could potentially come into conflict with the revised "Code of Academic Integrity." True, Flint limits his collaboration-as-plagiarism dictum to "certain projects" and "particular classes," but he also places the authority for such decisions in the hands of department chairs, who may or may not look favorably on collaborative work. And if this conflict is evident in the English Department curriculum, it probably occurs in other departments as well.

The academic stakes are equally high for graduate students, and the "rules of the game" are equally confusing. As graduate students progress through their programs of study, they may form collaborative relationships or study groups, and they may even be encouraged by some professors to write together. In fact, the University of Arizona English Department's program in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English (RCTE) urges students to "Begin talking with faculty and other graduate students about
collaborating on research projects" as early as the first year in the degree program (Roen 2). While this is a promising start, we know of no situations where individuals are encouraged to collaborate on theses or dissertations. Even the "principal investigator" model used in the sciences does not allow single theses/dissertations to be collaboratively written. The structures within the academy require graduate students to complete such scholarly discourse individually, and frequently in isolation. In fact, the dissertation often sends people into solitary confinement, forcing them to disappear for weeks and to withdraw from their interactions with others. We both know of colleagues who have resigned teaching assignments, and one who even rented an unfurnished apartment to serve as a "study"—all so they could focus solely on their dissertations. Eliminating human and material distractions from the thinking and writing process is an outdated remnant of the Cartesian epistemological model, but one still very much in use.

In addition to the "lore" of the dissertation process, the written documents that we have reviewed promote and sometimes even prescribe individual work. In the "Manual for Theses and Dissertations," graduate students are first told, "Your thesis will represent you, your department, and The University of Arizona in the international scholarly community" (5). The emphasis on the individual as representative of the larger academic community suggests that graduate students become members of their scholarly communities only when they can complete a large body of work independently. This message is further reinforced in an Appendix to the document which specifies procedures for including published papers within the thesis or dissertation. Writers are required to describe

the unique contribution of your work to the field of study.... Where doctoral research efforts are a part of a larger collaborative project, you must be able to identify one aspect of the project as your own and demonstrate an original contribution. Your role in the research and production of the published paper(s) should be clearly specified. (25)

Not only are graduate students asked to distinguish their work from that of other scholars in their field, but they must also identify and "own" their contributions to collaborative scholarship as independently generated and as substantially different from those of their collaborators in spite of the collaborative process. Finally, in our examination of the language of "A Handbook for Completing the Steps to Your Degree," we find words which invoke images of adversarial relationships: the submitting of forms, the defending of dissertations. Although this language doesn't explicitly discourage collaborative relationships, we believe that the dissertation process serves as an early initiation into the suppressive hierarchical structures within academe, of which competitive, individual scholarship is typically a part.

The expectations for faculty are even more entrenched, as official university guidelines invite and reward individual effort almost exclusively.
For example, in a recent report, "Long-Term Criteria for Assessing Faculty Scholarship/Creative Activity" (an Appendix to the PAIP document), collaborative work was not mentioned as an institutional priority in any of the fifteen criteria for evaluation of individual faculty. In fact, as we mentioned earlier, faculty who participate in collaborative scholarship must indicate their "percentage of responsibility" for coauthored publications. Furthermore, the language in a "Sample Letter to Outside Referees," included in the "Guidelines for the Promotion and Tenure Process and Preparation of Dossiers," reinforces conventional notions of individual autonomy and competition within academe:

What is your evaluation of his/her research or creative activity? To what extent does it make a coherent, independent contribution to the literature, creative corpus, and methodology of the field?

... How does his/her standing in the field compare with others in the same rank? Can you be specific? (Sypherd 10-11)

A brief note within the same document acknowledges the existence of collaborative scholarship but continues to use "independent contributions" as the primary criterion for excellence:

If the candidate has engaged in extensive collaboration, and the ability of the candidate to make independent contributions may be difficult to ascertain, it may be helpful to request letters from one or more of his/her collaborators, describing the extent and nature of the candidate's contribution to the collaboration. (Sypherd 10)

These comments reflect the ambiguous position of collaboration in the academic mindset: on the one hand, this document seems to recognize that "independent contributions" are difficult to identify or measure; but on the other hand, it seems unwilling to revise the criteria by which collaborative scholarship is evaluated. Even someone's "ability" to contribute to a field of study is called into question when that person engages "in extensive collaboration."

Clearly, official documents such as the "Guidelines for the Promotion and Tenure Process" continue to privilege single-authored publications over collaborative work. The consequences of this preference can be particularly threatening for junior faculty: those who collaborate with others leave themselves professionally vulnerable and must often become more productive—producing greater numbers of publications and even more pages of scholarly writing—in order to survive within existing reward structures. When asked about her collaborative research endeavors, one junior faculty member at a large research university (whom we'll call Karen Goldsmith) vividly describes the realities of her work:

I know that I take great risks involving myself in collaborative research with teachers in public schools because I know my research and writing with others is not valued as highly as, say, someone else's individual research projects within the university. Colleagues continually urge me to publish more single-authored pieces. So I have to listen to some of their advice if I want to survive within the system.
It is evident that Karen feels pressure on many levels—administration, collegial, and personal. What is especially significant about Karen’s experience is that she is aware that her professional success is conditional, that her allegiance to the prescribed structures of “the system” is ultimately more important than the quality of her work. (See Cochran-Smith and Lytle for a discussion of the complex collaborative relationship between university-based researchers and teacher researchers.)

Even though she says she must do what it takes to “survive” within a reward system which privileges autonomy and independence, Karen nevertheless prefers collaborative writing and research—in part, because she feels that her work makes a small contribution toward changing the system. She says,

I do publish some pieces on my own, but the majority of my work is collaborative in nature. I know I am putting myself and my work on the line, but I remain committed to collaborative research. I don’t even submit my work to the major research journals in my field—the teachers I write with and for don’t read those journals. I know I am making a political statement. It’s frightening. I end up trying to do more than is required, more than a person who writes alone.

Despite the (generally positive) attention that collaboration has been paid in recent years, even in “the major research journals,” Karen claims that few journals in her field value collaborative work in practice, which reiterates the point we made in the first sentence of this essay. Karen feels that she opens herself up to professional criticism and potentially jeopardizes her career advancement when she writes collaboratively. By “compensating” for this political statement, Karen falls victim to an unfortunate message implied in university documents that suppress collaboration: more is better.

The language of collaboration is slowly seeping into the academy but, as we have seen, it is frequently devoid of action. On a superficial level, the University of Arizona seems neither to endorse nor to discourage collaborative work on the part of its community, but the contradictions we have identified in official documents are not simply neutral. In reality, all of the documents we examined suggest, subtly or explicitly, that independent scholarship is safe and collaboration is dangerous. While we have shown that both students and faculty may suffer when they collaborate, the question remains: Why is collaboration dangerous? Who or what does it threaten? Some answers might be found in current debates concerning multiculturalism. By democratizing the educational process, and by including and honoring multiple voices in the creation of knowledge, some believe that intellectual standards are lowered or sacrificed to an “anything goes” attitude toward scholarship. In a recent team-teaching situation, one professor exposed his bias against student collaboration: “I get a little nervous when we start turning the institution over to the inmates.” Thus, while academe has finally acknowledged that collaboration exists, it has not yet recognized its scholarly legitimacy, nor has it developed structures to reward collaborative work.
Mentoring. We turn now to a position paper entitled "Mentoring: The Faculty-Graduate Student Relationship," co-written by Michael Cusanovich and Martha Gilliland (dean and vice dean, respectively, of the University of Arizona Graduate College), circulated at the University of Arizona in January 1991, and later incorporated into the "Policies and Procedures Manual" for the Graduate College. "Mentoring" was prepared in response to evidence of unethical faculty practices that were keeping graduate students from finishing their programs in a timely fashion or from not finishing at all. As announced on the front cover, the paper's purpose is, first, to argue that mentoring is a necessary component of graduate education and, second, to make graduate students "aware of the various options available to them so that they can design their graduate program to achieve maximum quality as well as timely completion." In addition, the document urges departments to pay special attention to mentoring "diverse" or traditionally underrepresented members of their "graduate student pool" (that is, women and ethnic minorities), and to do so by considering "compatibility of professional interests and goals; experience with dissertations and theses; socialization and experience with research; knowledge and respect of cultural and national differences and of the unique problems facing minority students; and commitment to students" (3).

At a glance, these seem to be laudable goals; in fact, in the nearly two years since the position paper was published, it has been adopted as a model for mentoring programs at colleges and universities around the country, including its own English department and some departments in its College of Education. But, self-consciously or not, this document is complicit in the same problems it ostensibly makes efforts to resolve, and in large part because of its carefully chosen rhetoric.

A number of questions and contradictions introduce themselves as early as the document's front cover. To begin with, the Graduate Council straightforwardly acknowledges that this is the university administration's official view of mentoring, one that will be distributed before becoming university policy but that will not be discussed further. Furthermore, while purportedly directed toward graduate students, two versions of the document were circulated: one addressed to graduate students, one to graduate faculty. Except for the cover page, there is no apparent difference in these versions, a fact that calls into question who the "real" audience of the document actually is. Clearly, one audience is more likely than the other to benefit from the "official" view of mentoring, a fact that the document itself confirms: "the depth and breadth of the mentoring program in any given department or program certainly will have an impact on their ability to compete for resources within the Graduate College and the University" (5). In order to emphasize the importance of mentoring as "the 'heart' of graduate education," Cusanovich and Gilliland make it clear that "each degree granting unit will have in place an active and definable mentoring program . . . that it will
be reviewed on a regular basis by the program to assure its effectiveness . . . [and] that it will be considered in faculty merit evaluations and tenure/promotion decisions" (1). With this pressure, it is hardly surprising that those departments that comply with the Graduate Council's expectations do so in the form of the definitions, values, and activities proposed in "Mentoring." But while university funding is an enticing carrot indeed, the position paper may be promising more than it can deliver. For one thing, few graduate students have the power to set the terms of their mentoring relationships, much less make decisions about the distribution of university and departmental funds. For another, budget constraints have drastically limited formal reviews within departments and colleges, which suggests that good mentoring programs ultimately have little or no impact on the ways university monies are divided up.

In addition to the curious conflation of student and faculty audiences, the Graduate Council betrays a significant bias in its choice of metaphors for mentoring roles:

Mentors are advisors, people with career experience willing to share their knowledge; supporters, people who give emotional and moral encouragement; tutors, people who give specific feedback on one's performance; masters, in the sense of employers to whom one is apprenticed; sponsors, sources of information about and aid in obtaining opportunities; models, of identity, of the kind of person one would be to be an academic. (1)

This officially sanctioned definition has serious implications. Most obvious is the notion that the mentor is a master, a term containing a history of, at worst, violence and, at best, domestication—neither of which is conducive to non-hierarchical collaboration. Nevertheless, it is difficult to extract a firm position on collaboration from this document. On the surface (and in spite of its disturbing choice of synonyms), "Mentoring" makes use of what we call "the rhetoric of collaboration": it is coauthored by Cusanovich and Gilliland, and it advocates the "sharing" of knowledge, "emotional and moral encouragement," and active professional assistance. But the structure of such "collaboration" is completely hierarchical and unilateral: presumably, only the mentor has knowledge and professional experience to share and encouragement to offer; similarly, the mentor has sole responsibility and prerogative in establishing and maintaining such relations. Thus, while the rhetoric of "Mentoring" seems to favorably recognize pseudo-collaborative mentoring relationships, it undermines itself in two specific ways: it encourages hierarchical relationships based on unequal distributions of power (master/apprentice, for example), and it does not encourage collaborative scholarship. In short, this document does nothing to question or change traditional university structures that suppress collaboration. Furthermore, "Mentoring" seems unwilling (or perhaps unable) to critique this position—perhaps because, as the manifestation of an institutional structure, it can't. Foucault, Lyotard, and others have shown how power is discursively constituted in
social "fields of force" or "master narratives"—that is, how dominant posi­
tions emerge as if they were the only, the best, or the most "reasonable"
positions available. Enshrined in law, embedded in institutions, and routin­
ized in administrative practices and procedures—in short, given the "offi­
cial" seal of approval—such positions seem almost invisible and, thus, beyond
critique.

But there are, in fact, alternatives to the perspective offered by
"Mentoring." In a recent interview, an assistant professor at a large research
university (whom we'll call Debbie Fry) stated unequivocally that although
in her experience mentoring and collaboration have been two different
things, she would like to see them merge:

“If you’re in a mentoring relationship, it usually occurs because one person has something
to share with another person. And I wish it could be more collaborative in nature because
I think that I’ve got some real good experiences, but everyone I’ve worked with so far in
this business has also had equally good experiences, and so I don’t see myself as being
superior in any way to a student that I’ve worked with . . . In true collaboration I don’t
think that negates someone sharing some expertise, or someone sharing some knowledge
or some experience that is worthwhile with another person."

Debbie points out that her most successful mentoring relationships “gave me
confidence, and I think that’s what a good mentor should do, sort of help you
realize what’s within you, rather than imposing something on you that you
don’t care to do.” While she describes her past mentoring experiences as
dominated by the equation “mentor equals advice-giver,” Debbie mistrusts
the idea that mentors should be all-knowing experts, and she is uncomfort­
able with the pressure to be a “master” of her field. She prefers instead to see
herself as a “co-investigator” or “co-conspirator,” and thus she’s drawn to
collaboration as an alternative to the traditional mentoring described in the
Graduate Council position paper.

In spite of her commitment to collaborative relationships, though, Debbie expresses some doubt that they will ever be accepted in the academic
world: “It's hard because you have to perform, and you have to achieve, and
you have to publish, and collaboration is not rewarded. I want to get ahead and
be on the cutting edge. And so how can we . . . really, collaborate?” Debbie
recalls a relationship with a mentor who took credit for her ideas, and she
wonders if the academy’s system of rewards would have even supported their
coming up with ideas together. She explains how in her first-year review she
has to claim a percentage of responsibility or contribution within collabora­
tive projects (for example, 50-50, 60-40), a practice that perpetuates the
notion that it is preferable to work alone. Coming to the conclusion that the
academy does not support non-traditional approaches to mentoring, Debbie
says, “I don’t think there can be good alternatives [to mentoring] until we
think hard about the system that we’re in.” If the academy is going to
institutionalize mentoring, she says, then somehow it has to show that it
values that relationship, perhaps by offering release time or honoraria. "There's so much that demands time as far as committees, and your writing, teaching, students, and if you have to fit mentoring in there as just another responsibility, it's gonna be down at the bottom." (For more detailed case studies of Debbie Fry's and other academic women's mentoring experiences, see Ervin.)

Both the position paper and Debbie's observations illustrate a basic contradiction that suppresses collaboration within academe: faculty (particularly untenured faculty) and graduate students are encouraged to seek out and collaborate with mentors; however, they are rewarded for working and succeeding independently. The traditional view of mentoring prescribed by "Mentoring: The Faculty-Graduate Student Relationship" encourages an unequal power distribution that silences students and opens them to sexual harassment, the appropriation of their ideas, and pressure to emulate the behavior and values of their superiors. Consequently, the kind of collaborative mentoring that is encouraged within the academy is the kind that fits into a hierarchical, unilateral, master/apprentice model—and that encourages us to aspire to a model of scholarship represented by the solitary, self-sufficient cogito.

Physical Structures of the University. In the process of writing this paper, we have realized that the university is in many ways like those "sick buildings" so much in the news these days. The physical metaphor is more apt than it might immediately seem, for just as sick buildings are infected by toxic fumes and oppressive architectural designs, the modern academy is infected by physical structures which create an atmosphere that discourages collaborative learning among undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty. Our discussion in this section is based not on university documents, but on personal experience, observation, and classroom discussions.

One example of this is the structure of many classrooms on our campus. Because, like many schools, the University of Arizona has such a large composition program, it has no "home" building; that is, writing teachers must travel all over campus for available classroom space. Every semester, Room Scheduling is deluged with requests from writing teachers for classrooms with movable desks, but most of these requests must be denied: movable desks are a rare commodity at the University of Arizona.

Let us describe a typical room from Elizabeth's teaching experience this semester. Located in the Mines and Metallurgy Building, this room has seating for more than two-hundred students. The tiny wooden desks are arranged in tight rows to allow maximum space efficiency. And, as one of Elizabeth's students discovered, the desks are bolted to the floor to allow maximum cleaning efficiency: it's easier to sweep the floors when students don't move the desks around. Approximately two feet of space stretches to the back of the room on both sides of the body of desks, leaving no space
behind the back row; in other words, there is no place to stand conveniently for any length of time—except, not surprisingly, at the front of the room, where a raised stage is furnished with a chair and overhead projector. The physical structure of this classroom reinforces a socioeducational structure: students (as many as possible) sit down here; the teacher (very wise, with much knowledge to transmit to the masses) stands up there. Students are not to move themselves or their desks; they should look straight ahead and mind their own business. It is physically easier in such a classroom not to try to work in groups. Elizabeth has had complaints and bruises and stiff necks from her poor students when they have to maneuver in those settings. And though Mines and Metallurgy is one of the older buildings on campus, we should note that even rooms in the newest buildings have similar physical features.

Time structures also discourage or prevent collaborative work in the classroom. Most university courses are designed for a lecture format, so that students meet with a teacher for fifty minutes three times a week, for instance. Our complaint is that true collaboration takes time—time to get to know each other, time to build trust within the group, time to wonder together. When, for example, only twenty or thirty minutes can be allotted for group work, it seems necessary to artificially impose strict guidelines and specific, goal-oriented tasks which actually inhibit meaningful collaborative relationships. In short, hierarchical, competitive structures remain in place in spite of everyone's best intentions.

Office space poses yet another physical restriction for many composition teachers, especially teaching assistants, who are usually corralled into crowded offices or closets. English department TA's are strongly advised (for insurance purposes) to hold conferences in their assigned offices—that is, instead of outside on the mall or at the student union. But for those teachers interested in facilitating group conferences, the lack of space, quiet, and privacy inhibits productive talk and movement. It's difficult to see the benefits of collaboration with the telephone ringing, people knocking on the door, and officemates trying to conference with their students.

These anecdotal examples are not exhaustive. However, they clearly reinforce our idea that the academy oppresses collaborative relationships on a physical as well as a linguistic and political level. These structures are not coincidental. By design, even architectural design, they promote and perpetuate a conventional conception of schooling, teaching, and learning.

Collaboration and Anarchy in the Academy
In light of the institutional structures into which we are initiated as we enter the academy, it is not surprising that collaboration is neither a natural relationship nor an easy one. To be honest, it can be difficult to put the necessary effort into collaboration when the very real concerns of professional success are weighing upon us, and when we are trained to believe that "we really work better alone." When we began this project, for example, our
vision of collaboration was infused with the *cogito* version of knowledge and scholarship discussed earlier. Stealing an hour between classes and meetings, we discussed our ideas, gave each other an assignment to work on—alone, at our own convenience—and made plans to meet and try to put together what we had come up with. This approach did not work for either of us: we had taken similar notes, but by the time we actually sat down to do our “homework,” we no longer had a clear vision of what we were doing, of what our goals were. So when we met again, we had to start from scratch, taking new notes and articulating concrete goals that we both understood and agreed on. The key difference in this second meeting was that we realized that we needed to begin drafting our essay together—sitting in the same room, in front of the same computer—however difficult, inconvenient, or “unnatural” this process seemed.

Our experience demonstrates the challenge of collaboration that Ackelsberg and Addelson identify in “Anarchist Alternatives to Competition”: namely, “that competitive structures need to be opposed not only by cooperative structures but *in cooperative ways*” (231; emphasis added). The distinction might seem artificial, but “working together” does not necessarily imply collaboration; furthermore, replacing competitive structures with collaborative ones is clearly ineffective if we do not inhabit such structures collaboratively. Because collaborative scholarship is undervalued and thus underpracticed, it is important to investigate collaborative processes even as we work collaboratively. As we worked on this project, we addressed the following issues: how we interpreted tasks and goals; how we negotiated roles and responsibilities; how we addressed our mistakes, misunderstandings, and different visions for this project; how we felt about the other person and ourselves as we learn to work together. Reflecting on our own collaboration helped to make it a more natural process. More importantly, though, we hope to demonstrate through our own successful partnership that it is possible to resist the hierarchical structures that seem to dictate only one path to success within the academy—that it is possible, even, to revise those structures, and thus create new realities, new paths for success.

Because many scholars have defended collaboration as a valuable scholarly relationship, we have not taken that as our project. Instead, we hope to show how institutionalized university structures may (indeed, *must*) be revised so that collaborative scholarship is encouraged, valued, and rewarded. We take as our starting point recent feminist revisions of the notion of autonomy.

Most contemporary models of moral development claim that a sense of an autonomous self, clearly differentiated from others, is necessary for the development of a moral sense. As Lorraine Code has argued, the achievement of rationality has historically rested upon the same assumptions, to the degree that knowledge itself is considered autonomous—as long as it transcends the “muddling” particularities of experience, that is (111-13). A
problem with this notion of autonomy is that certain groups—including women, children, slaves, and the mentally ill—have been considered incapable of achieving it. Women, in particular, continue to be structurally excluded from rational discourse: they represent minorities in most academic disciplines, and they are frequently associated with terms like emotion, body, and dependence, which are devalued and defined in opposition to rationality, at least in Western cultures. What this suggests is that our understanding of autonomy has been constructed from a limited perspective, one that dovetails with the Cartesian cogito and its emphasis on detached, dispassionate noninvolvement: the "view from nowhere." Sandra Harding has argued that within this context, autonomy is based upon a concept of the self as "individualistic, self-interested, fundamentally isolated from other people and from nature"; of community "as a collection of similarly . . . isolated, self-interested individuals having no intrinsically fundamental relations with one another"; and of nature as a "system from which the self is fundamentally separated and which must be dominated to alleviate the threat of the self's being controlled by it" (Science Question 171). Thus defined, the maintenance of autonomy and rationality depends upon knowledge-seeking and knowledge-making as solitary, competitive activities.

It is possible, however, to conceptualize autonomy and rationality in other ways. Carol Gilligan, for example, has argued that a person achieves moral maturity when he or she is able to successfully balance concerns for self and concerns for others; feminist philosophers have called this an "ethic of care." Evelyn Fox Keller, furthermore, has articulated a theory of "dynamic autonomy" that "reflects a sense of self . . . as both differentiated from and related to others, and a sense of others as subjects with whom one shares enough to allow for a recognition of their independent interests and feelings" (99). Clearly, then, autonomy can be defined in terms of mutual interests, cooperation, and interdependence; and so can rationality. Within these revised definitions, the autonomous knower may legitimately see other scholars as resources rather than as competitors for a limited number of academic rewards. Such a reconfiguration would make the market version of scholarship obsolete, thus reducing the competition between individual scholars that seems imperative within current institutional structures.

John Trimbur has said that "one of the goals of collaborative learning is to replace the traditional hierarchical relations of teaching and learning with the practices of participatory democracy" (611). We embrace this goal, but let's think about it in practical terms. New conceptions of autonomy and rationality are of little effect unless they are used to restructure academic policies and standards, "to remake them from the root." As long as the university values single-authored works over collaborative ones, to use just one example of the traditional structure, theories of autonomy-as-interdependence will remain viable only as theories. And as long as universities publish and distribute the kinds of documents we have been discussing in this
essay, scholars will continue to share those values.

We have argued throughout this essay, however, that the academy need not be organized according to constrictive notions of autonomy and rationality, and it need not impose the language of hierarchy, competitiveness, and individualism. What we offer here are six specific guidelines for reinventing the university based on collaborative principles that integrate feminist epistemological assumptions.

First: *We must value collaboration as a genuine professional relationship.* Throughout official policies and documents, university administrators need to offer explicit assurance to faculty and graduate students that professional relationships based on cooperation and interdependence (team-teaching and mentoring, for example) are valued and will be rewarded. They must also explain in writing *how* these relationships will be rewarded, and they must be held accountable to their policies. A commitment to collaboration should be described in university mission statements.

Second: *We must change our mechanisms for evaluating graduate student and faculty performance.* By placing disproportionate or sole emphasis on individual authorship, the university subtly discourages collaboration. Once we stop pretending that people do their (best) writing and research alone, however, it becomes clear that quality scholarship can be produced under other circumstances. In fact, famous collaborator Mary Belenky suggests that truly collaborative work is actually higher in quality than single-authored work:

> If a work is embedded in a collaborative process, the writers goad each other into endless revisions. . . . No one working alone can do that kind of intensive revision, nor can they benefit from the extensive redrafting that takes place in conversation. The kind of reflection and revising enabled by collaboration brings a quality of depth and scope to a work. Collaborating may only produce two-hundred or three-hundred pages of text, but perhaps they’re more enduring than the two- or three-hundred pages of a single voice. (qtd. in Ashton-Jones and Thomas 281)

For these reasons, Belenky suggests that collaborative scholarship should count *double* in faculty evaluations.

Third: *We must be more flexible with the contingencies of an effective collaborative relationship.* In order to develop a sense of mutual trust and, thus, in order to do better work, collaborators must have time to talk, to reflect continually on the collaborative process. If we recognize that collaborative relationships take time to develop, we must also recognize that they may not develop within the boundaries of a first-year or tenure review, or within traditional definitions of academic standards, or even in time for submission deadlines. Two days before this essay was due, for example, Dana was incapacitated with a back injury and we were unable to work; although this "inconvenience" did not ultimately keep us from completing the project, it did force us to shift our collaborative responsibilities temporarily.
Fourth: We must develop guidelines for fair and honest collaborative relationships. Those involved in collaborative projects must be encouraged to negotiate their goals and discuss their roles and expectations for joint projects, perhaps in writing.

Fifth: We must find ways to help students and faculty improve ineffective, unfair, or unrewarding collaborative relationships. Although we feel strongly that the university should not legislate collaboration, we believe that assistance in arbitration or in renegotiating project goals could be built into institutional structures. Scholars committed to collaborative scholarship need institutional protection; such protection must be integrated into codes of ethics.

Sixth: We must invest time and resources in teaching collaborative processes instead of competitive ones. We must practice collaboration in our classrooms in ways that challenge competitive institutional structures instead of in ways that reinforce them. The idea that we must have a totally different conception of teaching and learning has enormous implications. As Ackelsberg and Addelson explain, “The contrast is not simply between competition and cooperation, but between different understandings of equality, justice, knowledge, and—importantly—the nature of social reality” (222).

We are aware, of course, that there are objections to what we propose. Structures based on competition are familiar, and we have been rewarded for “mastering” them. In fact, most of us have lived within these structures for so long that we find it difficult even to recognize them much less to envision alternatives. As Alfie Kohn points out in No Contest: The Case Against Competition, competitive structures force us to define our world as a series of contests: “Our collective creativity seems to be tied up in devising new ways to produce winners and losers” (2). But what such a system masks is the fact that in order to win, we have to tear other people down, a destructive process in which everyone ultimately loses. “Instead of taking competition for granted,” Kohn suggests, “we ought to be asking what broader arrangements might be altered so as to present us with a structure that does not require winners and losers” (193).

The alternative to this destructive process is not simply to promote the notion of a meritocracy by applying the rules of the game (on which there is assumed consensus) with as little bias as possible. Rather, the alternative is to question, dismantle, and change the rules of the game. This change won’t come easily. It will require collective effort and long-term commitment (“trying it out” for a semester isn’t enough); and there will be resistance and costs: those who are committed to collaborative endeavors may be denied tenure, promotion, high grades, graduation, and professional esteem. But we are not proposing change just for the sake of change. We believe that it is important to be able to identify ourselves as partners within the academic community; this transformation will empower us to define our own professional identities and collectively shape the identity of the academy.
again to Kohn: "By helping others to see the terrible consequences of a system that predicates one person's success on another's failure, we can act together to change that system" (196).

**Conclusions**

We are not trying to argue here that collaboration never occurs in the academy, nor that cooperative structures are utterly nonexistent. Indeed, there are many signs to the contrary. For example, in its handbook for doctoral candidates, the University of Arizona Graduate College casts its staff as "key members of your [Ph.D. candidates'] academic team" (1). As mentioned earlier, the English Department's RCTE program urges students to explore possibilities for collaborative work early in their course of study. And a cursory reading of first-year placement essays suggests that incoming college students are literally starved for collaborative work. One writer sums up the situation like this: "We were never allowed to work together in school, and our teachers would get mad at us if we tried to. The only place we got to work together was on the football team."

As promising as these examples are, there are a number of potential problems. In the case of the Graduate College (who also publishes "Manual for Theses and Dissertations" and "Mentoring: The Faculty-Graduate Student Relationship," discussed earlier), the rhetoric of collaboration may simply disguise a reinforced allegiance to the status quo. In the case of the RCTE program, the positive efforts and encouragement of a small departmental program have little chance of surviving in an environment infected by competitive relationships and rewards and, consequently, hostile to collaboration. Finally, in the case of the incoming students who yearn for opportunities to collaborate, the same writer succinctly illustrates the problem: "Group work is good because you get [the work] done faster when everybody has the same goal." In other words, collaboration is often defined in terms of problem-solving and efficient time-management—terms that do little or nothing to disrupt the competitive structures of individual work.

Clearly, then, this is an overwhelmingly large and wide-ranging problem within the academy: at every point in the academic program, students and faculty are discouraged from seeking support and sharing ideas, and they are encouraged instead to pursue projects independently and competitively. Consequently, while discussions of the importance of collaboration are necessary and useful, the time for real change has arrived. We've done enough rethinking, renegotiating, and reconceptualizing; now we need to revise.

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Works Cited


**ATAC Elections**

Elections for officers of the Association of Teachers of Advanced Composition will be held at the ATAC special interest session of the Conference on College Composition and Communication convention in March 1995. Please send nominations and self-nominations to Irene F. Gale; Department of English; Kansas State University; Manhattan, KS 66506. All nominees must be present at the special interest session.