Being Reasonable: A Proposal for Doctoral Education in Composition Studies

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Sociologist Robert Bellah has recently defined the "true scholar" as someone who has, in addition to disciplinary knowledge and skill, "a stance toward the world" that is "clearly normative or ethical, not merely cognitive" (18). Many compositionists would nod in agreement with this definition of what it means to be a scholar and perhaps have adopted some version of it as their own. For example, Arnetha Ball and Ted Lardner have framed research in composition in terms of acts of teaching writing, explicitly arguing for opening our boundaries of knowledge to encompass teacher affect—our stance toward the world—so that reflections on our actions and attitudes may better inform our theories. Patricia Harkin has invoked the privilege of lore in order to identify the "postdisciplinary" status of composition studies, in which knowledge drawn from lore cannot but transcend the merely cognitive and rise to the level of the ethical or normative. And Sharon Crowley, even though she makes a strong case for disconnecting the service of teaching first-year writing from the development of composition studies as a distinct and valuable area of scholarship, affirms the "unusual professional practices and attitudes" in composition studies that invert "the traditional academic privileging of theory over practice and research over teaching" (4, 3).

Crowley can point to the inversion of theory over practice and Harkin can claim the postdisciplinary nature of composition studies because we have taught ourselves in graduate programs in composition to understand the field in these ways, although this does not mean that we routinely prepare graduate students in composition studies to become what Bellah calls true scholars. If doctoral programs in composition studies did consistently teach students a stance toward the world through disciplinary knowledge, Ball and Lardner’s call for affect-based theorizing would

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be unnecessary. We may generally value practice over theorizing and we do concern ourselves with ethical issues, but we have not made normative concerns central to practices of doctoral education and the formation of composition studies. Nonetheless, graduate students do already implicitly learn a stance toward the world through their acquisition of theoretical knowledge. But this is not the same as teaching students to use theoretical knowledge to take a stance toward the world and toward the people who inhabit it. Nor is it the same as preparing students to take stances supported by theoretical knowledge and encouraged by the ethics of the profession. We need to consider more explicitly the connections of knowledge and stance so that we might better understand, and so act on, doctoral education and the reproduction of composition studies as somehow orientated to the world ethically and normatively as well as cognitively. My claim is that we best consider the connections of knowledge and stance and best evaluate doctoral education in composition studies by thinking through Bellah’s notion of the true scholar.

Bellah’s argument turns on the opposition between the cognitive and the ethical that are given in his definition of a true scholar. He develops this opposition on the familiar ground that scholars who debate disciplinary knowledge and ways of knowing solely within their discipline have lost sight of why those debates matter to anyone else and so have largely lost the ability to make those debates matter to anyone else. According to Bellah, “We claim devotion to pure cognitive inquiry without any other intent, and we argue that the only normative basis for our inquiry is freedom; we do not take conscious responsibility for the fact that freedom without judgment would lead to self-destruction” (20). What begins in the abstract as an opposition between cognition and ethics becomes in practice the struggle between freedom and judgment, a struggle between an openness to all ideas and a commitment to specifiable ways of knowing, a struggle that Bellah describes in language drawn from the debate in political theory between liberalism and communitarianism. The overlap of abstractions, practices, and debates in Bellah’s argument can help compositionists clarify our own abstractions, practices, and debates about freedom and judgment, knowing and doing, so that we may better consider the goals of doctoral education in composition studies. The terms of Bellah’s argument enrich our discussion by enabling us to express a wide variety of issues and positions. Many compositionists who would initially agree with Bellah’s definition of the true scholar might not agree with the commitments to the communitarian position that support the definition. And those compositionists who would go so far as to agree
with the communitarian foundations of Bellah's definition of the true scholar might not agree with the commitments in practice that such foundations entail. To bring these distinctions and their possibilities into discussions of doctoral education in composition studies, I begin with an overview of the tensions in political theory between liberalism and communitarianism. I then draw on those tensions to frame consideration of doctoral education in composition studies.

Liberalism, Communitarianism, and Education

Briefly, the debate between liberals and communitarians turns on a disagreement over principles. For liberals such as John Rawls, the greatest good is freedom. And Bellah is right in many ways to characterize modern disciplines as liberal in the sense that scholars in those disciplines do seem to value most highly their academic freedom. We value academic freedom so highly because we believe that our commitment to free inquiry best protects us when we argue new and especially controversial claims. We also believe that protecting the openness of inquiry best ensures the integrity of our field. In practice, we take great care to protect the freedom of our colleagues by providing them venues in print and at conferences to present their research and to disagree with our own research. But in good liberal fashion, this does not mean, in either principle or practice, that we tolerate all research. We simply don't. We take great care through various review processes to evaluate the presentability and publishability of research, as well as the tenurability of researchers. More to the point of doctoral education, we grade students on their performance in seminars, how well they command the field in their comprehensive exams, and how successfully they present research in dissertations. From a liberal perspective, such evaluation and review processes do not curtail freedom as much as they ensure it by providing guidelines for responsible use of our freedom of inquiry. Simply put, liberal freedom of inquiry is not merely a blanket freedom to say anything; it requires commitments to procedures designed to ensure everyone a fair hearing. For liberals, commitment to procedures enacts responsibility to both the freedom of inquiry of others and so to the common enterprise of inquiry in the field. In this way, the liberal value of freedom of inquiry promotes and supports practices that fashion disciplines as enterprises of cognition, practices of protecting, preserving, and creating knowledge.

When Bellah criticizes the emphasis on freedom of inquiry as not productive of true scholars, he is doing so from a communitarian perspec-
tive. For communitarians such as Bellah, liberal emphasis on freedom of inquiry becomes in practice an overemphasis on procedures such as publication and tenure reviews. Communitarians warn that proceduralism does not rise above itself because it provides no direction for the uses of procedures. By privileging the value of freedom, we are in practice denying our best selves; we are leaving unacknowledged and underdiscussed the dispositions toward ourselves, others, and our world that make our knowledge matter. The communitarian claim is that, at its best, academic proceduralism ensures nothing more than the preservation and promotion of intellectual capacities; at its worst, academic proceduralism perpetuates a tyranny of the majority that diminishes or excludes marginal ideas and knowledge.

In graduate education, emphasis on procedures can encourage students to pursue no other end than to satisfy degree requirements, in which case they acquire knowledge of a field such as composition studies in a manner that at best demonstrates their command of that knowledge. From a communitarian perspective, doctoral candidates whose dissertations demonstrate command of disciplinary knowledge do not in and of themselves rise to the level of true scholars because they have not considered centrally enough issues of disposition that structure the meaning and value of their disciplinary knowledge. As Bellah claims, true scholars can make use of their knowledge because they understand what they know in terms of why it matters. Many compositionists would agree. At the same time, though, compositionists have not adequately inculcated the training of dispositions into doctoral education. Simply encouraging graduate students to apply what they know or training them to theorize through practice is not enough. We need to consider how in doctoral education we create the conditions for the exercise of judgment to guide knowledge making in composition studies.

If composition studies is to retain its claim to a kind of postdisciplinary formation—a knowing that is also a doing—then some version of the communitarian position on freedom of inquiry and responsibility to judgments can provide a vocabulary for evaluating doctoral programs that train people in both the cognitive capacities and dispositions to judgment that define the field. A vocabulary for discussing doctoral education is necessary for political as well as practical reasons. Doctoral education is a matter of the politics of disciplinary identity and the institutional organization of knowledge. It is also a matter of practices of graduate education and the preparation of scholars.

The politics of doctoral education have drawn considerable attention
in the wake of the unionizing of graduate teaching assistants and the lobbying efforts of graduate students for fundamental changes in the training and hiring practices of colleges and universities. For the sake of historical perspective, it is worth noting that concerns about the politics of graduate education are not new. In the mid-1960s, Ken Macrorie had already lamented the current state of graduate education and its sad consequences for the field of English studies. As Macrorie put it, "After many years of cooling reflection I have decided that the Establishment of graduate schools in English is indeed rotten and that its diseases of narrowness and hypocrisy are real" (209). He illustrated the narrowness of graduate education in English by recounting stories of graduate faculty rejecting student challenges to received knowledge; and he illustrated the hypocrisy by recalling his own experience as president of a graduate student group founded by the chair of the department. When the group organized to bring their grievances to the faculty, they were told not to press any complaints, as they were "in no position to do such a thing" (211). Macrorie described the consequences of narrowness and hypocrisy as a generalized graduate student experience of disillusionment and despair: "What hurts most about the run of graduate work in English is that it wastes and saps these brilliant young persons. And in fact, many are not young when they begin their study; the system stalls them and ages them, draining them of energy as they try to teach and study and go back to teach before finishing their degrees" (210). The nature of English studies, and with it the issues of graduate education, have changed considerably over the last forty years. What seems to have changed little is the disillusionment of doctoral students.

**Graduate Students and the Future of English Studies**

In a recent survey of graduate students in doctoral programs in composition studies, Scott Miller and his colleagues found graduate students rather uniformly and unambiguously positive about the "present tense" of their lives as graduate students, but less satisfied about the "future tense" of their lives, their prospects as professionals in composition. As Miller and his coauthors put it in summarizing their results, "Dissatisfaction and ignorance manifests itself most especially regarding professional development issues, job market difficulties, or the transition from graduate school into the professoriate. An alarming number of students simply don’t seem to know much about the ‘future tense’ of their lives as rhetoric and composition professionals" (397). The researchers conclude from this general dissatisfaction that “In some of the respondents’ programs,
there clearly have not been many concerted efforts to foster understand­
ing about rhetoric and composition as a profession, as an institutional
structure situated within other institutional structures” (398). On the one
hand, we can expect individuals to be anxious about their transition from
student to teacher and researcher. On the other hand, the researchers
conclude that widespread anxiety points toward discipline-wide prac­
tices in doctoral education that ignore the more practical aspects of
working in composition studies. Students are anxious because their
education has not prepared them to anticipate applying their knowledge
in the specific institutional settings—the classrooms, departments, of­
fices, conferences, and meetings—where that knowledge is put to work.
Drawing on Bellah’s general criticism of academic disciplines as con­
cerned with cognition and knowing to the detriment of ethics and doing,
the doctoral students surveyed by Miller and his colleagues have been
initiated into a field through “pure cognitive inquiry,” learning “that the
only normative basis for our inquiry is freedom,” and finding that “we do
not take conscious responsibility” for the consequences on the field and
its initiates of “freedom without judgment” (20). Saying this, I do not
discount the significant efforts of administrators and scholars who have
forged an understanding of composition studies as a profession situated
within the institutional structures of higher education. But I also do not
discount Miller and his coauthors, who have so recently found that the
experience of doctoral students in composition studies is that their
education is more about acquiring knowledge and intellectual capacities
than about educating judgments and developing dispositions.

One consequence of a cognitive emphasis in doctoral education has
been our inability to ground discussions of composition’s postdisciplinary
status in concerns about the training of future compositionists. As Joseph
Harris remarked in his editorial to the issue of *College Composition and
Communication* containing the report by Miller and his colleagues,
“Writing about questions of labor practices and staffing as they impact on
our more traditional concerns with teaching and the curriculum is still
something that, as a field, we need to learn how to do. It is not something
most of us have been trained to do (as, indeed Miller et al. point out in this
issue), but unless we teach ourselves how, we will continue to labor under
constraints others have set for us” (332–33). One of those constraints is
the formation of compositionists through doctoral education. We do not
have an adequate vocabulary for talking about the purposes and values of
composition studies because graduate education does not cultivate that
kind of discourse among graduate students. PhDs in composition studies
who have been trained in ways that leave them with vocabularies that are "future imperfect"—that do not facilitate the application of what was learned to what will be done—are, like a majority of compositionists, constrained in their professional discourses by the institution of doctoral education.

Stephen North has recognized the constraints of doctoral education on the structure of work in English studies more generally, arguing that the job crisis and the deprofessionalizing of teaching in English studies are crises of the disciplinary formation of English studies itself and so are crises best addressed through revision of the doctoral education that forms the discipline of English studies and the graduate students who become the future professorate. Attention here to North's argument provides specific claims about doctoral education in English studies, claims that I discuss in the vocabulary of intellectual capacities and critical dispositions drawn from the liberalism/communitarian opposition. While North's argument for curricular revision is concerned with English studies as a whole, the claims he makes regarding the need for a fusion-based curriculum in doctoral education in English studies more generally can also make sense of the current conditions and needs in doctoral education in composition studies more specifically.

North argues that the labor problems that plague English studies are in large part a function of the divide within English departments themselves between the privileging of literary studies and the discounting of teaching undergraduate writing. As North puts it, there is a systemic tendency in English studies toward "(hyper)specialization" that isolates scholars from each other and that disengages the disciplinary work of knowing from the work of teaching, with the consequence that the teaching of first-year writing is economically disempowered (240). To put it in terms drawn from Bellah, North attributes the perpetual crisis of graduate education in English studies to an exclusionary emphasis on preserving and promoting the rationality of disciplinary knowledge to the detriment of dispositions that grant greater purpose to the application of intellectual inquiry. North writes, "Unless and until English Studies takes such steps—fundamentally reinvents itself in a form that ends such internal discounting—it will be in no position even to begin the negotiations that might result in substantive change" (237).

To move English studies in the direction of reinventing itself—to move professionals in the field to a point where, as Harris suggests, they are trained to talk about issues of labor and work—requires, as North points out, a radical revision of graduate education. North recognizes that
a reorganization of how we prepare graduate students for careers, as well as attention to the careers that we prepare them for, does not in and of itself dissipate the range of economic, institutional, political, and social pressures that make the future imperfect for graduate students. At the same time, his strategy of responding to those pressures through curricular revision of doctoral education is aimed at improving the material conditions of work in English studies by introducing issues of work into the disciplinary knowledge of English studies. Considering the merits of North's proposal in terms of the liberal/communitarian disagreement over freedom and judgment highlights the difficulties compositionists face as they work to adequately incorporate normative concerns into the institutionalized practices of doctoral education.

North characterizes his proposed revision of doctoral education as a fusion-based curriculum, a model that guided revision of the doctoral program in English at the State University of New York at Albany. A fusion-based curriculum brings hyper-specialized faculty and graduate students together in a genuine negotiation of relationships and authority. Its three basic features are a requirement for "what amount to do-or-die negotiations" among specialists who must define their relationships to each other, a commitment to affording doctoral students a major role as participants in these negotiations, and a willingness among graduate faculty "to renegotiate their disciplinary and professional status vis-à-vis the doctoral students in their programs" (73, 75). The purpose of the negotiations is to make the significance of work in English studies central to a reorganization of English departments and to the training of doctoral students. The real virtue of the fusion-based curriculum, for North, is in "mandating that the faculty put its authority on the table as part of the process, so that doctoral students are negotiating the terms not only of their own educations but of the nature of English Studies—discipline and profession—as a whole" (256).

Making binding the negotiations about the status of knowledge in English studies, the relative importance of specializations, and the relationships among graduate faculty and doctoral students to each other, to areas of specialization, as well as to texts, fashions what North calls a "programmatic lingua franca" (109) that creates opportunities for doctoral students and faculty to articulate, as Bellah put it, "a stance toward the world" that is "not merely cognitive." I endorse North's bold proposal to put the discipline of English studies on the negotiating table for the sake of professionalizing doctoral students. Including doctoral students in negotiations of knowledge-making in English studies provides a way of
displacing the liberal emphasis on freedom of inquiry that has limited our vocabularies to hyper-specialized rationalization. At the same time, I hesitate supporting North's proposal for a fusion-based curriculum because the proceduralism of its three requirements does not enlarge our vocabularies beyond a liberal emphasis on freedom of inquiry.

The three conditions that enable the fusion-based curriculum—binding negotiations on the relationships of separate areas of specialization, inclusion of doctoral students in negotiations, and willingness among graduate faculty to negotiate their status with doctoral students—create opportunities for discussions about relationships, status, and authority. As purely procedural conditions, they do not provide explicit criteria for evaluating relationships, status, and authority. While the lack of explicit criteria may enable a genuineness of negotiation by preventing, say, graduate faculty from claiming privileged insight on important issues, this does not mean that there are no implicit criteria limiting negotiations or privileging any one position. From a communitarian perspective, the inclusion of people in a dialogue on matters of significance to them is never as open-ended and egalitarian as procedural guarantees make it seem because people never fully divest themselves of their experiences and expectations. In this case, graduate faculty are still graduate faculty and doctoral students are still doctoral students. As North makes clear, faculty must make a conscious commitment to open their status to negotiation. This imperative is certainly necessary to ensure as much equality in negotiations as possible. Setting aside the question of whether faculty can disavow their status to the point that makes fair negotiations possible, I consider what I think is a more damaging communitarian critique of proceduralism: as a strictly procedural constraint, disavowing authority and status disconnects negotiations from the institutional, political, and social frameworks that make those negotiations necessary and meaningful to begin with. Whatever else such a constraint asks, it asks faculty to set aside the dispositions toward others entailed in their disciplinary knowledge. Again, this is not entirely a bad thing, especially if those dispositions lead them to treat doctoral students in the ways Macrorie describes. But from Bellah's communitarian perspective, it is a procedural constraint that isolates the goal of cultivating capacities for judgment from the task of establishing claims for knowing. If graduate faculty and graduate students must surrender discipline-derived capacities to judge what should count as doctoral education, then their claims for curricular revision are denied appeal to the dispositions and knowledge that have come to define
composition studies as a distinct area of intellectual activity. The implica-
tions of this surrender has damaging consequences for North’s fusion-
based curriculum, consequences that are drawn out through consider-
atation of what it means to open negotiation of the curriculum to the needs
of doctoral students and the concerns of a larger public.

The Conundrum of “Reasoned Exception”
In its “Statement on Graduate Students,” the American Association of
University Professors (AAUP) recommends standards for various as-
psects of graduate education. The significance of the standards, as stated
in the preamble, are “not simply to protect the rights of affected individu-
als but also to ensure that graduate education fulfills its responsibilities
to students, faculty, and society” (64). To invoke Bellah’s argument,
ensuring that graduate education fulfills its responsibilities to students,
faculty, and society would require a shift away from the liberal language
of rights and freedom to a communitarian language of judgment. Interest-
ingly, the recommended standards do and do not provide such a language.

The first recommendation reiterates the importance of freedom of inquiry
in graduate education: “Graduate students have the right to academic
freedom. Like other students, ‘they should be free to take reasoned
exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve
judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning
the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.’ Moreover,
their advanced education particularly requires faculty to encourage their
freedom of ‘discussion, inquiry and expression’” (64).

As a statement of standards, the language of the recommendation is
specific enough to be widely applicable and too vague to be particularly
meaningful. Certainly, the language does not encourage the kind of
revision of doctoral education advocated by North. But then North makes
clear that he is not committed to the fusion-based curriculum either over
the long term or as a national model (258). Less sweeping than North’s
proposal for “do-or-die negotiations,” the AAUP statement still follows
in the spirit of reforms recommended by North, asserting the need for
faculty to negotiate with students their freedom to take reasoned excep-
tions to course material. Unfortunately, the statement is not specific
enough about the good that follows from graduate students’ right to the
freedom of reasoned exception. As communitarians such as Bellah argue,
failure to articulate the specifiable good that follows from a distinct
freedom only frustrates efforts to achieve either the freedom or the good.

The AAUP recommends granting graduate students the freedom to
take "reasoned exception," at the same time constraining students to their responsibility for learning course content. The AAUP does not similarly specify the role of faculty beyond a liberal requirement to "encourage" freedom. There is more to it, however, than the statement addresses, and it is this unaddressed issue that vexes both the "Statement on Graduate Students" and North's description of the fusion-based curriculum: when a graduate student in a seminar takes a "reasoned exception" to the claims of the scholarship, or to the claims of seminar faculty, by what criteria is the exception considered "reasoned"? Is it the student's criteria, or is it the faculty's? How far can a student go in the direction of having a reasoned exception to fundamental course content and still act responsibly with regard to learning that content? Certainly, what would count as a "reasoned" exception would differ between students and faculty because each brings to the situation different reasons as well as different ways of reasoning. North's proposal for "do or die" negotiations is no help here. It is at the point of differentiating between reasoned exceptions and curricular responsibility that negotiations would become most difficult. And North only makes the negotiations harder by denying appeal to disciplinary knowledge for the sake of calling everything into question. Such a move not only excludes explicit appeal to an intellectual tradition, it implicitly reaffirms the authority of that tradition.

Susan Wells describes and confronts the bind of reasoned exception in *Sweet Reason*. In a chapter discussing the angry outburst of a student who felt ostracized and silenced by the imperative to call all statements into question, Wells argues that the narrative structures of modernity actually prohibit a student's reasoned exception to the validity of any course content. While the requirement to call all statements into question may appear to provide cognitive ground for equalizing the legitimacy of both teacher and student statements, Wells points out that it in fact privileges the authority of the teacher who is "more used to arguing theories" than her students (205).

The imperative to open all statements to question also disadvantages students because it disconnects their statements from the nonacademic contexts with which students are most familiar and reconnects their statements to structures and traditions with which the teacher is most familiar. In this way, any statements made by students only count to the degree that they successfully appeal to the disciplinary rationality commanded by the teacher. Here, an exception only counts as reasoned when the reasoning remains within disciplinary boundaries that are unexceptional. Wells proposes recasting narratives of modernity that regard the
cognitive imperative to call all statements into question as the best way of removing constraints on the relevance of the social. In her proposal, Wells anticipates North's focus on the need to take student narratives seriously: "What students write provides us with a way to think about the knowledge that we are creating with them, and about how knowledge is deployed in the social. . . . When student writing is studied as a serious form of textual production, then the discourses of the disciplines become available for study as concrete rhetorical negotiations, socially situated practices of rationality" (219). Following this line of argument, North's proposal for negotiating the disciplinary formation of English studies falters, not because North wants to create knowledge with students but because the proposal's procedural preconditions remove the creation of knowledge from the socially situated practices of rationality that we identify as the discourses of the discipline. Procedures meant to secure freedom of inquiry end up sacrificing consideration of the judgments that constitute concrete rhetorical negotiations.

Following Wells, what can count as reasoned exceptions depends on taking seriously—and not discounting for the illusion of procedural fairness—the institutional practices of rationality through which knowledge is created, preserved, and transmitted to students, as well as the socially situated practices of rationality within which, and from which, doctoral students approach their study of composition studies. While negotiating disciplinary rationality with the extracurricular rationalities of students may unsettle traditional conventions for evaluating seminar papers, comprehensive exams, and dissertations, it actually brings us closer to responsible practices of training our normative judgments to draw on cognitive expertise. It brings us closer to enacting Bellah's ideal of a true scholar. Still, recognizing the value of taking seriously the socially situated practices of rationality of both doctoral students and graduate faculty provides little in the way of proposing how it might be done. To recall Bellah, the inclusion of socially situated rationalities in the construction of knowledge directly raises larger political questions about the locations and values of knowledges that a primarily cognitive vocabulary cannot express.

My own experience has been that every time I teach a seminar on writing pedagogy there are a number of students for whom the teaching of writing is a matter of accuracy and correctness (because that is what employers expect) and who are also committed to the view that the acquisition of the conventions of standardized written English among minority students will dismantle discrimination. These students gener-
ally resist, and sometimes even reject, any arguments or research findings that contradict their views. Appeals to academic freedom are really not useful here. We do not typically think of academic freedom as allowing students to resist or reject course content without reasons drawn from within the course content itself; otherwise, we regard the student as not taking responsibility for learning course content. In this case, as Wells demonstrates in her book, any exception is destined to seem unreasoned and thus inappropriate. At the same time, though, these students are not entirely wrong. People in the world do expect accuracy and correctness in writing. We expect it too. But this expectation does not provide me with a satisfactory reason to teach future teachers a pedagogy of skills and drills. Neither does it make their exception any more reasonable.

As the teacher of a graduate seminar on writing pedagogy, I expect students to be persuaded by my presentation of appeals to research literature in composition studies that frames desires for correctness in writing in cultural, economic, historic, and political conditions as well as in class, gender, and race dynamics. My reasons justifying the curriculum and pedagogy I teach in the course do not always persuade students to completely or even partially give up their commitments. As sometimes happens, students can become more adamant in what they see as their reasoned exceptions. In this case, I am not convinced that these students can use their freedom to take exception with course content and still be considered as having acted responsibly with regard to learning that content. What counts here as academic freedom would depend, as it does above, on whether one asked the student or the faculty. Describing my experience in liberal terms as a tension between the individual right to reasoned exception and the individual responsibility to learn leaves me short of Bellah’s definition of the true scholar, short of making best use of a fusion-based curriculum, and short as well of the stated hope of the AAUP standards “not simply to protect the rights of affected individuals but also to ensure that graduate education fulfills its responsibilities to students, faculty, and society” (64).

The students in my class who want to learn how to teach writing in ways that promote surface correctness do so because they do believe that this best fulfills their responsibility to society. Here the problem of reasoned exception and the responsibility to learn become entangled in concerns other than freedom of inquiry. In this case, the rights of students to take exception with their education draws from a greater responsibility to society that demands less responsibility to faculty and to the knowledge of composition studies. But I too would claim that I teach graduate
seminars in writing pedagogy in ways that most fulfill my responsibility to students and society, as well as to the ways of knowing specific to composition studies. Our senses of responsibility seem to overlap, but our understandings of the obligations entailed are clearly distinct. Neither freedom of inquiry nor binding negotiations help my students and me to decide the matter. Commitments to openness and procedural fairness give us no way to explain for ourselves whether any one teaching practice is more responsible than another. We are left agreeing to disagree, unless I resort to my authority as representative of the power of the truth of research in composition studies, to which—I would then be forced to claim—our inquiry in the seminar is ultimately responsible. But my appeal to disciplinary authority would abandon freedom of inquiry in an effort to reach resolution. Rather than abandoning freedom and appealing to authority, communitarian theorists describe the inevitable need for appeal to some end other than freedom as an opportunity to make explicit the dispositions necessary for exercise of good judgment. Further elaboration of the communitarian position brings valuable perspective to discussions of doctoral education in composition studies, making it possible to account for what it means to be a true compositionist and do the work of composition studies.

The Communitarian Solution

A communitarian critique of liberal freedom claims that an evaluative term is always introduced in any procedural recommendation. As an example of liberal discourse, the AAUP recommendation is no exception. It introduces the term “reasoned” to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate exceptions to course content. As I presented it above, the notion of a “reasoned exception” causes serious trouble for a liberal emphasis on freedom of inquiry, primarily because criteria for deciding what count as reasoned exceptions can differ so greatly. But within a communitarian frame of reference, the term “reasoned” becomes an advantage and provides a way to connect, as the AAUP proposes, the rights of individuals with responsibilities to specific groups, such as students, faculty, and society. Bellah’s claim is not that the cognitive concentration of modern disciplines is not rational. The disciplines are highly rational. The disciplinary pursuit of knowledge is driven by logically grounded research methodologies. For Bellah, the disciplines are simply not reasonable. They do not encourage scholars to make sense of their work to anyone else. Similarly, the graduate student who takes reasoned exception to course content may be rational (that is, internally consistent in his
or her exception), but he or she may not be reasonable (that is, making judgments persuasive to others in the situation). Of course, the same may be said of the faculty member who rejects the student’s reasoned exception. The faculty member may be acting rationally but not reasonably. The kind of reasonableness needed in this situation is best defined by Cass Sunstein as making it “possible to obtain agreement where agreement is necessary,” and making it “unnecessary to obtain agreement where agreement is impossible” (8).

In terms of balancing faculty responsibility to encourage academic freedom against graduate student rights to reasoned exception and graduate student responsibilities for course content, reasonableness provides that a range of interpretations, responses, and theories are possible, acceptable, and encouraged. What’s more, reasonableness understood in terms of encouraging agreement up to the limit of its possibility is vital for the production of knowledge in composition studies and is productive of attitudes and dispositions that enact composition studies in the persons of graduate students who can become (through the experience of learning composition studies by exercising reasonableness) what Bellah calls true scholars. This understanding of reasonableness provides a way for me as teacher of a graduate seminar to better engage students who take exception to course content.

In my writing pedagogy seminar, students who take exception with process pedagogies or with post-process pedagogies can be acting reasonably. But if I seek only a rational agreement between research claims in composition studies and student exceptions to those claims, the seminar devolves into a negotiation of knowledge and of ways of knowing. It becomes nothing more than an exercise in weighing cognitive claims where we challenge each other to provide accounts of how we know what we know, accounts that can only make sense in terms of prior knowledge that we already accept or reject. Such a dispute is really no improvement. A communitarian conception of reasonableness demands more. It demands an accounting of what we know that makes sense in terms of normative requirements to draw others into discussion of our shared commitments. Here student exceptions to research claims in composition studies only count as reasonable to the extent that those exceptions express a responsibility to purposes of teaching writing that themselves can be reasonably expressed in terms of individual aspirations, social norms, and political and economic conditions. Similarly, research claims about the teaching of writing only count as reasonable to the extent that they directly account for the individual and social purposes
of writing pedagogies. Finding the common ground of reasonableness in this instance becomes a matter of negotiating the purposes for teaching writing and, given those purposes, deciding on ways of knowing, as well as instances of exception, that do and do not satisfy those purposes. A seminar on the teaching of writing grounded in the pursuit of purposes would not violate freedom of inquiry because it does not disallow reasoned exception; what it does do is shift the ground for the reasonableness of exception to the question of the appropriateness of action. Students who take exception to composition pedagogies because they are initially committed to the practical value of teaching standardized written English are engaged in an exception not to the validity of the research but to the possibilities inherent in that research for consequential action. I have come to engage this exception, to understand it and to respond to it as reasoned, by facilitating discussion of how and why we decide in composition studies that some teaching practices are preferable to others.

My proposal for a standard of reasonableness to guide negotiations between graduate faculty and doctoral students has the advantage over North’s commitment to a common language of inquiry that it provides normative guidance for the knowledge produced in a given negotiation without discounting the extant knowledge of the field, the multiple purposes of graduate education, or the positionality of either doctoral students or graduate faculty. A graduate curriculum in composition studies that focuses on training in the norm of reasonableness would emphasize the capacity to evaluate and explain the good enabled by knowledge in the field. Such a curriculum would enhance action-oriented research opportunities (such as those described by Thomas Miller) by explicitly preparing students to represent the consequence and value of research to broader constituencies. Faculty and students would explicitly concern themselves with developing an understanding of how the broader concerns of a larger public enable and constrain research-supported practices. In light of this understanding, they would concentrate on creating narratives that persuasively justify research-based action to broader publics. They would also focus on crafting research claims within composition studies that take account of public imperatives. The goal is to enable students to discern and represent to a range of audiences the greater common good served by composition research. The widespread adoption of this curriculum would have consequences for composition studies. It would enrich the normative vocabulary of the field, legitimating research for a broader audience and moving the value of writing research beyond what it contributes to first-year writing and
Knowledge in composition studies would matter not only for the services it enables us to provide; it would matter for the challenges to inequality and injustice it makes possible. It would enable us to persuade others that what we know and what we do with that knowledge contributes to a clearer articulation of the common good through the redistribution of literacy practices.

The broader implications of a doctoral education grounded in the pursuit of reasonableness are hinted at by Bellah and his coauthors in *The Good Society*, a book that makes claims for the democratic restructuring of basic institutions. Interestingly, in the discussion of the democratic possibilities in education, Bellah and his colleagues draw on composition studies and the work of James Berlin. Remarking on Berlin and on Richard Ohmann, they characterize teachers of writing as “actually working with several discourse communities, all of which must be treated respectfully, at the same time that students must learn that mastering standard written English enables them to participate in a linguistic community of great importance in our culture” (171). The goal of respect for difference does more than enhance inclusion; it serves to develop the capacities and dispositions necessary for making judgments about uses of language in pursuit of citizenship in a democratic society. They write, “The class is conceived as a collaborative activity in which students take responsibility for discovering how to use language effectively” (171–72).

Bellah and his coauthors translate what they see as the strengths of first-year writing pedagogies into proposals for professional education:

> Within the social sciences and the humanities teachers can still ask the central questions of social self-interpretation that are essential to citizens, and in our professional schools efforts are widespread to link professional expertise more explicitly to social responsibility and ethical sensitivity. The very diversity of American education allows a variety of forms that would link intellect with character and citizenship. For these to flourish we must make changes throughout our institutional life, particularly in our economic and governmental institutions, changes that would show that we understand education less obsessively in terms of “infrastructure for competition” and more as an invaluable resource in the search for the common good. (175)

I believe that reasonableness can be used to reconceive the politics of graduate education in composition studies so as to encourage a search for the common good between graduate student exception and faculty assertion. A reciprocity of reasonableness would shift what it means to
enter the profession and so would change the kind of profession that gets entered. If we seek in the ethics of knowledge making and in the ethics of graduate education a reasonableness that nurtures judgment and reproduces through that judgment the conditions for ethical, reasonable judgment-making in conditions of unevenly distributed authority, power, and voice, then we will be preparing “true scholars” in composition studies.

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