Let me say immediately that I share Marc Bousquet’s central assumption as it appears in the second paragraph of his essay: “I prefer instead a labor [Bousquet’s emphasis] theory of agency and a rhetoric of solidarity, aimed at constituting, nurturing, and empowering collective action by persons in a group.” Given that conditions vary widely from one institution to another, however, and given that the labor force directly involved in composition instruction typically involves multiple groups, sometimes with conflicting interests, the constitution of “group” solidarity in any specific instance is neither obvious nor something that can be determined in advance. Graduate students, often from different disciplines; part-time and adjunct instructors; instructors on one-, two- or three-year renewable contracts; instructors in their third, fourth (or more) three-year renewable contract periods; postdocs on fixed term with partial research support in addition to their composition responsibilities; tenure-track and occasionally already tenured instructors—any or all of the above might be involved in composition instruction at a given time in a given institution. There’s no reason to assume automatically that any “rhetoric of solidarity” might equally well serve these potentially very disparate groups. Nevertheless, all this can be recognized without flipping immediately to the opposite extreme of arguing that agency must then necessarily be so individuated that collective action of any sort becomes a naive or anachronistic dream. Bousquet’s argument already supplies sufficient evidence to the contrary.
My point is simply that a "labor" theory of collective agency, such as Bousquet's, remains a point of departure for political understanding and action, not a conclusion. In fairness, however, this isn't an essay about political coalition building, but rather a critique of a range of theorizing within composition studies that has ignored or, at worst, dismissed out of hand the political possibilities of collective action while across that range gaining increased visibility and even ascendancy in determining viable directions for composition instructors. Indeed, the critique goes much further, by drawing out connections between this recent theorizing and a number of developments in the organization of educational institutions that affect a great many people in a number of different ways. And it's this register of Bousquet's argument that I want to address first, before returning in my conclusion to the vexed issues of constituting group solidarity.

In remarking on the often expressed hope that composition might eventually come to assume a status equivalent to other university disciplines, Bousquet suggests parenthetically that "Of course, this equivalence could easily come about by the frightening but very real possibility—evidenced by clear statistical trends—that labor patterns in other disciplines will become more like those in composition, rather than the other way around" (6). Later in the same paragraph, he is even more emphatic: "To put it in blunt terms, so long as composition's discourse remains a management science—or, alternatively, until history, engineering, and philosophy are management sciences to the same extent—it is likely to fail to enjoy the status it seeks: the status of a discipline among peers. Insofar as we observe the continuing realization of the logic of the EMO, however, composition's 'peerlessness'—is nonequivalence with the other disciplines—is likely to become increasingly visible as its 'excellence,' in Bill Readings' sense, with composition exemplifying the ideal labor relation of the managed university [Bousquet's emphasis] to which all other disciplines must conform" (6). Among other things I take these suggestions to mean that both the labor conflicts and the intellectual tensions that currently characterize the field of composition instruction might well be understood as a harbinger of things to come elsewhere across the organization of higher education generally rather than the growth pangs of a still nascent field poised but not yet quite empowered to take its rightful place within an existent disciplinary structure. As the university discipline still typically charged with the bulk of composition instruction, English could certainly bear out Bousquet's speculations. Any glance at the virtual explosion of comp jobs,
relative to other positions, in recent MLA Job Information lists should suggest how closely the educational fate of English has become tied to composition.

To some extent, of course, this has always been the case. The size, importance, and funding of English relative to other humanities disciplines was predicated far more on the responsibility to teach writing than on the wonders of literary criticism and theory, even in the overt ideologizing of "literature" during the Cold War. What has changed is the positioning and composition of the labor force, on the one hand, and the pervasiveness of what Bousquet refers to as the "management" of human resources, on the other. In short, the putatively pragmatist hope of achieving integration into "the system as it is," with the accompaniment of disciplinary respect for the expertise of composition practitioners, may well soon prove to be far more a pipedream than any union organizing. It's not alarmist by any means sometimes to feel that there's no there there; the "as is" of "the system" seems directionally shapechanging before one's eyes, with a potential for an all-too-familiar result of achieving a kind of status that's possible only because it no longer matters in the same way anyway.

At the same time, however, it must be acknowledged that there often seems to be a possibility for some enhanced position for composition specialists that isn't at all dependent on entry into an assumed existent disciplinary structure. More directly, though at the risk of oversimplification, writing instruction for a number of reasons has become a valuable commodity, not only within postsecondary educational institutions at a number of different sites, but also in the corporate world and in local, state, and federal government bureaucracies. The National Committee On Writing report, projected now for April 2003, is already being anticipated as if the next Nation at Risk sensation. Writing instruction has purchase beyond the field of composition and the expertise of its practitioners. In contrast, issues such as the debates over whether Foucault misdated the emergence of the Early Modern period have trouble selling even to university presses for runs of less than 300 copies, though for the immediate time being literary scholars who do manage to negotiate the difficulties of publication can still anticipate relatively greater disciplinary rank and status than most composition specialists.

An awareness of this situation in one form or another hasn't been lost on those who teach and publish in composition, with the result that it seems to me necessary to distinguish two rather different directions within the pragmatism that Bousquet critiques. One direction, as he
argues, does indeed seem intent on achieving for composition an internal recognition as a legitimate discipline that could take its place within an existent structure of disciplinary organization—by such means as making visible the existence of a long and complicated history of the field, by elaborating a theoretical and methodological exoskeleton guiding research in the area, and indeed at times by the rhetorical strategies Bousquet labels as a matter of "pleasing the prince." But there is also another direction that would instead trade on, precisely, the commodity value of writing instruction both within and outside the university. Crudely, this is an approach that would link recognition, status, and pay to the market value of the commodity rather than to the possibility of achieving an enhanced academic capital that could be translated into disciplinary status. And among those Bousquet discusses as "pragmatists," as well as others such as Miller or Harris, it's possible to recognize that both these directions often play a part.

Within the terms of how the recent history of composition has been narrativized, however, a quest for academic legitimacy continues to have a relatively greater appeal than what I'll call for lack of a more decorous term a market-value approach. I think Bousquet is right to note the decline of critical pedagogy—whether because it is perceived as naive and anachronistic, or because it evidences a certain "bad faith" in its payoff in the classroom. And right to note a decline of theory generally in favor of more rhetorical or pragmatic oriented practices. Nevertheless, the antagonistic critique of market-based thinking, of corporate imperatives, of "vocationalizing," and of late capitalism generally so much a part of critical pedagogy and other theory-oriented approaches persists to the point that overt, direct market-value claims for writing instruction remain highly suspect. Striving for academic legitimacy may involve compromises, accommodations, even shameless pandering at times, but not what would seem an outright abandonment of familiar goals in the way a market-value approach does, just a more pragmatic means for gradually achieving some of those goals at the minimal expense of ideological purity. I should, of course, make clear at this point that I'm not at all preparing the ground to advocate some more direct market-value approach. What I'm uneasy about, for two rather different reasons, is the way in which emergent debates are being shaped in roughly the terms I've sketched out above.

First, I see little reason whatsoever to imagine that even a very aggressive pragmatism of "hard market realities" would translate into enhanced recognition, status, and pay for composition practitioners if just
shorn of its sentimental leftism and pursued aggressively enough. Historically, the perceived market value of a commodity has rarely if ever translated automatically into a radical distribution of greater rewards for those offering the commodity. More often than not, it's been almost the reverse, especially when no collectively organized labor group exists. If anything, the perceived market value occasions intensified exploitation, tighter controls over surplus distribution channels, and a frenetic competition among individual entrepreneurs. After all, the market value of writing instruction as a commodity is hardly "intrinsic," but dependent more than anything on the cheapness of its availability. Nor can I foresee much chance for a kind of halfway house here—that is, test out some of this more market-oriented stuff as short-term tactics to be abandoned once the immediate end is achieved. Being able to step in and out of specific tactics at will assumes already empowered agents—that is, one must assume that the "problem" has already de facto been "resolved," by The Market or otherwise, and all that remains is to act on it.

This line of reasoning leads me to my second difficulty with the way debates are shaping—namely, the potential for articulating the issue as a matter of ethical judgment (that is, the idea that perhaps we could at this point in time pursue more market oriented approaches). But should we? Are "we" really ready to see ourselves as little more than technical agents for an advanced corporatism at the potential expense of foregoing any opportunity for a genuinely educated democratic citizenry and a more inclusively just society? Casting the issues in this way, however, not only invites a reinvention—and not even as just a second and "farcical" historical return—of yet another round of idealism versus more jam arguments. More to my point, such ethical judgments also assume already fully empowered agents who can at will step back from events into equivalent individual spaces to make those inevitably difficult judgments of ethical principle. And even at best they would ignore all the intricate structural politics of how in the world such a space might be made available to everyone with stakes in the outcome.

This, of course, returns me to my initial point about Bousquet's "labor theory of agency and a rhetoric of solidarity" in the circumstances of differently constituted groups involved in the teaching of composition at very different kinds of locations. Another way of recognizing that the constituencies of a composition labor force often have different interests and stakes in composition instruction, however, is to say that these different groups also often have different powers of action in their
specific circumstances. A rhetoric of “pleasing the prince” on the part of WPAs as lower management may seem suspect to Bousquet and others, but for graduate students—even unionized graduate students—it has necessarily a rather different valence. And even when such a rhetoric seems suspect, the reasons aren’t the same. Bousquet can be quite dismissive about the results of “pragmatic” and rhetoric-based strategies for changing institutions: “A lab for business writing? Sure. Salary, tenure, and research budget for writing program administrators? No problem. A graduate program or certificate in rhetoric and composition? Go for it. But when it comes to employing the institutional capital that comes from overseeing a large cheap labor force for purposes that run counter to institutional capitalism, such as addressing the scandalous working conditions of the labor force itself, the lower-management track record of enacting change is pretty poor” (9). But on the basis of Bousquet’s own analysis of lower management positions, it would seem that those first enumerated changes are precisely the kind of changes within the scope of lower management positional powers of action. Thus, there might be better reasons for making “common cause” with the authors of “Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change” and other like-minded critics than solely out of the frustration of finding this almost the only oppositional politics left around. The idea of a common cause might be determined more productively on the basis of an analysis that takes as its object a means of figuring connections among the multiple powers of action potentially available to differently positioned groups teaching composition.

At a more macro level, there remains as yet much to understand about the operational powers of what Bousquet refers to as “academic capitalism.” The work of Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson (J. K. Gibson-Graham when writing collaboratively) since The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy, for example, has increasingly focused on the complexity of class processes evident in “the firm,” let alone in educational institutions. (See the essays collected in Re/ Presenting Class: Essays in Postmodern Marxism (eds. Gibson-Graham, Resnick and Wolff; Duke, 2001) for more examples of detailed analysis). Their studies highlight the danger of assuming a Capitalist Economy as a single monolithic formation penetrating and transforming everything in its path. It’s perhaps easy enough to dismiss their claims as overly optimistic and their examples as purely local, but I think it a mistake to ignore the potential they demonstrate for multiple kinds of collective action even in the most difficult of circumstances.
The conception of "class processes" Gibson-Graham and others borrow from Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff's *Knowledge and Class: A Marxian Critique of Political Economy* offers distinct advantages for a study of "academic capitalism" over a more typical framing in terms of class position in distinctly organized hierarchies. It allows for a recognition of the positional fluidity and movement that occurs within segments of academic labor, without at all assuming that "class" is now an obsolete social category that must be dissolved into more individualistic indices of determination. Further, it shifts analytic attention away from the binary of inclusion/exclusion as a necessarily fixed boundary defining all political struggles, and toward new ways of understanding how exploitation functions in circumstances of so-called flexibly organized labor; toward the complex relations between exploitative "fundamental" class processes and the "subsumed" class processes (in Resnick and Wolff's language) apparent in the surplus distribution so much a part of academic capitalism; and finally toward the potential for contingent collectives at the intersections of different directional vectors of class processes.

There are a number of other productive lines of inquiry and analysis that offer much of use. The bottom line, however, is that obviously I have no easy—or even difficult—ready answer to the larger labor issues, the directions of institutional educational change, or the problems of political coalition building that Bousquet's essay raises. If I had, I would simply have delivered it rather than bothering with all this other stuff. For me the most immediate achievement of Bousquet's essay is the substantial analysis of the pragmatic dangers of pragmatism, as it were. I would guess that almost any long experience working in a university should breed a healthy skepticism about the announcement of "pragmatic" alternatives. Such announcements usually proceed into a familiar ideology-framed lecture—where definitionally almost any pre-Althusserian conception of "ideology" will suffice. Bousquet's analysis does much better than simply be suspicious of such dangers, however, by offering a reasoned critique of the conditions within which a putative pragmatism must operate. Knowing what those conditions are and how they function can't substitute for political action, but it's difficult to imagine what effective action could be taken that isn't grounded in considerably more knowledge than seems available in the current "pragmatic turn."

*University of California*  
*Davis, California*
As a composition and rhetoric scholar, a college writing teacher, and a writing program administrator, I can agree with some of the basic points made by Marc Bousquet in his essay, "Composition as Management Science: Toward a University without a WPA": the material conditions of many college teachers of composition are unsatisfactory, and there needs to be some fundamental changes in the system. The deplorable labor conditions for those teaching first-year composition have been well documented, lamented, and fought against since the late nineteenth century (see, for example Brereton, Connors, Crowley, Ede). Changing the system, although not necessarily in the same way as Bousquet suggests, has been discussed and even tried for just as many years, as Fred Newton Scott’s career illustrates (Stewart and Stewart) and other scholars discuss (for example, Crowley; O’Neill, Crow and Burton; Sledd). I can also agree with the idea of a university without a writing program administrator, if by WPA Bousquet means what Sledd and others describe as “boss compositionists.” I can even acknowledge (and sometimes agree with) the legitimacy of many aspects of Bousquet’s critique of the “heroic WPA” and his use of Marxism and labor theory. However, Bousquet’s essay finally leaves me unconvinced (and troubled) because it is based on contestable—even erroneous—assumptions about the field of composition and rhetoric, it inadequately represents the discourse of composition and rhetoric and the field, and it fails to address the historical and contemporary contexts that have created the current