

# Literacy Link

Fall 2006

## From the Editors' Desktops:



Fall term always brings changes. For *Literacy Link*, in its fourteenth year of publication, the same holds true.

After twelve years of service, Lynne Graft has retired from her position as Co-Editor of *Literacy Link*. "Retired" is a misnomer, of course, since this move has simply provided Lynne additional time to serve her students and the university in other ways. Christopher Giroux has taken over this role and hopes to bring as much to the position as Lynne has over the years.



Another change, of which we are particularly proud, is that *Literacy Link* has become not only a place for faculty to share and develop their work, but a place for students to do the same. Thanks to Vice President Donald Bachand's support, *Literacy Link* is now an internship opportunity for students in our Professional and Technical Writing (PTW) program. Each year, we will hire one PTW student who will be responsible for doing our layout, design, editing, and proofreading, as well as (we hope) some writing for future issues. This year's intern is Saun Strobel, and the magazine's new layout is largely thanks to her ideas and hard work.

Finally, in addition to sharing articles about literacy in our university, this issue of *Literacy Link* introduces a new feature: reviews of recent books discussing issues surrounding literacy and higher education. To start us off, we include reviews of Hersh and Merrow's *Declining by Degrees* and Bok's *Our Underachieving Colleges*. Please be on the lookout for books you'd

like to see discussed in future issues, or, better yet, send us those reviews!

One thing that will never change is our goal: to make *Literacy Link* a forum to share ideas about teaching and writing. With that in mind, this issue features an article on the effectiveness of Communication-Intensive (CI) courses in the Political Science Department based on a newly developed assessment model by Mark Nicol, a discussion of the goals and aims of the newly revised PTW major by W. J. Williamson, and an explanation of a digital community mural completed by SVSU advanced art students in collaboration with the SVSU Writing Center and Saginaw High School by Mike Mosher.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Literacy Link*.

Christopher Giroux

Helen Raica-Klotz

Co-Editors of *Literacy Link*

## Contents

- 1 From the Editors' Desktops
- 2 Professional and Technical Writers
- 4 The Power of the Printed Image
- 6 The Assessment of Assessment
- 9 Book Reviews

# Professional and Technical Writers: Agents for Technological and Cultural Literacy

W. J. Williamson  
Associate Professor of English



When I was an undergraduate majoring in scientific and technical communication at Michigan Technological University during the early 1990s, we used to joke that we would receive our diplomas when we could explain to our parents what exactly we would do with our degrees. Although *CNNMoney.com* ranked technical writing thirteenth among its “best jobs” in 2006 (“Best Jobs”), I hesitate to say that the profession has achieved significant public notoriety during the past fifteen years. If I say *technical writing* or *technical communication*, what comes to mind? I understand that for some readers, the answer may simply be...nothing. For others, the phrase may conjure visions of memoranda, manuals, and corporate Websites.

It is no wonder that people get confused about what technical writing is, or what these professionals do. The profession even goes by different names—professional writer, technical writer, technical communicator, and information designer—all equally applicable terms that still do not encompass the full range of language used to describe this community. In addition, on the surface their work and workplaces might look very different. My experience is not exceptionally diverse, and I have worked as an editor for scholarly publications, a designer for textbooks, a consultant to writers of safety reports for a nuclear power plant, a developer of Web spaces, a writer of

proposals and administrative reports, and, of course, a teacher. Although it may not seem so at first glance, all of these activities draw on a core skill set and knowledge base that represents a range of literacies.

In a world where a blinking clock on a VCR is a running joke about the effectiveness of technical writers, many folks do not seem to think that this diverse community of professionals does anything even remotely sophisticated, interesting, or innovative. And yet I would argue that technical writers are a significant and driving force for literacy within our culture.

In a culture and economy that place extremely high value on invention, innovation, and information, technical writers are key participants in the construction of knowledge in virtually every field. Scientific and technological advances are only valuable when they can be effectively introduced into the broader culture. For example, bringing science to the lay public is so significant to the mission of the Los Alamos National Labs in New Mexico that it created the Bradbury Science Museum. The “About Us” page of the Bradbury Website offers the following description: “The Museum serves as a bridge between the Laboratory and the community, helping to improve science education and science literacy. The Museum also serves as a window to the Laboratory, interpreting the Laboratory’s history and current research” (“Bradbury Science Museum”).

Although people may at times seek to master technology through trial and error, most people are introduced to new or newly refined technologies through the products of technical writers: operator manuals, other product- or consumer-related publications, or the testimony of individuals who, in turn, draw their knowledge from such sources. These information resources are commonplace, and yet science and technology are surrounded by mysticism.

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Technical communicators serve a vital cultural role as agents for fostering scientific and technological literacy. In "You Will: Technology, Magic, and the Cultural Contexts of Technical Communication," Karla Saari Kitalong suggests that technical communicators have the responsibility to strip the aura of the arcane from new technologies:

As purveyors of instructions for complex technological products, technical communicators are in a unique position to demystify seemingly magical technological processes. [T]echnical communicators have the opportunity to help consumers understand complex, enfolded technological processes instead of reproducing the idea that such processes are too mysterious to be comprehended. (312)

These may seem like lofty aspirations, but I would argue that such visions of cultural and professional service amount to little more than accepting responsibility for the kind and variety of expertise that technical communicators strive to claim as their own.

As happens in schools across the globe, SVSU's Professional and Technical Writing program fosters a variety of literacies:

- **Language Literacy**—This most fundamental of interpretations of literacy is at the core of what technical writers do. Although this literacy may begin with knowledge of language, its functions, and its structures, language literacy can quickly expand to include a wide range of issues related to power, authority, and culture.
- **Professional/Workplace Literacy**—Because technical writing is tightly tied to the workplace, knowledge of how to effectively and successfully navigate work spaces, and an understanding of the power and responsibility of claiming professional status, become essential to professional and technical writers.
- **Cultural Literacy**—If technical writers are to understand what

it means to function as agents for scientific and technological literacy within our (or any other) culture, then they must come to understand the relationships between science, technology, and culture. It is also essential that students realize they may be asked to represent, navigate, and interact with many cultures, just as they need to understand many literacies.

- **Technical Literacy**—Communication is an increasingly technological activity. Our goal in PTW courses is not merely to use technology, but to understand the ways communication technology simultaneously offers new media for expression, new tools for production, new capabilities for transforming our communication practices, and new means of exerting and abusing power. We ask questions such as "How does technology impact our culture?" and "How does culture impact our technology?"
- **Visual Literacy**—Communication is also an increasingly visual activity. Although I believe text remains the primary literacy in our culture today, the significance of the visual is on the rise.
- **Scientific/Technological Literacy**—Much of what technical writers communicate is specialized knowledge. They must come to understand the construction and value of such knowledge.

Technical writers must situate their professional knowledge within this diverse range of literacies because success in communication is a fleeting accomplishment. The strategies that might prove effective in one context might fail in another. Knowledge of how to communicate with one audience might contradict the expectations of another. Adopting and adapting multiple literacies does not ensure

**A** *adopting and adapting multiple literacies does not ensure success, but does increase the likelihood that we will at least understand our failures and be able to respond accordingly.*

success, but does increase the likelihood that we will at least understand our failures and be able to respond accordingly.

When I changed my undergraduate major from materials science engineering to scientific and technical communication, some of my engineering friends saw the move as a signal of defeat, that I could be numbered among the failed engineers. After all, what could be easier than a writing degree? I soon discovered the truth I had already begun to suspect prior to the change—that communication challenges and contexts are infinitely complex; that short-term success in communication occasionally results from simple luck; that long-term suc-

cess results from hard work, constant adaptation, and innovation; and that I would never for a moment regret stepping onto a new path.

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## The Power of the Printed Image: A Digital Mural Project with Saginaw High School and the SVSU Writing Center

*Mike Mosher*

*Assistant Professor of Art & Communication/Multimedia*



It is this artist and educator's conviction that the community mural has been, for four decades, the major medium for attractively visualizing a group's identity, while enhancing a community's physical environment, in the most inclusive and democratic process possible. Digital technology now maximizes communication, community-building, and artistic development time—while minimizing strenuous production (i.e., covering a big wall with complex paint). Through a grant from Michigan Campus Compact and SVSU's College Transitions Program, I was able to collaborate with Saginaw High School, the SVSU Writing Center, and four advanced art students to create such a mural.

On February 25, 2006, seven Saginaw High School juniors and seniors worked with fifteen SVSU students in a day-long writing/arts workshop entitled "Finding Our Center." The Saginaw High students spent the morning working on

their writing with tutors from the Writing Center and Eric Gardner's English 383 (The Art of Tutoring Writing) course; in the afternoon, these same students worked with my Art 499 (Independent Study in Advanced Art) students, generating art for a digital mural.

The "Finding the Center" digital mural project completed during the winter semester of 2006 gave my art students an opportunity to draw high school students and Writing Center student mentors on February 25. Teaching the non-art students some basic art skills enabled them to create imagery for the mural, thus allowing the Saginaw High students to be involved in the project to a greater degree. The four muralists—Erica Kowal, Howard McLean, Benjamin Robinson, and Cole Swinehart—organized fifteen-minute mini-teaching sessions for the workshop in figure drawing, caricature, "street" (i.e., graffiti-derived contemporary Pop Art) motifs, and watercolor painting.

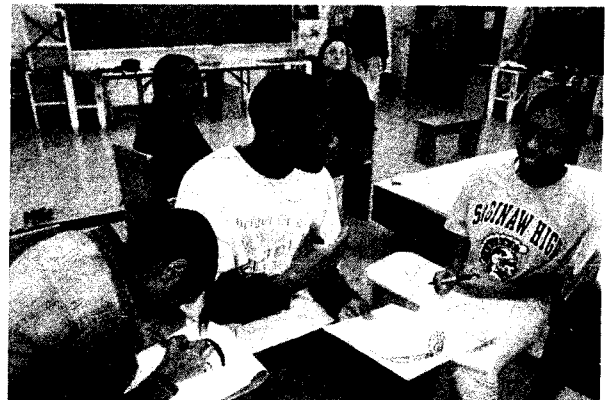
One of the art students, Erica Kowal, noted, "It was interesting to see how the tutors related with the students they were paired with [in the Writing Center]. I highly enjoyed seeing that connection, for it will leave a great impact on the high school students and their view of college. The students had such interesting ideas and stories, and they worked so hard on writing that they felt was important. The atmosphere of that morning was brimming with excited pens and eager minds. The students were very open to letting me in on what they were doing and the writing they had done, and I was glad that I was able to put some of their work into the final mural.

"Their excitement also followed them into the art arena as well. They were giving out so many good ideas for the mural that I was worried we would not have enough room on the page! To hear them get excited about things that do not fit in with the stereotypical high school student was so refreshing."

The fruits of these efforts were collected, scanned, assembled, and manipulated in Photoshop, and other images suggested in group discussion were drawn by the muralists. The resulting mural design was critiqued by the Writing Center, and nec-

essary changes were made. When completed, the digital file was sent to the Detroit office of billboard printer MetroMedia Technologies, and returned as 5' x 18' vinyl murals with grommets, ready for installation. One was promptly installed in SE 139, the Writing Center classroom. A second copy of the mural was installed in Saginaw High School on October 27, 2006.

This community mural will serve as a powerful visual reminder of SVSU's commitment to Saginaw High School, "centering" not only on the education and development of our university's students, but the students in our community as well.



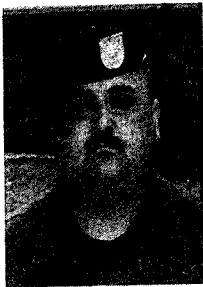
For the past five years, Communication-Intensive (CI) courses have been integrated into SVSU's General Education Program. During the current 2006–2007 academic year, 91 CI course sections are being offered at the university in a variety of different fields, including sociology, geography, criminal justice, art, philosophy, and political science. In these courses, students are required to engage in active writing and research as they study a given field. Thus, these courses have dual purposes: to enhance the students' understanding of a discipline and to improve their academic writing ability. However, based on the General Education Committee's 2006 Report, 63% of students scored 3.0 or higher on their "Critical Thinking/Logical Reasoning" ability, and only 47% achieved the same score in "Effective Communication" upon completion of these courses.

Mark Nicol and his colleagues in the Political Science Department developed their own assessment of these courses, specifically focused on their department, using the model that is described below. We are pleased to include this article that details the rationale for creating this new model, along with its results. Nicol's work can encourage all of us to re-examine what assessment tells us about CI courses.

—From the Editors

## **The Assessment of Assessment: A Discussion of an Assessment Model for Political Science CI Courses**

*Mark Nicol  
Instructor of Political Science*



It has become an article of "revealed wisdom" that assessment of student learning should occupy a central place in the activities of academic departments, and having occupied this central place, assessment should be used as a guide for ongoing improvement. However, what is less certain than the need for assessment is the validity of the findings produced by those assessments. How can we be sure that what we learn about our students from assessment data is valid and, therefore, useful information? Members of our department set out to design an evaluation process and instrument for our Communication-Intensive (CI) Political Science 118 (Introduction to Political Science) course that would give us a clearer indication of whether students were learning in our classes, and if they were, whether that learning could be attributed to the coursework rather than to some set of extraneous factors. In short, we wanted to know, were we managing to teach our students what we expected them to learn?

### **Background and Aims of the Study**

Previous and concurrent assessments of student learning in political science general education courses were and are largely focused on content recall and recognition of particular items and key course concepts using a pretest/posttest single-group research design. Because of the extensive threats to validity inherent in this design (Campbell and Stanley, 1966), the department was reluctant to continue using it. Consequently, we attempted to develop an assessment instrument that allowed us to move beyond simple recognition and recall. By asking students to exercise their skills in a more complex manner with material in context, we hoped to create a more realistic assessment of their ability to apply the practical and critical-thinking skills that are integral to our introductory/general education courses.

## Procedure

Analysis of the PS 118 assessment data was accomplished using a comparison of data gathered as part of a pretest/posttest quasi-experiment (Campbell and Stanley, 1966) carried out as a part of a two-stage process. The pretests were administered to a cohort of 172 students in six sections of Introduction to Political Science during the second week of Winter Semester 2005. The posttests were administered to a cohort of 164 students in six sections of Introduction to Political Science during the fourteenth week of Fall Semester 2005. A random sample of 150 pretest and 150 posttest cases was selected, and the data was aggregated in a final set of 300 cases for analysis.

The assessment assignment consisted of a 400-word critical response to an excerpt from Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (1939). The excerpt was selected because of its obviously ideologically based argument. Although the particular selection (Volume I, Chapter III) was not the most obviously controversial section of the work, we hoped its vociferously anti-liberal critique of parliamentary democracy would elicit a strong response from the students. The author of the reading selection, as well as relevant contextual data (time and place of publication, etc.), were unknown to the students.

Once the written responses were collected from both the pretest and posttest groups, the responses were evaluated by a single faculty member using an evaluation instrument specifically designed for this purpose. The evaluation instrument consisted of three distinct sections of questions. First, there was a brief selection of demographic items related to academic affiliation and class standing. Second, a series of Likert-type items were presented to evaluate a set of six questions related to the broad general education goals (i.e., effective communication, logical reasoning, and critical thinking). Finally, we included a set of five dichotomous response items based on the general education category-specific goals addressing the students' ability to recognize,

recall, relate, and contextualize key information and course concepts.

We settled on this particular quasi-experimental approach to the assessment process based on both practical and methodological imperatives. The actual work required to complete the assignment was accomplished outside of normal class hours and therefore required only a minimal amount of in-class time for administration. In addition to the obvious gain in efficiency from conducting the work outside of class hours, having a uniform process and instrument for all sections of Introduction to Political Science, and fixing the responsibility for scoring and analysis to one person, allowed us to decrease the overall number of faculty hours devoted to assessment. Furthermore, circumstances dictated the selection of a quasi-experiment instead of a true experiment because of the impracticality of creating a control group and because of the self-selected nature of the subjects in our data set.

Of course, the use of a quasi-experimental model carries with it a number of potential threats to the internal and external validity of the assessment (Achen, 1986). The most important of these potential threats to the internal validity of the assessment is the selection bias mentioned above. The fact that student class assignments were a product of student choice rather than a result of a randomized process made it necessary to test for inter-group equivalence among the test groups. Once this inter-group equivalence was established, self-selection bias became less of a concern.

Due to the nature of our data, the bulk of the analysis was carried out in a series of Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney tests. This test is a non-parametric equivalent of the independent samples t-test. It is preferred to the t-test when we cannot assume a normal distribution of the values of our variables, or when our data is at a level of measure less than interval. It can also be used with interval or ratio level data producing measures of statistical significance identical to the independent sam-

ples t-test. Essentially, the test allows us to judge the statistical significance of the difference in rank-ordered value of the mean pretest rank and the mean posttest rank of a variable being examined.

## The Results

In considering the six items related to the broad general education goals, the difference in pretest and posttest scores are obviously both statistically and practically significant. All items in this group were well below the critical value for statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ). All results were truncated at a p-value of .001, meaning that there is less than a 1 in 1,000 chance that the statistically significant results presented here represent something other than the true relationship between the mean pretest and posttest values of the variables in question. (See Table 1.)

If we examine the five items related to the Category Six-specific general education goals, the differences in four of the five test scores are clearly both statistically and practically significant. All items in this group, with the exception of the student's ability to place the reading passage in its appropriate historical and cultural context ( $p < .456$ ), were well below the critical value for statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ). All statistically significant results had a p-value of .003 or lower, meaning that there is less than a 3 in 1,000 chance that the statistically significant results presented here represent something other than the true relationship between the mean pretest and posttest values of the variables in question. These findings are summarized in Table 2.

## Conclusion

With the obvious exception of the ability to identify the correct cultural and historical context, we seem to have achieved what we set out to achieve. However, more can, and

*Table 1: Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney Tests for Writing Objectives (N=300)*

	<i>Pretest Mean Rank</i>	<i>Posttest Mean Rank</i>	<i>Asymptotic Significance</i>
Grammar and Spelling	113.51	187.49	.001
Stylistic Conventions	101.15	199.85	.001
Precision of the Thesis Statement	105.59	195.41	.001
Use of Evidence in Argument	94.7	206.3	.001
Coherence of the Summary	98.21	202.79	.001
Accuracy of the Summary	117.04	183.96	.001

*Table 2: Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney Tests for Content Objectives (N=300)*

	<i>Pretest Mean Rank</i>	<i>Posttest Mean Rank</i>	<i>Asymptotic Significance</i>
Used Key Political Concepts	88.36	21.64	.001
Included a Methodological Critique	138.5	162.5	.001
Mentioned a Political Thinker	139.5	161.5	.001
Identified the Author as a Fascist	141	160	.003
Identified the Historical Context	148	153	.456



will, be done to improve both the reliability and validity of the results in future iterations of the assessment. We hope that eventually this model will allow faculty members at our university to leverage intellectual capital regarding assessment and evaluation that already exists as a part of our institutional knowledge base to provide the most valid assessment of student learning possible. I would invite anyone who is interested to please contact me for a copy of a more extensive and complete discussion of establishing inter-group equivalence and minimizing threats to validity in our assessment process.

To obtain the complete discussion of his findings, contact Mark at 964-2605 or [mnicol@susu.edu](mailto:mnicol@susu.edu).

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## Book Reviews

*Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should Be Learning More.*

Derek Bok.

Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. 424 pp.

Reviewed by

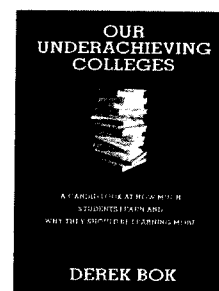
Helen Raica-Klotz  
Lecturer of English

As I was sitting in the ballroom in Curtiss Hall during our faculty luncheon this past August, Ken Bain, author of *What the Best College Teachers Do*, began speaking. I was listening, but not too closely. Like many of you I'm guessing, I was also making mental lists of things I needed to do: copy syllabi, check (and recheck) bookstore orders, clear dates for department meetings. But then Bain asked us to "Describe a characteristic of a good teacher you have had in your lifetime." Immediately the answer popped into my head: "He was a good listener." Indeed.

Derek Bok, in *Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should Be Learning More*, demonstrates his ability to think and listen; therefore, this is a book worth listening to. Like Bain, Bok forces us away from concerns about our specific courses, department, or discipline, and invites us to think about the

overarching purposes of our university. And this is a worthwhile endeavor for all of us, since being an effective teacher is more than the practices we engage in inside the classroom; it is how we perceive the practices and contexts of higher education as a whole.

Bok opens with a brief history of higher education in America, reminding us that a little over a century ago, only five percent of the American population attended a college or university; now that number is up to sixty percent of the population, and still growing. Bok offers his thesis that because the number of students has increased, so too should the university's goals. He makes the compelling argument that higher education should have multiple purposes for students, all of which are worthy of discussion and consideration. These purposes are focused on the students themselves and include far more than simply preparing them for the workplace. As well as preparing



**Being an effective teacher is more than the practices we engage in inside the classroom; it is how we perceive the practices and contexts of higher education as a whole.**

students for a career in their discipline, there needs to be a focus on increasing their communication and critical thinking skills, building their character and preparing them for citizenship, enhancing their ability to live with diversity and engage in a global society, and encouraging their development of broader interests. Serving as the outline for his book, Bok carefully examines each purpose, offering to us the current state of higher education in this regard and his recommendations for improvement.

Bok's book, by his own admission, is markedly different from other recent books on higher education (including Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, Sykes's *Profscam*, and Hersh and Merrow's *Declining by Degrees*) in two significant ways. First, Bok uses contemporary research rather than a string of personal narratives to support his claims. Second, Bok not only outlines the key problems in higher education, he also offers viable and practical solutions to these problems.

In addition, Bok's book is comprehensive, both in scope and perspective. As the former president of Harvard, Bok could have easily focused on the larger, more prestigious universities' issues; instead, he discusses a complete range of issues that confront almost every institution, from state-funded schools all the way to small private universities. And the issues he covers are vast: we hear his views on familiar ground like

the role of general education in academics and the use and abuse of adjunct faculty, but he also has a lengthy discussion about the sticky issue of students' moral development and personal growth, which he handles carefully and thoughtfully.

Finally, Bok is a good writer. His prose is engaging, his examples clear, his arguments provocative. Unlike the dry, distanced tone that so many authors take when discussing higher education, his writing is both articulate and personal: it is clear that he cares about this subject deeply. "Why do colleges seem so reluctant to make major changes in the way they conduct their educational programs?" Bok questions near the end of *Our Underachieving Colleges*. He then continues,

The reason is not that they are indifferent to the welfare of their students, and critics are wrong to suggest the contrary. Most college presidents and deans genuinely care about undergraduates and want to see them educated well. The great majority of professors enjoy their teaching, like their students, and devote much time to their classroom responsibilities. Yet enjoying teaching and caring about students do not necessarily bring a willingness to re-examine familiar practices and search for new methods that could serve the purpose better. (312)

This book articulately argues that such a reexamination of our practices, a search for new methods, is crucial for all of us, students and faculty alike.

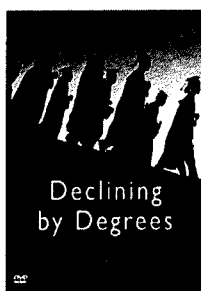
I wonder if Derek Bok is busy next August...

***Declining by Degrees: Higher Education at Risk.***  
Ed. Richard H. Hersh and John Merrow.  
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 244 pp.

Reviewed by  
*Christopher Giroux*  
*Instructor of English*

Granted, we've all done it. Who among us hasn't been upset about the student who can do better but, as we see it, is consciously choosing not to do her best?

It's happened to us all. Watching the student in class who sits in the back row, slumped in her chair, the one who never raises her hand or bothers to take notes, we start to wonder: why doesn't this stu-



dent, why don't so many of our students, engage actively in their coursework?

Too often, frustrated by our students' lack of motivation, we begin to blame their lack of clear priorities, the high schools' inability to prepare students adequately, and our culture's seeming disinterest in developing thoughtful, engaged world citizens. While this blame may be therapeutic, does it help us make any substantive changes? What, instead, can we do to turn these reflections into a balanced exercise involving a careful analysis of the issue of students' disengagement in the learning process?

For starters, we can take a look at Richard H. Hersh and John Merrow's *Declining by Degrees*. Drawing on a range of perspectives, the collection's fifteen essays sound a call for reform. Moreover, the book forces us to consider some topics we don't necessarily (and immediately) think about when we consider academia and the factors that shape the way our students approach their studies. In other words, *Declining by Degrees* allows us to gain a richer perspective of the number of issues affecting postsecondary education today, while simultaneously demanding that we, both faculty and administrators, work towards change.

Using what they term "a wide angle" approach, Hersh and Merrow begin by including essays that focus on the outsider's view of academia. Gene I. Maeroff, of the Hechinger Institute on Education and Columbia University, considers the media's coverage (or lack thereof) of higher education, arguing that the dearth of reporters on the education beat results in few articles on limited subjects, namely tuition, athletics, and admissions, instead of assessment. Deborah Wadsworth, former president of Public Agenda and now a board member of the National Center for Public Policy and Education, examines public perceptions about higher education, namely that good jobs require a college degree, but that access to and the affordability of a college education tend to be of prime concern. "Getting in" is the issue for parents and students, she

laments, and not the quality of the college experience.

A continued focus on admissions issues is found in James Fallows's "College Admissions: A Substitute for Quality?" Fallows, who regularly writes on education matters, reiterates what will become a resounding theme: Prestige and an emphasis on enrollment figures, whether on the part of incoming freshmen or the entire student body, move us away from an emphasis on "real" learning and quality education.

Market forces and social trends inhibiting equal access to education and/or a quality education come to the forefront in other essays. Roberto Suro and Richard Fry, in "Leaving the Newcomers Behind," and Heather D. Wathington, in "Talking the Talk: Rhetoric and Reality for Students of Color," discuss the issues of affordability and academic inequity facing Hispanics and African Americans in an era of supposedly greater access and opportunity. (Fry has been affiliated with ETS and is now a member of the Pew Hispanic Center, as is Suro; Wathington has done work on diversity issues for the Association of American Colleges and Universities.) Additionally, journalist and sports writer, Frank Deford tackles the financial allure and elitism of athletics (he proposes that more talent scholarships must be given in the arts and the core subjects), while the inequities facing those of lower-income brackets are a disparity noted in author and educator Arthur Levine's "Worlds Apart: Disconnects between Students and Their Colleges." Leon Botstein, the president of Bard College, likewise, highlights other "disconnects" on campus, namely the emphasis on campus life versus classes; the explosion of ethnic clubs in the name of diversity, which he sees as fostering separatism; the lack of personal interaction between faculty, students, staff, and the larger community; and the disappearance of a Great Books approach to education.

Then, there are those essays that seem to strike even closer to home, talking of con-

**Universities have to keep coming back to their mission statement, and compare what is actually done in the classroom to institutional goals.**

cerns over which we have more control in our individual classrooms. In commenting on "career colleges" and technical programs, tracking and advanced placement credit, and the advice that students get their general education courses "out of the way," The Association of American Colleges and Universities's president, Carol G. Schneider, addresses the need for integrative learning and reasserts the value of a "true" liberal arts experience in "Liberal Education: Slip-Sliding Away?" Vartan Gregorian, the former president of Brown University, also identifies the diminishing presence of a liberal arts education, as just one of the "Six Challenges to the American University."

Howard Gardner and Julie Johnson Kidd similarly focus on quality education promoting inter- and intrapersonal growth. Affiliated with post-secondary institutions like Middlebury College, Columbia University, and Berlin's European College of Liberal Arts, Kidd argues for the development of the whole student, claiming college isn't an "ultimate destination" but "a port of call." Citing the Good Works Project Initiative, Gardner, who is a member of Harvard's graduate school of education, warns against the commercializing of education, of using a market-focus approach, a concern echoed in David Kirp's "This Little Student Went to Market" and Murray Sperber's "How Undergraduate Education Became College Lite—and a Personal Apology."

In "Caveat Lector: Unexamined Assumptions about Quality in Higher Education," journalist and author of *Harvard Schmarvard* Jay Mathews likewise notes that universities have to keep coming back to their mission statement, and compare what is actually done in the classroom to institutional goals. As an extreme example, he questions what classes like "Ghosts, Demons and Monsters" or "Campus Culture and Drinking," both offerings at Ivy League schools, contribute to a general education program. Instead, he finds little concrete data with which we can measure

student growth, as well as few schools truly dedicated to a liberal arts education.

It is this last group of essays that seem to carry the most weight for me. Here, we have an emphasis on what we, as an institution, can and should be doing differently. Whether it is working to develop the ethical citizen, to keep class sizes small, to emphasize learning as a skill and a process (and not merely a right answer), these writers offer some thought-provoking solutions and lessons we can take from other institutions—about rewarding good teaching, about creating active learners, about teaching process not product. Gardner particularly offers an insightful question that all of us can ask ourselves, no matter our role at the university: If enrollment numbers and budget concerns aren't the issue—or, as other writers mention, ratings in special issues of *Newsweek* and *US News and World Report*—what do we ideally want to occur in our classes, with our students, in our students? In the best possible world, what does post-secondary education look like and what can those students do when they graduate? After all, if we're not striving for the ideal, are we any different from that underachieving student?

In the final analysis, *Declining by Degrees* offers a bleak picture, but one that is tempered with hope. Providing food for thought about our mental and professional sustenance, about our potential students, and about our students' potential, the collection delves into topics with which we, as educators, find ourselves regularly engaged: government funding, public attitudes and perceptions about higher education, factors promoting and prohibiting "deep" learning, the dangers of a consumer approach to education. In a society where convenience, campus amenities, and customer satisfaction are confused with (or privileged over) quality education, Hersh, Merrow, and their contributors vent their call to action and offer possibilities for reform.