

THE EVOLUTION OF A COLLEGE PUBLICATION: A REVIEW OF *JOHN JAY'S FINEST* AFTER 25 YEARS

Nolan Chessman

Like many freshmen composition students, Curtis Johnson acted on a *compulsion to confess* when he wrote “Peccatum Taciturnitatis (Sin of Silence)” for his English 201 class at CUNY’s John Jay College:

If in fact human decency exists, then I would say that I am somewhat of a decent human being. I believe myself to be polite and to some degree I adhere to the manner of a chivalrous gentleman. Yet for some reason unfathomable to me I acted unlike myself one night. (28)

What follows this cryptic, Poe-ian introduction is an account of how, when stumbling upon a sexual assault taking place against a young woman one night, the author did nothing to intervene, call for help, or aid the victim in any way:

I watched this young woman while her assailants began to tear viciously at her clothes. The young men were taunting her with snorts of glee. Her screams began to rise in volume until one of the young men struck her in the mouth. I watched as she began to bleed and whimper quietly. After seeing this I could take no more and I turned around and started back down another way out of the park. (29)

The vivid (and incredibly stylized) anecdote arose from an assignment that asked students to “write about an experience that

marked a turning point in their lives”—explained Professor Lee Jenkins—“one that caused them to see themselves, and others of importance to them, in a new light.” In other words, Johnson was not explicitly asked to confess his deepest, most shameful secret—*he chose to*. And, in doing so, he succeeded in crafting a visceral piece of writing that, in his professor’s words, “explores the way taken-for-granted gender stereotypes can be confronted and deconstructed as a result of encounters that compel a clear-eyed examination of one’s own biases and conventional attitudes.”

Such clear-eyed examinations of the self, as well as one’s community (both local and global), fill the pages of *John Jay’s Finest*, an annual publication of exemplary student writing produced in courses across the disciplines at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, one of twenty-four institutions within the City University of New York system. Now in its twenty-seventh year, the journal was founded by English professors Patricia Licklider and Shirley Schnitzer to (1) celebrate outstanding student writing, (2) provide other student writers with successful models of composition, and (3) inspire faculty outside of the English department to implement writing-to-learn strategies in their classrooms (ii). The magazine is admirably egalitarian, publishing material from the college’s most basic-level composition courses as well as from its graduate-level criminal justice courses. In fact, the journal doubles as an unofficial literary magazine, publishing fiction, poetry, and drama, too—much of which is produced outside the classroom walls.

My aim here is to explore the evolution of *John Jay’s Finest* (one of CUNY’s most long-standing records of student writing from across the curriculum) in order to gain a deeper understanding of the changing attitudes toward student writing at John Jay College between 1985 and 2010. My hope is that a detailed examination of the genre and rhetorical characteristics of these publications will yield insights into writing faculty’s fundamental notions of what constitutes exemplary student writing, and how these notions have shifted over the last twenty-five years. Peripherally, this study may also reflect the genre and rhetorical characteristics

valued at the student level since a portion of *JJF*'s contents are comprised of self-submitted entries. It may also uncover discoveries regarding the function(s) of a publication such as *John Jay's Finest* and, to a larger extent, determine their potential pedagogical and administrative uses.

Edith Wells provides some historical context surrounding anthologies of student work in "College Publications of Freshman Writing," which appeared in *College Composition and Communication* in 1950. In this article, she profiles four noteworthy journals of freshman writing, detailing their editorial processes, funding methods, publicity campaigns, curricular functions, challenges, successes, etc. Ultimately, Wells concludes that "by giving prestige to freshman writing, the magazine can brighten the often dull composition classes" (11). In doing so, argues Robert Scholes in *Textual Power*, we afford student writing the same respect garnered by literature and print journalism (7).

The glow of "prestige" and "respect" furnished by publication can, in part, be attributed to the feeling of *purpose* with which it supplies its writers. But purpose, of course, is an affective charge contingent upon its surroundings (just as everything else). What purpose relies on is *audience*—a willing ear, an eager eye. After implementing an e-publication of student work in her writing classroom, Dawn Putnam discovered the awesome effect that audience could have on her students' level of engagement with and enthusiasm for writing. Before employing e-publications, writing for Putnam's students was "just something to get done so you don't have to do it" (102). But when Putnam announced that the class's writing would be published and disseminated among the community, they suddenly cared a great deal about the quality of their work. Workshops exhibited a newfound fervency, with students endlessly deliberating over which ideas they wanted to express to their community, and how (Putnam 104).

It seems, then, that another desirable result of student publications is that they can lead to an increased level of accountability in the student's work ethic, thereby enhancing the intellectual depth and linguistic character of the work itself. But

what does “depth” and “character” in student writing look like anyway? Can we measure it in terms of rhetorical style or mode of genre? Perhaps, but it is certainly more complicated and nuanced than a near-sighted process as such could account for. Thus, in an attempt to find answers to these and other questions surrounding the publication of student writing (from selection to production), I have applied methods of textual analysis from Edward P.J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors’ “Study of Style.” These methods, which entail a detailed, sentence-level examination of six works from issues of *John Jay’s Finest* dating between 1985 and 2010, will provide a technical lens through which I will chart changes in writing styles valued by students and English faculty over twenty-five years. Additionally, I have categorized and tallied the presence of specific genre types found in these six issues of *JFF* in order to note changes in the magazine’s perceived preferences as editorial positions shift (about every five years). At the very least, this study will be a preliminary gesture toward answering questions about the function of student publications in- and outside the writing classroom.

When leafing through any given issue of *JFF*, it is easy to become absorbed in the stories of these students (their failures and achievements, their secrets and sorrows). And this is the point, explained former co-editor Patricia Licklider to me inside John Jay’s brand new English department offices on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. In her view, English composition was the only course that afforded students the opportunity to explore themselves personally through writing. Thus, she and co-founder Shirley Schnitzer sought to applaud these efforts of personal writing by amplifying their presence in *JFF*. As indicated by Table 1, *John Jay’s Finest* was, and continues to be, committed to showcasing a variety of genre types in its pages; however, as editorial roles shifted among English faculty, so did the overall tone and style of the magazine’s contents.

In the magazine’s first ten years of publication, we can see a growing appreciation for the personal narrative in its pages, reaching their apex in 1995, at which point they comprised the

majority of the magazine's contents at 28.6%. Contrastively, textual analyses came in at a close second place at 23.8%, an exponential increase from 1990 (when analyses comprised only 9.7% of the issue), and an even more dramatic increase from 1985 (which contained no analyses, spotlighting poetry, fiction, and short editorial essays instead). In dramatic fashion, however, the personal narrative falls out of favor after Professor Frederik Rusch's 1995 issue, plummeting steadily until, in 2010, the genre is completely eradicated from the pages of the magazine. Instead, editors Jeffrey Heiman and Adam Berlin devoted those pages to textual analyses, which make up 45.2% of the 2010 issue. In the span of twenty-five years, then, what was once the journal's most omnipresent genre has slowly and steadily disappeared from its pages. Moreover, the personal narratives were replaced by a genre that was at first completely disregarded by the editors of *JJF*, only to become its most prominent.

Table 1: Genres Types in *John Jay's Finest*, 1985 – 2010

	Personal Narratives	Exploratory Research Essays	Profiles	Reports	Position Papers	Textual Analyses	Fiction	Drama	Poems	Fairy Tales	Multi-Genre Essays	Journal Entries	Letters
1985 (Eds. Licklider & Schnitzer)	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.6%)	1 (5.6%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (22.2%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (11.1%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.6%)
1990 (Eds. Licklider & Schnitzer)	8 (25.8%)	2 (6.5%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (9.7%)	4 (12.9%)	3 (9.7%)	3 (9.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (9.7%)	2 (6.5%)	3 (9.7%)	0 (0.0%)
1995 (Ed. Rusch)	12 (28.6%)	3 (7.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (4.8%)	2 (4.8%)	10 (23.8%)	5 (11.9%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2000 (Ed. Mushabac)	9 (29.0%)	3 (9.7%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.5%)	3 (9.7%)	11 (35.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.5%)	0 (0.0%)
2005 (Ed. Pease)	7 (22.6%)	2 (6.5%)	1 (3.2%)	1 (3.2%)	4 (12.9%)	9 (29.0%)	1 (3.2%)	2 (6.5%)	1 (3.2%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (9.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2010 (Eds. Heiman & Berlin)	0 (0.0%)	8 (25.8%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.2%)	4 (12.9%)	14 (45.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Notable, too, is the magazine's evolution from an unofficial literary magazine to a rather straightforward journal of expository writing. Licklider and Schnitzer's 1985 issue contained six poems and four short stories; yet, from there, the inclusion of creative writing is much more erratic. A few poems appear in most issues over the years, but their presence seems to be an afterthought, as they are typically inserted in empty spaces after expository pieces

(perhaps the editors intend them as palate cleansers). By 2010, analyses of literature take the place of student literature, which, combined with the absence of personal narratives, detracts from the magazine's former polyvocal, expressive demeanor.

Such a dramatic evolution would imply that John Jay College, as an institution (or at the very least its English department), sought to shift its students' attention to academic writing, what David Bartholomae describes as "pure, muscular, lean, taut, the language of truth and reason [...] language stripped of the false dressings of style and fashion, a tool for inquiry and critique" (62). Bartholomae intoned this definition of academic writing somewhat sardonically in a conversation with Peter Elbow at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, but despite its admittedly "stuffy" and "pedantic" (62) traits, it serves as a useful vector for the conveyance of ideas in the university environment. If, ultimately, the objective of *John Jay's Finest* is to model exemplary academic writing, it is worth examining how these models have changed over the last twenty-five years. In doing so, we might find a model upon which to base the selection of all future models, achieving a level of consistency in the modeling process. At the very least, we will gain further insights into the evolution of academic writing at a public institution such as John Jay College, and, in the process, discover some significant points of departure.

Moving my inquiry beyond a simple survey of featured genres in *John Jay's Finest*, I began to look closely at individual samples of student writing from six issues of the magazine—1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2010. Methods from Corbett and Connors' "Study of Style" informed my own analyses of the student writing found in these issues, where I focused specifically on sentence types (simple, complex, compound, compound-complex, etc.) and sentence length. I also made general analyses of rhetorical structures found in these samples, such as paragraph organization and transitions. (Graphic representations of these data can be found in Table 3 and Table 4.)

In hopes of achieving objective, impartial results, I blindly selected the fifth essay from each of my six sources. In cases where the fifth piece of writing was a poem or a short story, I chose the essay immediately following. For the purpose of this study, I considered short stories and poems to be outliers since these genres utilized nonstandard English to create a desired effect not found in the other genre types present in *JFF*. A full breakdown of the selected student works, their thematic concerns, and genre modes can be viewed in Table 2.

Table 2: Focus of Selected Essays

	Subject	Theme	Genre
1985 Gonzalez	gender stereotyping	relationship between societal prejudice and gender roles	position paper
1990 Unick	consequences of industrial development	material desires and environmental degradation	position paper
1995 Newhart	cab drivers in New York City	the knowingly dangerous situation we put ourselves when entering an NYC cab	personal narrative
2000 Zvezdanova	childhood memories	realizations about the human condition brought on by childhood experiences	personal narrative
2005 Daleus	sexual assault	psychological and emotional effects in the aftermath of sexual assault	personal narrative
2010 Wynns	global warming	irrational associations with nuclear energy inhibit a viable solution to global warming	position paper

In the 1985 sample, English 101 student Anthony Gonzalez seeks to answer the question posed in his title: “Women—Fragile Flowers?” The topic arose, he explains in his introduction, from a “hot discussion on ‘women’s lib’” that took place in his Puerto Rican Sociology Class. He goes on to credit a classmate (“Chris”) for inciting the argument when, “with an air of authority,” he outlined innate, biological differences distinguishing the female character from that of the male. Like many of the essays in this study, Gonzalez’s is situated locally, in the community of the university or New York City (or, in this essay’s case, the confines of the classroom).

Gonzalez goes on to defend his position that “women are not the weaker sex but are the ostracized sex” in a four-paragraph, bisymmetrical, bipartite essay that utilizes logic and reason (rather

than facts and statistics) to support its central claim. The essay is strikingly similar to English 101 student Kevin Unick’s “Is This Progress?” which appears in the 1990 issue. Unick, too, presents an argument relying on logos as its primary mode of persuasion, making use of a similar bisymmetrical structure (except he employs three support paragraphs (a tripartite) rather than two). He eschews the inclusion of credible evidence, it seems, to instead appeal to his readers’ sense of personal ethics by presenting them with a smattering of rhetorical questions: “Have we allowed the quality of our lives and environment to be sacrificed for the sake of driving a faster car or building a larger building?” In fact, as illustrated in Table 3, 23.5% of the sentence types found in Unick’s essay are questions. By contrast, Gonzalez’s essay contains only one question, also rhetorical, and, like Unick’s use of questions, it functions as a substitution for a more direct statement or claim. Why does Unick work so ardently to deflect authorial claims in his essay, instead asking readers to formulate them for him?

Table 3: Analysis of Sentence Types

	1985 Gonzalez	1990 Unick	1995 Newhart	2000 Zvezdanova	2005 Daleus	2010 Wynns
Total No. of Sentences	32	34	51	48	78	29
Simple	14 (43.8%)	10 (29.4%)	23 (45.1%)	20 (41.7%)	30 (38.5%)	2 (6.9%)
Compound	5 (15.6%)	1 (2.9%)	3 (5.9%)	4 (8.3%)	13 (16.7%)	4 (13.8%)
Complex	7 (21.9%)	9 (26.5%)	13 (25.5%)	19 (39.6%)	18 (23.1%)	14 (48.3%)
Compound-Complex	5 (15.6%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (9.8%)	4 (8.3%)	5 (6.4%)	8 (27.6%)
Question	1 (3.1%)	8 (23.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (7.7%)	1 (3.4%)
Incomplete	0 (0.0%)	3 (8.8%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.1%)	6 (7.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Imperative	0 (0.0%)	3 (8.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Dialog/Quotation	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (13.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Total No. of Types Used	5	6	6	5	6	5

In part, we can perhaps view this deflection as a gesture toward an academic rhetoric of sophistication. We can view Unick’s polite prodding as mindfulness (he does not wish to push his readers

away). At the same time, however, we might view this tactic as a cop out—used as a way to mask the essay’s lack of substantive evidence. Unick at least acknowledges—and attempts to compensate for—this point of weakness, whereas Gonzalez peppers his essay freely with unsubstantiated claims, such as this one: “Few brilliant women have tried to develop their talents simply because there has been a small market for brilliant women in this country.”

The personal narratives examined in issues 1995 and 2000 bear similar syntactical features. Both utilize relatively short, simple sentences to portray memories of past events. English 101 student Cynthia Newhart opens “Cab Drivers in New York” in conventional, five-paragraph-essay form:

Cab drivers in New York have a driving style all their own. They act as if the standard rules of the road do not apply to them. Among their various dangerous habits are driving too fast, cutting off other drivers, and not using turn signals.

Here, Newhart plainly sets up another bisymmetrical tripartite structure. She begins with an uncomplicated “hook” to draw the reader in and transitions into a three-prong thesis statement. Strangely, however, only one of these “prongs” receives explicit treatment in the essay (“driving too fast”), which makes sense, seeing as how Newhart is clearly working in the personal narrative genre and not in that of the more formulaic position paper. What follow this student’s rather humdrum introduction are vivid depictions of nightmarish run-ins (some literal) with New York City cabs. It is in these passages that Newhart discovers an appropriate voice, incorporating dialogue and active diction to evoke a real sense of panic:

“Stop. Let me out,” I pleaded. I pounded on the bullet-proof divider between us. “Yes, Miss?” he asked. “Please pull over, I want to get out,” I said. He turned his head to face me, completely taking his eyes off the road while he kept his foot firmly on the gas peddle

[sic]. “Where do you want to get out, Miss?” he asked, still facing me. “Anywhere, just pull over!” In one jerk of the wheel I was curbside. I paid my fare and quickly got out, relieved to be on terra firma again.

English 201 student Polina Zvezdanova opens her personal narrative, “A Sudden Summer Storm,” with a similar “academic” trope—that of the vague generalization. Meant to “draw the reader in,” such generalizations risk coming across as pandering; yet, at the same time, they communicate the writer’s desire to connect to her reader, as Zvezdanova attempts in her introduction when she writes, “Everyone has a collection of childhood memories.” The obvious statement is useful, however, for the way in which it allows Zvezdanova to craft an opening to her personal narrative that transitions from an empty generalization to meaningful reflections on the significance of memory:

Everyone has a collection of childhood memories. Memories are our way of connecting with the past, with ourselves. They are like a magic box that we can always open, or close. Some last, some do not. They constantly remind us of who we really are, of how we became what we are. When I remember, it’s like watching an old movie, a favorite old movie that I can watch over and over again. No one else can see what I see, only me...

Here, after somewhat of a false start, Zvezdanova effectively relates her topic to the reader while simultaneously exploring how memory is significant to her personally—the ultimate objective of the genre.

The third personal narrative of these six samples was found in the 2005 edition of *John Jay’s Finest*. Written by Beverly K. Daleus in Professor Alisse Waterston’s Culture and Crime class, “Abduction of a Soul” narrates Daleus’ experience being raped in an empty parking garage as she attempted to enter her car. Daleus opens her traumatic account on a note of uncertainty, unable to adequately verbalize her experience. In fact, she begins by asking

the reader, ostensibly, for advice in this regard: “How do you describe what it feels like to be violated sexually by force? Is there a way to put into words the empty feeling you have when a man lays his heavy body on yours, and pounds away inside you?” In contrast to Newhart and Zvezdanova’s personal narratives, Daleus utilizes a variety of sentence types, positioning complex structures against direct, simple arrangements: “He laid the machete on my chest with the tip towards my neck and told me, ‘Don’t move unless I tell you to.’ So I didn’t. I lay there. I didn’t fight back.” The effect is an authentic evocation of fear and anxiety. The details from Daleus’ horrific encounter are conveyed with an immediacy appropriate to the rhetorical situation. She does not, as Newhart and Zvezdanova’s sometimes do, enlist an academic voice or structure to infuse a misguided sense of logic and credibility into the piece. Instead, she trusts the accuracy of her memory and the authenticity of her voice to conjure up a persuasive helping of pathos that elicits empathy from her readers.

Among the five essays discussed so far, only small differences can be detected between them in regard to sentence type and length (see Table 4).

Table 4: Analysis of Sentence Length

	1985 Gonzalez	1990 Unick	1995 Newhart	2000 Zvezdanova	2005 Daleus	2010 Wynns
Total No. of Words	643	550	809	624	869	792
Total No. of Paragraphs	4	5	5	6	6	4
Total No. of Sentences	32	34	51	48	78	29
Average Words/Sentence	21	20	17	16	14	28
Maximum Words/Sentence	30	29	35	32	26	51
Minimum Words/Sentence	11	2	5	3	4	11

Excluding Zvezdanova’s essay on childhood memories, the samples exhibit an overwhelming preference for simple sentences over compound, complex, or compound-complex sentences. Even Zvezdanova’s piece, which, of the five, contains the most complex structures, still favors simple sentences. While most of

these samples contain several complex sentences, very few compound-complex sentences, or even simple compound sentences, were found. The sixth and most recent sample, however, shows a drastic increase in the usage of complex and compound-complex sentences. In fact, only two simple sentences (out of 29 total sentences) can be found in English 201 student Mark Wynns' "Do the Smart Thing: Thoughtful Action against Global Warming."

Wynns' 2010 essay can most meaningfully be compared to the two earliest samples by Gonzalez and Unick, as all three can be categorized as position papers. As I noted earlier in my analysis, Gonzalez and Unick's essays rely on logic and reasoning to demonstrate their claims, omitting outside texts and thereby sacrificing authority and credibility. Conversely, Wynns cites academic studies to disparage society's resistance toward nuclear energy as a viable alternative to fossil fuels. Perhaps the most prominent difference between Wynns' work and that of Gonzalez and Unick, however, is in the writing *style*. Only 6.9 percent of Wynns' essay is comprised of simple sentences, as opposed to 43.8 percent of Gonzalez's and 29.4% of Unick's. But where we see the largest difference is in the presence of complex and compound-complex sentences: 48.3% of Wynns' sentences can be described as complex, whereas only 21.9% and 26.5% of Gonzalez and Unick's, respectively. Lastly, and most dramatically, Wynns' essay contains eight, rather lengthy, compound-complex sentences, whereas Gonzalez's essay contains five, and Unick's contains none.

In examining Wynns' introductory paragraph, we can see a marked difference between the language featured, not only in Gonzalez's and Unick's essays, but in Newhart's, Zvezdanova's, and Daleus' as well:

Though climate change is a proven phenomenon and arguably the most important issue of our time, it remains misunderstood by many. For decades, industrial interests that benefit from activity that pollutes the atmosphere have waged all-out war on the global

warming theory in the public arena, simultaneously stalling solutions and making the problem worse. They insist (correctly to some extent) that solving the problem will be uncomfortable and cause a lot of upheaval in the current economic system, but certainly environment catastrophe (such as G. Tyler Miller's forecast of potential wildfires in 90% of North American forests [p. 301]) would be much more uncomfortable.

Here, Wynns utilizes a passive, objective voice and yet manages to firmly and effectively present his argument—that disregarding evidence of global warming is exacerbating the problem. The introduction is comprised exclusively of complex and compound-complex sentences, which contribute to the writer's credibility and reliability, as does the citation of G. Tyler Miller in line seven.

The inclusion of Wynns' advanced-level academic essay paired with the *exclusion* of personal narratives in the 2010 issue of *John Jay's Finest* suggests a significant shift in, not only the type of writing valued by English faculty at John Jay, but also in the intended (and potential) uses of a publication like *JFF*. From 1985 to 1995, the magazine devoted most of its pages to personal narratives and creative writing, allotting approximately 12 to 16% of the magazine to academic writing in the form of non-researched position papers (such as Gonzalez's and Unick's essays). By 1995, personal narratives continue to dominate the pages of *JFF*, but textual analyses emerge in a close second place. By 2000, personal narratives are on the decline, and more academic writing takes their place in the form of exploratory research essays, researched arguments (like Wynns'), and, of course, textual analyses (which, by 2010, constitute the majority of the magazine).

So what is lost and what can be gained—pedagogically, curricularly, administratively—by such a pronounced stylistic shift from publishing student writing *as literature* to publishing it to serve as rhetorical models for academic writing? Perhaps one undesired consequence is that the magazine may come to be perceived as a text used exclusively for learning purposes, not

enjoyment. Such an association may undermine the magazine's founders' original aspirations, which were, in part, to motivate freshmen writers to craft creative, engaging work with the goal of someday seeing it in print (and therefore valued and respected by an audience outside the classroom). Stoic and cerebral academic writing, however well-written, nonetheless lacks the power to engross, at least at a glimpse, the average freshman student at John Jay College.

And yet, the rhetorical inadequacies discovered in the ostensibly academic essays by Gonzalez and Unick indicate that there is certainly a need to exhibit stronger models of this genre. Since *JFF*'s inception in 1985, its production and distribution process has been severely underfunded, rendering the project essentially useless as a pedagogical tool in the writing classroom. (How can an undergraduate population of 14,000 benefit from a magazine if it can only be found in the recesses of the library's special collections, or in the seldom-opened drawers of faculty?) To ameliorate the financial burden of producing a publication of student writing, Vassar College requires students enrolled in all composition courses to purchase copies of *The Sampler* (published tri-annually). Compulsory sales allow faculty to make significant use of the journal as a tool for modeling successful writing approaches. "The compositions in our magazine," wrote *The Sampler*'s editors in response to Edith Wells' survey, "are examined closely and discussed in detail as part of the class work" (4). By the end of their freshman year, Vassar students have been exposed to a variety of exemplary student essays, and, in doing so, "build up a set of critical standards which are meaningful because the students have had a part in formulating them" (4).

Lacking the level of classroom presence enjoyed by publications such as *The Sampler*, *John Jay's Finest* serves only to congratulate the distinguished writing of a handful of students each year. Of tremendous importance, the magazine functions as an institutional archive, documenting shifts in the writing culture at John Jay, but it could be so much more. Adopting the compulsory sales strategy of publications such as Vassar's *The Sampler* and,

perhaps more notably, New York University's *Mercer Street*, would convert *John Jay's Finest* into a sustainable enterprise—plus it would bring about the added benefit of ensuring every John Jay freshman's exposure to the level of academic writing they are encouraged to meet as new members of this strange, yet no less important, discourse community.

Finally, my time spent with this collection of student writing from John Jay College—much of it electrically poignant and insightful—leaves me with the following realizations toward a guide for publishing student writing:

- In order to help reconcile the tension between *reflexive* writing (writing for one's self and one's peers) and *extensive* writing (writing for one's teacher), publications of student writing should aim to feature work that comingles these writing situations.
- Published student writing should represent aesthetic and stylistic values held by the institution's entire English department—if not the institution as a whole. To this end, submissions should be read and evaluated by a large swath of faculty and students rather than by just one or two faculty and/or student editors.
- If student publications are to have a pedagogical function, published works should demonstrate a variety of rhetorical moves, from the expressionistic to the academic. Ideally, student writers should see such multimodality enacted within the boundaries of individual works rather than across several pieces of genre-specific writing.
- Student publications should be inclusive—i.e., showcase writing from a variety of discourse and disciplinary communities.
- To ensure their financial and pedagogical viability, student publications should be required texts for all first-year writing and writing intensive courses.

If enacted, the suggestions outlined above can help to create student publication initiatives that will serve as a key tool at every

step of a writing program's mission. Student publications, if produced thoughtfully and collaboratively, allow programs to see how and in what conditions successful writing is created. They allow us to study it in curriculum meetings and faculty development workshops. They allow us to assess and demonstrate the success of our programs. And, perhaps most importantly, they allow us to celebrate such work and incentivize it for future writers and writing teachers throughout our learning communities.

Works Cited

- Alexander, Jonathan. "Digital Spins: The Pedagogy and Politics Of Student-Centered E-Zines." *Computers & Composition* 19.4 (2002). *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 4 May 2012.
- Berke, Jaqueline. "The Campus Literary Magazine and Composition." *College Composition and Communication* 14.1 (1963): 10 – 14. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 May 2012.
- Bartholomae, David. "Writing with Teachers: A conversation with Peter Elbow." *College Composition and Communication* 46.1 (1995): 62 – 71. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 8 May 2012.
- Connors, Robert J., and Edward P.J. Corbett. *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. 4th Ed. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.
- Daleus, Beverly K. "Abduction of a Soul." *John Jay's Finest: Outstanding Student Writing from All Disciplines*. Ed. Allison Pease. New York, NY: John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2005. Print.
- Gonzalez, Anthony. "Women—Fragile Flowers?" *John Jay's Finest: Outstanding Student Writing from All Disciplines*. Eds. Patricia Licklider and Shirley Schnitzer. New York, NY: John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 1985. Print.
- Loomis, Ormond H. *Program Anthologies, Classbooks, and Zines: An Examination of Approaches to Publishing First-Year Students' Work*. The Florida State University, 2006. United States – Florida: *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (PQDT)*. Web. 4 May 2012.
- Newhart, Cynthia. "Cab Drivers in New York." *John Jay's Finest: Outstanding Student Writing from All Disciplines*. Ed. Frederick Rusch. New York, NY: John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 1995. Print.

- Putnam, Dawn. "Authentic Writing Using Online Resources: Selling Our Words in the Community." *English Journal* 90.5 (2001): 102. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 4 May 2012.
- Rhodes, Keith, et al. "WPA Outcomes Statement For First-Year Composition." *College English* 63.3 (2001): 321. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 4 May 2012.
- Unick, Kevin. "Is This Progress?" *John Jay's Finest: Outstanding Student Writing from All Disciplines*. Eds. Patricia Licklider and Shirley Schnitzer. New York, NY: John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 1995. Print.
- Wells, Edith. "College Publications of Freshman Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 1:1 (1950): 3-11. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 May 2012.
- Wynns, Mark. "Do the Smart Thing: Thoughtful Action against Global Warming." *John Jay's Finest: Outstanding Student Writing from All Disciplines*. Eds. Jeffrey Heiman and Adam Berlin. New York, NY: John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2010. Print.
- Zvezdanova, Polina. "A Sudden Summer Storm." *John Jay's Finest: Outstanding Student Writing from All Disciplines*. Ed. Jane Mushabac. New York, NY: John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2000. Print.

