Professing in the Contact Zone

Bringing Theory and Practice Together

Edited by

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First Contact: Composition Students' Close Encounters with College Culture

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When Mary Louise Pratt suggested that classrooms can serve as "contact zones"—that is, as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (34)—she also noted that "the idea of the contact zone is intended in part to contrast with the ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication, and culture that gets done in the academy" (37). Pratt's essay attempts to correct some facile concepts of community that have become common in our academic discourse. In fact, the essay invites a conclusion that Pratt never states explicitly: *any* sense of community in today's multiversities must be forged by sometimes fractious conflict in the contact zones where cultures collide. However, Richard E. Miller has argued that Pratt's own examples of contact zones are "curiously benign" in that Pratt "offers no examples of how her students negotiated [their] struggles in writing or of how their teachers participated in and responded to their struggles" (391). Miller's own essay provides a striking example of struggle in a composition class, and in this essay I will provide several more examples. In doing so, I will demonstrate that the first-year composition class can be a particularly important contact zone in

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that it can serve as an arena for exploring the pedagogical value of several types of *first* contacts that new students experience in the other contact zones of the university.[1]

While several scholars have offered promising proposals for utilizing the classroom contact zone to explore power and difference, I have not seen a study of how the classroom might be used to explore what may be the most pressing concern facing first-year college students: their adjustment to life on a college campus.[2] In their first semester on campus, students experience numerous "first contacts." One type of first contact is that between the students and the university itself, an institution that first-year students see personified in its representatives: the administrators, faculty, and staff members whom they encounter. Another type of first contact is that of students with other students who come from diverse—and disparate—sociocultural backgrounds. Within the contact zone of the composition classroom, students can be given opportunities to think, talk, and write critically about their initial experiences in college. To create these opportunities, I have developed a sequence of reading and writing assignments that focus on college life. For first-year students in the composition classroom, these assignments can serve the general function that Pratt attributes to texts produced in contact zones: the assignments can "constitute a marginalized group's point of entry into the dominant circuits of print culture" (35).

In designing a course with a thematic focus on college life, I was inspired in part by David Bartholomae's now-classic essay "Inventing the University." However, while Bartholomae has suggested that each new student must invent the university for himself or herself, he is primarily concerned with the ways in which students discover the writing conventions and habits of thought characteristic of the various disciplines that constitute the university. Certainly I share Bartholomae's concern—and my own course attempts to acquaint students with some of the discourse conventions of the academy—but I am intrigued by a dimension of the university that Bartholomae does not explore: the multi-faceted lives that students lead outside of the classroom but within the living space that the university provides. To paraphrase Bartholomae, I believe that every generation of students must

invent college life, and they must do so within a network of constraints. Some of these constraints are imposed by the students' own assumptions, values, and abilities, while others are imposed by the university life that other students have shaped and by the imperatives that the institution itself imposes. To invent college life, students must discover the potential as well as the limits of their agency within the university. They must identify the arenas in which their participation is required or encouraged, those in which it is grudgingly tolerated, and those in which it is unwelcome. They must also invent or discover modes of discourse that are acceptable to their various audiences in the university yet also suitable for their own particular ends. Thus, for some students the invention of college life requires a process that Pratt (borrowing from Fernando Ortiz) terms "transculturation"—that is, a process "whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (36). And as they negotiate the constraints imposed by multiple audiences in a hierarchical institution, students may discover the truth of Pratt's warning about writing in a contact zone: they may discover that the reception of their texts will be "highly indeterminate" (35).

In assembling the reading and writing assignments for College Writing, I settled on three general areas which, as it happened, correspond to the three temporal modes: past, present, and future. I see each of these modes as corresponding to a different identity that I would like my students to assume: the historian, the ethnographer, and the rhetor. I'll offer a very brief explanation of the assignments in each of these modes, and I'll follow each explanation with an analysis of one student paper that illustrates how students discover the social power—and the limits on the power—of their discourse.

Remembering the Past: The Student as Historian

One of my goals is that students become familiar with the history of life at American universities in general and at their own university in particular. To pursue this goal, students complete summary/reaction and comparison/contrast assignments on two

readings. The first of these readings is an excerpt from Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's *Campus Life*, a study of student culture in American universities since the eighteenth century. From the Horowitz reading, students learn that the struggle to balance newfound social freedom and academic responsibility is at least as old as the American university. Most of my students are surprised when they read Horowitz's account of an eighteenth-century educational system in which students "were completely dependent upon their faculty not only for their system of education but also for their living arrangements"—a system in which students "had no legitimate recourse other than withdrawal . . . if they found their instructor vindictive or their food rotten" (26). Even more surprising for students is Horowitz's account of campus disturbances in the early 1800s, an era when Yale students bombed a dormitory and North Carolina students horsewhipped the university president and stoned two faculty members. However, my students recognize in their own university the remnants of the eighteenth-century student cultures that Horowitz describes, and most students are quick to recognize themselves and their classmates as the descendants of the pleasure-loving "College Men," the career-minded "Outsiders," and the social-activist "Rebels."[3] The more recent antecedents of these cultures become familiar to them when they read an excerpt from Richard Kern's *Findlay College: The First Hundred Years*, a history of the institution that they attend.[4] This excerpt describes two protests on campus in the 1960s. The first protest was a demonstration against the college's no-alcohol policy: Kern describes how several hundred students occupied the student union and drank beer to protest the policy. The second demonstration was arranged by Findlay's Black Student Union, which occupied the cafeteria and burned copies of the college newspaper after it published a racist letter. Kern's work introduces students to a history of activism at their campus—an activism that is barely evident today but nevertheless is familiar in light of recent events at Pennsylvania, Rutgers, and other campuses. It also introduces two types of conflicts that occur within the contact zones of the university: conflicts between students and the university administration, and conflicts within the student body.

After students read and respond to these essays, they conduct their own interviews of students who attended college at least ten years ago. They use these interviews to assemble profiles of the interview subjects' college experiences. (See Appendix A for a detailed description of this assignment.) In doing so, students polish their skills in handling the mechanics of quotation and paraphrase (a requirement for all sections of College Writing at the University of Findlay), while exploring further the nature of college life for previous generations of students.

Many of my students interview family members, so their profiles provide evidence of the disparate educational backgrounds of their families: a student editing group may consider a profile of an Ivy League graduate, a graduate of a state college, and a trade-school student. Other students interview members of the Findlay faculty, and their interviews reveal how the representatives of the institution fared in their own first contacts with higher education. What they discover is sometimes disturbing, and how they handle this assignment reveals some limits in the authority of student writers.

As an example of the dilemmas that students encounter in preparing their profiles, I offer the case of Penny, a student who interviewed her advisor, Dr. M.[5] In discussing her experiences as a first-year student in the late 1970s, Dr. M talked at length about the difficulties of moving from a small farming community to a major metropolitan university. In the course of the interview, Dr. M mentioned that she roomed with two other women in her first semester at college and that she and the other White occupant of the room experienced numerous conflicts with their one African American roommate. Noting that the African American roommate had different study and social habits, Dr. M then chuckled and asserted that she and her White roommate "drove [the African American roommate] out of the room" by midsemester.

As I listened to Penny's recorded interview and read her transcription of it, I jotted a note saying "sounds despicable to me" in the margin next to Dr. M's comments. When Penny prepared a profile of her advisor, she did mention Dr. M's conflict with a roommate; however, she did not specify the race of the roommate who was driven out of the room. I asked Penny why she

had not done so. She replied that she felt uncomfortable about including the incident in a profile that she would have to show to her advisor and to other students, and she added that she thought the incident could create the wrong impression. In fairness to Penny and to Dr. M, I should add that Penny's reservations could be justified: since she didn't ask follow-up questions about her advisor's roommate conflicts, she couldn't provide details concerning the specific conflicts that Dr. M experienced and the specific actions she took.

In looking back at Penny's interview and profile, I see several issues that merit attention. First, of course, is her advisor's seeming inability to negotiate amicably her first contact with an African American student. What I find particularly troublesome, though, is not the prospect of that failure but rather Dr. M's lighthearted discussion of it nearly two decades later. Perhaps Dr. M's inability to recall her African American roommate's name is a natural result of the passage of time, but it's also possible to see in this lapse of memory a reduction of the roommate to a racial identity. Concerning Penny's handling of the material, I would note that her assignment provided her with an opportunity to accomplish what Pratt identifies as one important function of contact-zone writing: the opportunity to "mirror back" to the audience "an image of themselves that they often suppress and will therefore surely recognize" (35). However, instead of mirroring back Dr. M's unsuccessful first contact with difference and her subsequent attempt to ameliorate that experience, Penny chose to erase the racial dimension of Dr. M's experience. Penny's rationale for doing so may seem suspect (if understandable): she is reticent to cast an unfavorable light on her mentor, a person whom she admires.[6] However, Penny's response may also be governed at least in part by the asymmetrical power relations holding between her and Dr. M. On the one hand, Penny recognizes that she has the power to tarnish Dr. M's reputation. On the other hand, Dr. M occupies a position of power over Penny. As a representative of the university, Dr. M signs Penny's registration forms and will write letters of recommendation when Penny applies to graduate school (an event that already figures in Penny's plans). Thus, Penny's reluctance to include the sensitive material could

signal her recognition of her own vulnerability: as Penny imagines the reception of her text, she can anticipate undesirable consequences. Still, I think it worth noting that Penny's reluctance to discuss Dr. M's offensive behavior is itself an acknowledgment that she recognizes the insensitivity (at the very least) of Dr. M's actions and comments. Instead of seeing her advisor's attitudes as a validation of those attitudes, Penny chooses to see the attitudes as an aberration.

I'm not certain whether Penny could recognize that Dr. M's "aberrant" behavior is all too familiar in the university; however, I do know that other students have been quick to recognize the racial element in dormitory conflicts today. In class discussions that occurred while students were working on the interview assignment, students were quick to offer recent examples of racial conflicts among students at Findlay. One student reported an incident in which the American roommates of a Chinese student had piled garbage on her bed, and another student reported that a Hispanic student found a note that said "Go back to Iran where you belong" taped to his door. Indeed, the discussion of college life in the past leads naturally to a discussion of more recent events, many of which concern the tensions that students experience in their living environments.

Exploring the Present: The Student as Ethnographer

Another goal of College Writing is to acquaint students with some basic research conventions. To this end I have them read excerpts from Michael Moffatt's *Coming of Age in New Jersey*, a participant-observer study by an anthropologist who lived in a Rutgers dormitory for a year. Early in his study of college life in the 1980s, Moffatt identifies "three different zones of relative autonomy and control in college" (35). He notes that between the freedom that students experience in their dorm rooms and the relative lack of freedom that they experience in the classroom, there exists "an intermediate zone" into which students walk whenever they leave the privacy of their rooms (35–36). Moffatt's study provides abundant information about students' lives in this intermediate zone,

offering extensive insights concerning the conflicts and compromises that are inescapable aspects of campus life. In the course of his study Moffatt also offers extensive reports of students' attitudes about race, sex, and politics.

After reading Moffatt my students produce their own "autoethnographies"—Pratt's term for "texts in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" (35). First the students write comparison/contrast reading reports in which they compare their own lives as dorm students or commuters at Findlay to those of the Rutgers students; however, this unit also requires a more substantial paper—a participant-observer research project on some aspect of life at the Findlay campus. (See Appendix B for a detailed description of this assignment.) The best student research papers usually result from close observation of the minutiae of college life: students have studied seating arrangements in the cafeteria, the allocation of living space within shared dorm rooms, and the range of behaviors appropriate in dorm lounges. They also have compared graffiti in men and women's restrooms and counted derogatory racial comments in dorm conversations. Through this research students learn some basic conventions of research methodology as well as writing conventions, and they also acquire some sense of the disparate values competing for priority as students on campus negotiate not only the university's regulations but also the tacit assumptions governing their interactions with other students.

The study of racial slurs, conducted by a student I'll call Joe, proved particularly controversial. Based on a combination of direct observation and survey research, Joe reported that on average a Findlay student hears 10.2 racial slurs directed towards African Americans during each week of the academic year, 1.5 directed toward Asians, and 1 directed toward Whites. Almost all of these racial slurs are offered at gatherings within private rooms (and, since such gatherings at Findlay tend to be single-race congregations, White students would use and hear racial slurs directed toward African Americans and Asians but not toward Whites). Joe concluded that "students of the nineties may be a bit more hypocritical than Moffatt's subjects," revealing a

larger gap between their publicly professed egalitarianism and their private intolerance.

Unlike Penny, Joe seized an opportunity to "mirror back" behavior that his audience would have preferred not to scrutinize. In doing so he risked a hostile reception for his work, and he also risked polarizing the class along racial lines. Joe's report was disturbing for students of all races: like Pratt's own students, they all had the experience of "hearing their culture discussed and objectified in ways that horrified them" (39). However, Joe's research proved especially disturbing to some African American students: his statistics suggested legitimate ground for mistrust among some who might otherwise have remained ignorant of the extent of prejudice on campus.

To address the threat that Joe's report posed, students adopted two strategies. The first of these was a retreat to silence: by not responding to Joe's report, the students were able to hasten the conclusion of an uncomfortable episode. This was the strategy adopted by the other members of Joe's four-person editing group. However, when I used Joe's report as a reading assignment for several other sections of College Writing, the students in those sections adopted a different strategy: to minimize the threat that Joe's report posed, they identified flaws in his methodology. One White student noted that a minuscule minority of intolerant White students would account for the majority of the slurs reported. An African American student noted that African Americans and Asians are underrepresented in most research conducted on campus and that their own attitudes were probably not reflected accurately in Joe's study. Another African American student observed that at least some of the reported epithets were directed by one African American student toward another and that Joe's study was insensitive to how the signification of "nigger" differs in such cases.

In attacking the flaws in Joe's research, the students identified a weakness that is typical of most ethnographic studies that my first-year students have conducted: most of these students have not yet mastered the processes of conducting social-science research or the conventions for reporting that research. Thus, their work is an approximation of the discourse that the academy authorizes,

and even first-year students can recognize it as such. However, if Joe's autoethnography is an approximation, it is also an appropriation. Joe was able to use (however imperfectly) an academic mode to frame an oppositional discourse: one that implicitly indicted both his fellow students (for their duplicity) and the administration (for its complicity) in creating conditions that encourage intolerance. Since Joe's study contained an implicit critique of his peers, their hostile reception of his study was predictable; however, I find it significant that their responses revealed their own emerging understanding of the researcher's responsibilities.

Also significant was the students' ability to refine Joe's critique. In considering the complaints that students of one race lodged against those of another, the students were able to distinguish those that are rooted in genuine intolerance from those rooted in the intrinsic difficulties of dorm life. As one student observed, another student's complaint about "loud rap music" might really have been two complaints, one revealing a personal preference and/or a cultural bias against a particular genre of music and the other indicating a grievance over a violation of university quiet-hour policies. The discussion also revealed some ways in which perception is limited by position: while Joe noted that several male White students voiced their opposition to interracial dating, male African American students often point out that the university's recruiting practices have created a campus where African American men significantly outnumber African American women—a fact that White students often do not consider.

Furthermore, students reached a near-consensus on several points. While Joe noted that students "are strongly divided as to the role of the university in 'interfering' vs. 'ameliorating' flare-ups," almost all students agreed that the university exerts too much control over their lives and that it exercises its power in an arbitrary manner. Indeed, the students' images of the administration resemble those that the colonized might draw of a colonizing power: they see the administration as governing by fiat without the consent of the governed. Thus, students agree that it is in their own best interest to resolve conflicts on their own. They do not want to give the university an excuse for exerting further control over their actions in the dormitory.

Shaping the Future: The Student as Rhetor

As the end of the term nears, my students prepare proposals for changes in the policies or procedures of the university. (See Appendix C for a detailed description of this assignment.) In requiring this assignment I am asking my students to imagine a better future for the university, a different future that would result if their proposal were implemented. Since the students write the proposal in a form appropriate for the college newspaper—and thus for an audience that includes faculty, staff, and administrators as well as students—I am asking them to negotiate the competing expectations of multiple audiences who sometimes possess antithetical interests.

The range of topics addressed in this assignment will be familiar to most teachers. Students routinely offer complaints about the college cafeteria, the dormitory visitation and noise policies, and the lack of parking spaces. While these proposals address concerns that most students share, I receive some proposals each semester that express concerns of specific factions within the class: a proposal to include Spanish programs and contemporary African American music on the campus radio station, one to match international students with American roommates, and another to make campus cultural programs more accessible to commuters.

To make the proposal assignment something more than an academic exercise, I encourage students to submit their proposals to administrators or campus organizations that could implement the proposals. When students have done so, their experiences have confirmed Pratt's observation that the reception of a contact-zone text is indeterminate. On some occasions the students are successful. For example, one student was given a summer job to implement the peer tutoring system that he had proposed, and other students have achieved more modest successes. However, students usually find that their most ambitious proposals are undermined by their position in the university. While administrators usually are generous in making themselves available to discuss past experiences and current policies with students who are conducting research, the same administrators are much less willing to consider the actual proposals brought by students. Thus,

students often discover that the university's normal process of decision making provides few opportunities for student-initiated change.

Consider the experience of Jean. Dissatisfied with the university's single rate for all dorm residents, Jean offered a proposal that would have based dorm rates on the square footage allocated to each student. At present, students pay $1,100.00 per semester for a shared room regardless of the size of that room and the number of roommates with whom they must share the space. Jean's proposal would produce the same total revenue as the existing policy. However, under Jean's plan each student would pay $13.00 for each square foot of living space, a change that would create a six-level fee schedule that ranges from $810.00 to $1,250.00 per semester.

Well-reasoned and immaculately drafted, Jean's proposal seemed to merit serious consideration. Her research demonstrated that the disparities in accommodations on our campus are sufficiently large to constitute a substantial injustice, and her proposal identified a feasible solution to the problem. However, when Jean submitted the proposal to an administrator who earlier had provided some of her data, he immediately dismissed it as "too complicated." His reaction disturbed Jean: while she was prepared for failure, she did expect that her proposal would receive serious consideration. In fact, the perfunctory dismissal suggests that Jean was willing to give more thought to a significant campus-life issue than was the administrator. In light of the administrator's response, Jean might well question the value of rational argument as a tool for social change.

Jean's experience teaches a hard lesson: her agency as a rhetor is not solely a product of her rhetorical skills but also a product of the subject position that she occupies within the university, a position that undermines the authority of her discourse. Thus Jean's experience suggests a corollary to Pratt's observation that, for marginalized groups, texts produced in contact zones provide a point of entry into the dominant circuits of print culture. Instead, the reception of such texts may provide the marginalized writer one more index of her subordinate status.

Despite their limited success in converting their plans into policies, students remain willing to devote considerable time and

energy to preparing proposals that would improve the quality of their campus life. I have seen students spend hours accumulating data. They have compared textbook prices on their own campus with those at other universities, contrasted meal plans at Findlay with those of other private colleges, contacted contractors to determine the cost of building recreational facilities, and counted parking spaces available in lots at various times. They have also proven themselves to be respectful but merciless critics of each other's work. Each proposal for open visitation in the dorms is met by questions concerning security, and each request for better recreational facilities is countered by questions concerning funding. Perhaps the appeal of the proposal assignment in particular (but also of the other assignments for the course) results from the opportunity to have their ideas taken seriously by a peer audience, even when the ideas are dismissed by other elements of the university.

Community and Democracy

I am tempted to conclude that the students in my first-year composition classes discover that their mutual concerns are at least as abundant as the issues that divide them and that these mutual concerns could provide a basis for a true sense of community. This conclusion would be in keeping with my desire to assist students in making connections and resolving conflicts. The danger, of course, is that such a conclusion may well be illusory, a mere product of my desire. As Joseph Harris has noted, "community" is "a concept both seductive and powerful, one that offers us a view of shared purpose and effort and that makes a claim on us that is hard to resist" (13). Because the concept of "community" is so seductive, I could easily succumb to an illusion that Pratt identifies: the illusion that my classroom practices can unify the social world, constructing it in my own image (39). Since I recognize this tendency in my own work, I will offer a more modest claim here, one that does not "rehabilitate" a contact zone by converting it into a community.

I will suggest, then, that when I as a teacher promote forms of academic writing for my classes, I position myself as an "other"

for my students: I stand as a representative of an institutional hierarchy that constrains their options for expression. In adopting this position I influence my students by pulling their texts toward the conventions of the academy, even though I recognize that those conventions are being contested within the academy. However, the students are pulled as well by their own stake in the topics about which they write and by the responses that they receive from their classmates. This combination of forces, I believe, creates the necessary conditions for the transculturation of the students' discourse. When I strive to help students discover the identities of historian, ethnographer, and rhetor, I am trying to promote what Pratt terms "a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror" (35). In introducing academic modes of discourse, I recognize that the students will need to adapt those modes to suit the particular demands of their own positions within the university.

Near the conclusion of her essay, Pratt notes that "those of us committed to educational democracy are particularly challenged as that notion finds itself besieged on the public agenda. Many of those who govern us display, openly, their interest in a quiescent, ignorant, manipulable electorate" (39). I would add that more than a few university administrators are interested in a quiescent, manipulable student body. All too often this goal is attainable. In a discussion of the intellectual identities available to college students, Jim Merod has noted that undergraduates are "often confused by the attempt to sort through requirements, choices of majors, and the means of writing essays that will satisfy various professorial tastes and assignments" (127). Since these students' first contacts with the university sometimes resemble those of explorers encountering an alien culture, the representatives of the university may be tempted to treat these students as the uninitiated upon whom knowledge must be bestowed.

However, Merod suggests that the university bears a greater responsibility:

> Students are not merely the necessary audience (or clientele) for the propagation of knowledge and the continuation of intellectual traditions. They provide immediate access to the future. The purpose of intellectual work is not just to advance theoretical

> understanding and to enrich intellectual practices but to widen and deepen the social relevance of knowledge—to put ideas into more useful contact with democratic principles, to make all institutions within the Western sphere of influence more democratic . . . . (127–28)

Thus, Merod suggests, an intellectual identity is most likely to have relevance for students if it enables them to participate in a democratic society. I would add that an intellectual identity is most likely to have *immediate* relevance to students if it enables them to participate *immediately* in the shaping of the institution where they conduct their own studies.

Under the actual circumstances that students encounter, this goal is not always attainable. However, if the students are not always able to reinvent the institutional structures of college life, they are at least able to draw the blueprints for a campus that would better reflect their own visions. Moreover, they are able to assess and alter some of the tacit assumptions that govern their behavior in realms where the power of the university barely reaches. This last point is particularly important: I would argue that Moffatt's "intermediate zone" of "relative autonomy"—the zone of social interaction on campus but outside of the classroom—is the contact zone in which first-year students are best able to experience their own power as well as their responsibilities. It is there, I believe, that they can participate immediately in the project that both Merod and Pratt advocate: the project of democratizing Western institutions. If another contact zone—the first-year composition class—can assist students in this project while providing a point of entry into the discourse of the academy, then it can serve a function that is empowering as well as reproductive.

Notes

1. For those readers well versed in social anthropology, the title "First Contact" will be familiar. I have borrowed it from an ethnological film by anthropologists Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson. (See also Connolly and Anderson's book of the same title.) Released in 1982, Connolly and Anderson's film explores a 1930 encounter between an

Australian gold prospecting expedition and the Ganiga tribespeople in New Guinea. That encounter, the first contact between Ganigas and westerners, was captured on film by Michael Leahy, who had brought along a Leica camera to document the expedition's exploits. The first contact between the Australians and the Ganigas was marked by both conflict and cooperation, by mutual misunderstanding and groping efforts at cross-cultural communication. Some of the most striking moments in Connolly and Anderson's film detail the anthropologists' trip in 1980 to Papua, New Guinea, where they showed the 1930s photographs to the surviving Ganiga participants. As we watch the Ganigas looking at their younger selves in the old photographs, we see the extent to which Ganiga culture was changed by the modernization that followed its first contact with Western forces. However—and perhaps more significant—the photographs also provide an occasion for the Ganigas to remember the fears and hopes, the enrichment as well as the exploitation, that they experienced in their dealings with the prospectors.

2. For example, Patricia Bizzell has suggested the need for "studying how various writers in various genres have grappled with the pervasive presence of difference in American life and developed virtues out of necessity" (168). Bizzell adds, "I would include analysis of student writing, for its employment of contact zone rhetorical strategies, and I would include 'texts' of all kinds, as required by the contact zones under study—posters, songs, films, videos, and so forth" (168). While Bizzell does not make college culture the focus of her course, she emphasizes issues of difference akin to those that I am considering.

3. Horowitz argues that in the 1970s the culture of career-seeking "New Outsiders" prevailed over those of the hedonistic "College Men" and the socially conscious "Rebels." However, my own students argue that all three cultures are evident on the campuses of the 1990s.

4. My references to "Findlay students" serve as reminders that publication schedules often lag behind other events in our lives. Several years after I submitted "First Contact" to the editor of *Professing in the Contact Zone*, I moved from the University of Findlay to Salem State College. However, I still teach a first-year composition course that is similar to the one described in this essay. I no longer use the Kern reading, but I have found other texts to replace it. And my students at Salem State face many of the same challenges as my students at Findlay, so most of the present-tense verbs in my essay still seem appropriate to me.

5. I have changed the names of all students, professors, and administrators mentioned in this essay. The students have given permission for me to cite their works.

6. In truth, I too am reluctant to cast aspersions on the professor in question: I have seen too much of Dr. M's caring, sensitive treatment of students to believe that the incident of two decades ago would be repeated today. Nevertheless, her chuckle still haunts me.

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Appendix A: Interview/Profile Assignment Guidelines

This interview/profile assignment provides an opportunity for you to converse with a person who can offer you insights concerning what college was like ten (or more) years ago. Your assignment is to interview a person who attended college at least ten years ago and to inquire concerning what the person remembers about his or her college years. In doing so you may learn how college has—or has not—changed.

Components of the Assignment

The assignment includes five requirements:

1. Submitting a name for my approval. After you have chosen a person to interview, please prepare a file card containing the person's name, a description of where and when the person attended college, and a brief explanation of why you have selected him or her. Submit the card to me for approval before you interview the person.
2. Transcribing the interview. After you have conducted the interview, please type a verbatim transcript of the questions and answers. You will use this transcript as you prepare a profile of your interview subject.
3. Preparing a draft of the profile. After you have attempted to convert the interview into a profile, you will bring a draft of the profile to an in-class group session to obtain feedback on your work-in-progress.
4. Meeting with me to discuss your draft. After you have obtained feedback from other class members, I will meet individually with each of you to discuss your profile.
5. Writing a polished profile. The final product of this assignment should be a coherent, interesting profile (1,000–2,000 words) of the person you have interviewed. This profile should focus on the person's undergraduate college education and should convey his or her experiences and insights.

Selecting a Person to Interview

You may interview anyone who attended college as an undergraduate at least ten years ago. I would recommend (but will not

require) that you interview someone who is pursuing a career that you would like to pursue yourself.

Arranging the Interview

Make an appointment. Don't expect to walk in and conduct the interview immediately.

Make your purpose clear. Your subject should understand that you are conducting the interview as part of a college assignment.

Obtain permission to tape the interview. If the subject is unwilling to be taped, find someone else to interview.

Preparing for the Interview

Do some background research before the interview. When you make the appointment, ask the subject for a resume. Read the resume carefully before conducting the interview; it can suggest productive questions.

Prepare questions. Plan two or three lines of thoughtful questioning; these prepared questions will provide you with a sense of security at the interview. Some of your questions may focus on your subject's family background, personal life, and professional career; however, most of the questions should focus on the subject's college memories. These questions should address not only the academic but also the social aspects of the subject's college years, and they should invite the subject to consider those academic and social experiences in light of life after college. What were the most memorable events of the subject's college years? What was a typical day like? What sort of living arrangements did the person have? What courses did the person take? How much time did the person spend studying? In what activities did she or he participate? What aspects of college life were most enjoyable? What aspects were irritating? How well did the person's education prepare him or her for a career? What aspects of the subject's education were most useful? What aspects were lacking? These are just a few of the questions you could ask.

Check your equipment before the interview. Be sure that your tape recorder works and that the batteries are fresh. If you are

planning to take photographs, consider what equipment will be appropriate for the lighting conditions at the interview setting.

During the Interview

Be on time for the interview appointment.

If a line of prepared questions proves unproductive, shift to a new line. The interview itself should inspire some questions.

Be attentive. Pay attention to what your subject is saying, but also make note of details such as the subject's mannerisms, tone of voice, and appearance. Observe the setting itself and note items of interest that reveal something about the subject's personality.

After the Interview

As soon as you leave the interview, write down as many details as you can remember—they will add life to your profile, but many details will slip from your memory if you don't record them immediately.

Allow at least three hours for typing the transcript. Although the transcript will prove invaluable when you are writing the profile, the transcription of the interview can be much more time consuming than you might imagine.

Select the best material you have available, and rework this material into a profile of your subject. This profile will differ from the interview transcript in that it will be a coherent essay that uses your own words and insights to present a clear portrait of your subject's views on his or her own education. You may quote from your subject extensively, but you must frame any quotations within your own essay structure.

Deadlines

Please observe the following deadlines:

Th 9/8 Submit a file card with the name of your interview subject, a description of where and when the person attended college, and an explanation of why you have selected the person as your interview subject.

Th 9/15 Bring the tape of the interview and two copies of an interview transcript to class. Submit the tape and one copy of the transcript in a manila folder.

T 9/20 Bring two copies of a profile draft to class. Read one copy to a peer response group, and submit the other copy in a manila folder.

Th 9/22 Meet with me for an individual conference about your paper.

T 9/27 Submit two copies of a polished profile in a manila folder.

Appendix B: Research Assignment Guidelines

Throughout Chapter 2 of *Coming of Age in New Jersey*, Michael Moffatt reports on participant-observer research that he conducted at Rutgers University in the late 1970s and mid 1980s. Based on this research Moffatt is able to offer some generalizations concerning college life; however, those generalizations may not describe college life for students at other campuses in other time periods.

Your assignment is to conduct research to determine whether Moffatt's findings on a particular college-life topic are applicable to a particular population of Findlay students in the present day. Your research methods should include personal observation and direct questioning of a representative group or subgroup of Findlay students. Through your research you should determine whether Moffatt's generalizations are applicable to this group of students.

The section headings within Moffatt's chapter indicate some of the topics that he explores: "Work and Play," "Autonomy," "Private Pleasures and the Extracurriculum," "Individualism, the Real World, and the Friendly Self," "Boys and Girls Together," "Youth Culture and College Culture," and "Coming of Age." Within these sections, he discusses sex and romance, cross-sex friendships, clothing styles, alcohol consumption, fraternities, hazing, race relations, extracurricular activities, and numerous other topics. Moffatt's comments on these topics should suggest possibilities for your own research.

Please be sure to *narrow your topic*. You cannot do justice to the entire range of topics that Moffatt considers in his 45-page chapter, nor should you attempt to do so. The best projects will select a fairly narrow topic, identify Moffatt's findings concerning the topic, and then report on research that establishes whether Moffatt's findings are applicable to Findlay students today.

Components of the Assignment

Your report should contain the standard elements of a formal research project. The following items are essential:

1. An *abstract* that provides an overview of the contents of your report.
2. An *introduction* that orients the reader to the purpose of your research, explains the conditions under which you conducted it, and offers a "thesis" that reveals the most important insight(s) that you were able to draw about the class from your research.
3. A *review of previous research* that summarizes and analyzes Moffatt's findings concerning one aspect of college life (and could also report observations from Horowitz and Kern).
4. A precise *statement of the research question(s)* that your own study is attempting to answer (i.e., questions concerning whether some of Moffatt's generalizations would accurately describe a particular group of Findlay students today).
5. A detailed *description of the research design*, including information about the subjects you studied and the methods you used.
6. A *results* section that explains your findings in detail by reporting your answers to the research questions, providing some examples of observed behavior to support your answers, and offering selected quotations that illustrate students' attitudes concerning the topic you are studying.
7. An *analysis* section that considers what the results mean (i.e., an analysis of why Moffatt's findings do or do not apply to your research subjects and an explanation of what conclusions we can draw about the students you studied).
8. A *works cited* page that includes a bibliographic entry for Moffatt's book as well as entries for any optional sources that you use.

Some Procedural Advice

As you conduct your research, you may find the following suggestions helpful:

1. In selecting a group of students to study, you should try to find about six to ten students who are representative of a particular group (e.g., the first-year class, the football team, African American male students, etc.). This population may be narrower than the population that Moffatt studied—you can try to determine whether his generalizations remain valid for a small subgroup rather than a large group.

   If you want to try to generalize about a very large group (e.g., the entire male or female undergraduate population) then you will need more research subjects. (For a large-group study, you can follow Moffatt's model: the residents of a single dorm floor should constitute an adequate sample; however, you should obtain enough information about your subjects to determine whether the population differs significantly from the larger student body.) Try to select subjects who you will be able to observe in settings where you may obtain answers to your research questions.

2. Select a topic that can be studied through direct observation: I want you to be able to observe the behavior of your subjects instead of having to rely solely on their own accounts of their beliefs or behavior. (For example, if you're studying "friendliness," you will need to observe students to determine the actual ways that they demonstrate whether they are friendly.)

   In addition to personal observation, you should solicit responses directly: you can interview your subjects individually, administer written questionnaires, conduct group-discussion sessions, or use other techniques designed to obtain responses germane to your topic.

3. Keep a notebook, and make entries in it concerning your observations. If you do not make regular entries, you won't have a record of the behavior that you observe or the comments that you hear.

   In keeping your notebook, you may want to set up your observations by using variations on the reporter questions: What happens? Who is involved? Where does it take place? When does it take place? How does it happen? Why does it happen? Also, you should copy down verbatim any important comments that your research subjects offer, either in conversations that you observe or in response to your questions.

4. When you prepare your final report, you should be selective in using the material you have available. Try to identify examples and quotations that represent typical views and behavior, but also try to provide some sense of the diversity of attitudes or behaviors that you observed.

IMPORTANT: You *must* protect the confidentiality of your research. Please (1) change the names of all the participants when you prepare drafts of your report to show to the class and me, (2) use fictitious names for dormitories, fraternity houses, or other settings in which you are doing your observations, and (3) do not show your materials to any students outside of this classroom.

Additional Instructions

In addition to the basic guidelines given above, you should be aware of the following instructions:

1. You should submit *two* copies of your report in a manila folder, along with the notebook that you kept throughout the observation period and any other written documents you assembled. (I will keep one copy of your report and return the other copy, the notebook, and any other materials to you after I read them.)
2. Your report should be between 1,800 and 3,000 words long.
3. Your report should be typed and double-spaced.
4. It should follow the grammar, punctuation, and spelling conventions of standard American English.
5. It should follow the conventions for informal documentation of all quotations and paraphrases of the participants.
6. It should follow the conventions for formal MLA or APA documentation of any quotations and paraphrases from written sources.

Grading Criteria

In grading your report I will consider the following criteria:

1. The content of your report and notebook (i.e., how well you've succeeded in summarizing Moffatt's findings on a topic, formulating your own research question(s) to test whether Moffatt's findings hold true at Findlay today, explaining your methods, reporting your results, explaining what the results mean, and keeping detailed field notes).
2. The form of your report (how well you've succeeded in making the phrasing, organization, documentation, and mechanics of your report clear and appropriate).

Help Available

I would be delighted to meet with you to discuss this assignment. I also would be delighted to offer advice concerning research topics and designs. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need help on any aspect of this assignment.

Appendix C: Persuasive Proposal Assignment

To complete this assignment you must prepare an essay (1,200 to 2,400 words in length) that recommends a particular policy or practice for the University of Findlay. Your essay may either (1) propose an entirely new policy or practice that would improve the university or (2) propose a substantial change to improve an existing policy or practice. The audience for your report is the readership of *The Pulse*: the students, faculty, staff, and administration of the university. If you prepare the essay well, the majority of that audience should find your proposal clear and convincing.

Proposal Topics

A "policy" proposal would recommend a rule to which the university could adhere (e.g., a rule prohibiting first-year students from participating in intercollegiate athletics). A "practice" proposal would recommend a particular procedure that the university could use (e.g., a new practice of calculating grades on a letter scale with pluses and minuses). (The distinction between the two types of proposals is somewhat arbitrary—most policies require some procedures, while most practices require some rules.)

Your proposed policy or practice may concern any aspect of Findlay's operations—academic, administrative, social, or other. The proposal must affect a substantial segment (but not necessarily all) of the university's population. While your proposal may advocate either (1) an *entirely new* policy or practice or (2) a *substantial change* to improve an existing policy or practice, you should *not* simply *defend* an existing policy or practice.

Preparing the Report

You should present your proposal in a formal essay modeled on the opinion columns that appear in newspapers and magazines (e.g., the "My Turn" essays in *Newsweek* and the "Point of View" essays in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*). These essays usually employ one of the following organizing patterns:

1. A thesis-and-support organizing pattern. In this pattern the introduction offers a thesis statement and the rest of the essay supports the thesis.
2. A problem-and-solution organizing pattern. In this pattern the essay begins with a description of a problem and then proposes a solution to the problem.

Other organizing schemes also are possible. Regardless of how you organize your proposal, you will probably need to (1) describe the current policy or practice (if one exists), (2) analyze the merits and shortcomings of the existing policy or practice, (3) offer an alternative to the existing policy or practice, (4) consider the costs (both financial and human) of the proposed alternative, (5) explain any disadvantages of the proposed policy or practice, and (6) explain why the benefits of the proposed alternative outweigh the costs and disadvantages.

I am asking you to write a proposal rather than a research paper; however, you may need to conduct some research in order to understand a policy or practice. Likely sources of information include the university catalog, other university documents (such as dorm regulations), and interviews (with students, faculty, administrators, or staff).

Additional Instructions

In addition to following the guidelines given above, you should be aware of the following instructions:

1. Your essay should be typed and double-spaced.
2. It should follow the grammar, punctuation, and spelling conventions of standard American English.
3. If you use research materials, then you should follow the principles that we have discussed for fair usage. You do not have to include formal MLA documentation, but you should use informal in-text citations to identify quotations and paraphrases.
4. You should bring two copies of a rough draft to class on Thursday, November 17. (You'll give one copy to me, and you'll read the other copy to your peer review group.)
5. You should submit *two* copies of your essay in a manila folder on Tuesday, November 22. (I will keep one copy and return the other to you after I read it.)

Grading Criteria

In grading your summary I will consider two criteria:

1. The quality of your content—that is, of the research and reasoning that your report exhibits.
2. The quality of your presentation—that is, of the skill with which you present your ideas in your report.