Interest in the social aspects of composing has led writing researchers to examine more closely the contexts in which writing takes place. However, there is little agreement about what constitutes context as a theoretical construct. Because of this lack of agreement, writing researchers have not been able to delineate as fully as possible the interactions between context and composing. This article examines ways in which context has been defined and suggests a reconceptualization of this construct. The argument depends upon analyses of data gathered during a year-long ethnographic study of graduate journalism education. Specifically, results from the analyses of these data suggest that contexts for composing need to take into account individual writers' personal and social histories as they interact with the economic and political circumstances in which writers compose.

Redefining "Context" in Research on Writing

ELAINE CHIN
University of Michigan

Interest in social aspects of composing tends to be represented by writing research that focuses on the contexts where composing takes place. But there seems to be little agreement about what "context" is. In the past, *context* was used specifically to refer to linguistic contexts, how readers could infer the meaning of a passage by referring to intratextual cues (e.g., Miller, 1980). From this perspective, much of reading and writing involves the individual's ability to make sense of a linguistic context.

Now when we speak of context in writing, it refers to a larger world that takes into account but transcends the text itself. However, it is not

always clear what is encompassed when we move beyond the bounda-
ries of text. In fact, few attempts have been made to define what is
meant by *contexts for writing* (cf. Piazza, 1987). This situation creates
dilemmas for composition researchers, who have called for empirical
research exploring the complex interaction between context and com-
posing (Flower, 1989) for little can be said about this interaction
without a clearer definition of what constitutes contexts for writing.

    In this article I identify and examine several dimensions of contexts
for writing. My goal is to problematize *context* as a construct so that
we may begin to define more clearly what constitutes contexts for
writing and how these contexts interact with writing processes. I begin
by reviewing the studies of context in composing. I chose to limit my
examination only to that literature that addresses the impact of social
context on writing. Any selection is fraught with difficulties, espe-
cially in the review of a field as diverse as writing research. I acknowl-
edge that no discussion can ever be complete nor completely true to
authorial intention, as it is represented in the research itself. However,
by examining this research, we can begin to see that context has been
defined in ways that limit its analytic usefulness. The second half of
this article presents an argument for a different perspective on context
and illustrates how this perspective informed one study of adult
writers. Although the goal of this article is to push toward a reconcep-
tualization of context as a construct, it does so by reflecting my
argument through the lens of one empirical study of adult writing
development. As a contribution to the theoretical literature, the argu-
ment in this article is still very much grounded within the particular
study that gave birth to these ideas. I begin by developing a theoretical
argument about context and follow this argument with a report on
the empirical study that raises questions about our current concep-
tions of context.

CONCEPTIONS OF CONTEXT
IN STUDIES OF WRITING

    The conception of context in studies of writing seems driven by the
analytic distinction drawn between contexts *for* the production of
writing as opposed to the eventual contexts *of* use for written texts
(see Nystrand, 1987, for a more detailed discussion of this distinction).
Contexts *for* the production of writing take into account the tasks and

situations that writers confront and deal with as they write. In contrast, contexts *of* use for written texts refer to the variety of purposes, goals, and uses that the completed text may eventually fulfill, whether or not these purposes or uses are ones initially intended by the writer. When studies try to account for how writers negotiate contexts *for* the production of writing, they focus on the ways that writers interpret and understand the writing task and the social situations in which these tasks are embedded. When the focus is on writing for contexts *of* use, context is defined in terms of the rhetorical problems and situations presented by a particular task. The problem is, however, that researchers use the term *context* to refer to both the contexts *for* the production of writing (hereafter referred to as the contexts for writing) and the contexts *of* eventual use for written texts even though the analyses and descriptions of writing in context depend upon these distinctions being made. Thus, we often see a conflation of these two analytic constructs within the studies. Even those researchers who do acknowledge the interrelationship between contexts *for* the production of writing and contexts *of* eventual use have difficulty making explicit the nature of this interrelationship in their discussions (e.g., Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1988; Winsor, 1990).

The next three sections describe the difficulties writing researchers have faced in trying to elucidate the relationship between context and writing. I begin with a discussion of how the conflation of contexts for writing and contexts of use is manifested in some research on writing. This is followed by an analysis of the components of contexts for writing typically identified in research on composing. The third section examines how context is then handled when it is defined as contexts of use.[1]

Conflating Contexts for Writing With Contexts of Use for Writing

One example of how difficult it is for researchers to distinguish between contexts for writing and contexts of use can be found in constructivist accounts of writing, especially in their handling of tasks. *Task* refers to a goal-directed, bounded activity that is usually, but not always driven by the writer's desire or need to solve a problem. Writing tasks are typically described as being "ill formed" or "ill designed" (Flower, Schriver, Carey, Haas, & Hayes, 1992). As such, writers' accomplishments of tasks depend upon their ability to

represent the tasks as meaningful and doable. The importance of tasks in constructivist theories of writing can be traced back to the important function of the "task environment" in Flower and Hayes's (1981) influential cognitive model for writing. That tasks were discussed in terms of a task environment is important in helping us to understand why it is difficult to distinguish contexts for writing from contexts of use.

The word *environment* evokes a sense of a larger world surrounding the tasks for writing. This world is composed of social factors that impinge upon the tasks themselves. The interrelationship between social factors and tasks is described in terms of how context "cues cognition" (Flower, 1989). For Flower, cueing cognition means that "context selectively taps knowledge and triggers specific processes" (p. 288). It influences what writers represent to be their goals, criteria, and strategies for writing. From this perspective, context can be interpreted as a frame for action that shapes the writer's conception of the task. For example, Greene (1993) described the classroom context as being reflected in the interactions between the teacher and students and as representing the teacher's personal philosophy about and specific goals for the teaching of history. Greene (1993) does not give us a detailed account of the classroom context in this article. But readers can infer from his description of the classroom setting that he views the interactions between activities and the instructor's pedagogical approach as the environment framing the writing tasks that "cue" students' composing. Context, here, is used to refer to the situation for producing text—the context for writing.

However, context takes on another meaning when it is described as affecting writers' representations of task demands. As Flower et al. (1992) explain, initial task representation is "an effort to explore the *whole rhetorical problem*" [italics added] (p. 202). Rhetorical problems are, by their very nature, tied to eventual uses for text rather than the immediate situation for written text production. We see this linking of rhetorical problem with context in Ackerman's (1991) study of college writers, a study which provides a description of how writers' "contextual awareness" helped them construct the meaning of tasks. Specifically, Ackerman claimed that contextual awareness was represented by writers' statements about "intentions and plans for their essays" (p. 144). Contextual awareness, then, is the ability to project forward in time eventual uses for texts that are instantiated in the writers' plans for writing. Here, context refers to contexts of use. Neither Greene (1993) nor Ackerman (1991) makes the distinction between these two fundamental ways of conceptualizing context.

This comment is not meant to be a criticism of the basic soundness and contribution either study makes to our understanding of how context cues cognition. But making such a distinction in future studies can clarify which context cues cognition and how such cueing occurs. Nor is this criticism about lack of clarification restricted to constructivist accounts. As the following two sections show, context remains a problematic construct for other research traditions as well. The problems we have faced in discussing how context and writing are related stem from two major tendencies in writing research: (a) narrow conceptions of contexts for writing, and (b) the emphasis on context as rhetorical situation.

Examining Conceptions of Contexts for Writing

Research on contexts for writing has typically examined the social situations surrounding writing. Social situations for writing are linked with the physical locations where writing takes place, with a major distinction being drawn between academic and nonacademic settings. As a context for writing, these settings determine who is involved with the writing, what the writing activity will be, and how such writing is accomplished. In addition, participants in these settings learn or possess knowledge about the norms for behavior and the values placed upon writing accomplished there. The features of local settings that have tended to interest writing researchers are (a) the participants and the roles they play within specific settings (Doheny-Farina, 1986; McCarthy, 1987) and (b) how participants function as local resources writers may draw upon in composing a text (Nelson, 1990; Winsor, 1994).

Participants' roles establish to some degree who writes and who reads the various documents produced. In academic settings, teacher and student constitute the two major roles individuals can play. And in almost every study done, students are invariably the writers studied and teachers are the primary audiences for student writing. That is, the roles that students and teachers play when engaged in writing are tightly circumscribed by what the participants and the researcher understand about how schools function. Thus, we see few descriptions of teachers' composing for their students. What few descriptions there are tend to focus on texts, such as assignment sheets or evaluative comments, which teachers write to signal their expectations for their students' writing (see e.g., Herrington, 1985; McCarthy, 1987).

The roles that participants play are more important to descriptions of writing in nonacademic contexts. In these settings, organizational position or status sometimes determines who writes what and how texts are then read and used within an organization. In Doheny-Farina's (1986) ethnography of a start-up company, the process for writing the company's business plan was affected by a power struggle within the company itself. The conflict was worked out through the writing of a business plan designed to save the company from declaring bankruptcy. However, the roles that various participants played in the writing of the plan were determined by their position within the company's organizational structure. Similarly, Cross's (1990) study of collaborative writing in an insurance corporation showed how the hierarchical distribution of power affected the writing of an executive letter. Cross made some mention of how the hierarchy itself was reflected in the assignment of office space and in the physical design of the building. As is typical of most organizational designs, those with the most power occupied the highest spaces in the building (see Cross, 1990, p. 180). However, other than this brief mention in Cross's report, we see little of the physical plant in which this writing is accomplished. It is as if the physical setting merely functions as a container for the participants and the roles they inhabit.[2]

When participants in a setting act as local resources for writers, they do so principally through their interaction with the writers around texts. These interactions may help writers establish and define the tasks for writing (e.g., Nelson, 1990; Prior, 1991). In group writing situations, the participants may themselves play an integral part in the construction of a document (Cross, 1990; Doheny-Farina, 1991; Zimmerman & Marsh, 1989). With certain kinds of texts, the interactions become a "source text" for writers. News articles, for example, are almost always based upon interactions between reporters and their sources. But using participants as source texts implies more than what is represented in reporters' use of the information provided by others. As Witte (1992) argued, others act as source texts whenever these interactions become meaningful to the writers' perception of the function a text is to fulfill. Witte (1992) described how the writing of Marilee's grocery list was influenced by the meanings she ascribed to her various interactions with her husband and children. Her family may or may not have functioned as journalistic sources, but Marilee's experience and knowledge of her family's desires shaped the composition of the list. Although her family was farther removed from the actual situation of her writing than the collaborators in group writing

situations may be, they constituted an equally important aspect of the social situation for Marilee's writing.

Studies of collaboration in writing suggest that contexts for writing can often extend beyond the singular moment when writers begin to transform ideas into language or written texts. Witte's (1992) examples are particularly provocative in that they identify how activities normally not characterized as part of composing—conversations with one's spouse or children—played important roles in writers' conceptions of what to write and how to use their texts. As Witte's examples demonstrate, his conceptions of contexts for writing include their semiotic properties and potential ways in which writers may use these symbolic resources. I take up this point in greater detail in a subsequent section of this article.

In the social constructionist tradition, in general, interactions between writers and others function as socializing mechanisms as well. For example, social constructionists have been interested in how the interactions between writers and others in a social setting help writers learn the *culture* and *discourse conventions* of that setting (e.g., Lutz, 1989). Knowledge about the milieu of a setting can have a direct bearing on what writers can or cannot do with their writing. Doheny-Farina's (1989) study of writing in a reproductive services clinic, for example, demonstrated how the political ethos of that agency constrained the composing of one public relations report. However, relatively few studies have attended to the immediate, local impact that the culture of an institution or organization can have upon acts of writing (e.g., Prior, 1991).[3] The studies of collaboration in writing discussed above are notable exceptions for that reason. Instead, research has focused on the ways in which culture or *discourse communities* define and shape the contexts of use for texts. In fact, despite what studies have described about the nature of contexts for producing writing, much of the attention placed on contexts has tended to focus on the contexts of use for writing, with the contexts for writing playing only a minor role in writers' composing.

The Importance of Context as Contexts of Use

As the review in the previous section revealed, social approaches to writing have helped to define aspects of contexts for writing that had been previously hidden from view. But social approaches to writing have also been responsible for the increased emphasis on

defining context as contexts of use. Specifically, two theoretical frameworks have pushed the field toward a strong rhetorically based view of context—appeals to the idea of discourse community as well as a focus on the communicative aims of writing, which is typically represented in terms of reader-writer interactions.

I do not mean to imply that writing researchers attribute only a communicative function to texts. We might argue instead that the reader-writer interaction is a theoretical construct devised to explain how writers make decisions while composing rather than a description of what happens to texts once they leave a writer's hands. Certainly, this latter view seems to characterize Nystrand's (1989) attempt to develop a social-interactive model of writing. However, the shift toward viewing writing as an interactive process between some potential, possible reader and the writer of the text leads us to adopt language that emphasizes the communicative aspects of writing, even when the potential readers are the writers themselves. See Selzer (1992) for an informative discussion of the many ways of conceiving of audience.

The introduction of discourse community to composition studies was seen as a way to inject the social world into any theory of writing. What constitutes a discourse community has engendered debates within writing research (Harris, 1989), but central to all definitions of discourse communities is the view that they transcend local boundaries of space and time. Discourse communities are typically defined in terms of loosely organized groups of individuals whose use of discourse are governed by tacit and generally accepted "rules" for text production and function and who agree upon the meanings attached to these uses and functions. Doheny-Farina (1992) identified specific features of a discourse community as the "actions, beliefs, habits, language, rhetorical practices, and stylistic conventions that are tacit and routine for the members" (p. 296). All written discourse produced within and for a community then would adhere, to a lesser or greater extent, to these conventional ways of making meaning.

The discourse community is powerful as a construct because it is able to identify factors influencing writers that exist outside of the immediate context for the production of texts. In looking at writing for and within discourse communities, studies document how decisions that writers make are informed by their sensitivity to the rules of discourse production within these communities. Herrington's (1985) study of college engineering students' efforts to negotiate the

writing demands of two different forums for writing, for example, showed how disciplinary ways of creating texts constrained and created tensions that the students had to resolve in their writing. Similarly, Doheny-Farina's (1989, 1992) subject, Anna, had to learn appropriate ways of presenting arguments within two discourse communities—within the community of literary scholars and within the community of a public health agency devoted to reproductive services.

The specific settings in which the engineering students and Anna wrote are represented as individual manifestations of the larger discourse worlds of literary criticism, scientific research, and public health organizations. In fulfilling the demands for writing in these single instances, writers had to direct their writing outward, away from the immediate context, and embed it instead within an atemporal, nonlocalized discourse world. Success in writing then depends upon the writers being able to construct this discourse world, to attend to its rhetoric while simultaneously fulfilling the rhetorical demands imposed upon an act of writing serving the needs of a single rhetorical situation. Whether writers succeed in accomplishing their purposes, then, is assessed within the contexts of use. In other words, discourse community defines contexts of use as the ground on which writing stands and its effects are evaluated.

Although the concept of discourse community provides one way of grounding writing in the social world, it has also been criticized for being a form of social structuralism (Nystrand, 1990). Nystrand (1990) argued that the problem with any structural approach, whether of a social or cognitive nature, is that it removes writing from the actual here and now of composing or comprehending, the situation in which readers and writers communicate through acts of meaning-making. In place of a social structural account, Nystrand (1990) and Nystrand, Greene, and Wiemelt (1993) posited a social-interactive model of writing that traces its lineage to pragmatics and Bakhtinian dialogism. In a social-interactive model of writing, meaning comes into existence through "a unique configuration and interaction of what both writer and reader bring to the text" (Nystrand et al., 1993, p. 299). Text meaning is dependent upon what the reader and writer each "assumes the other will do/had done" (Nystrand, 1989, p. 75).

The benefit of a social-interactive model is that it accounts for the moment by moment decisions that writers make in response to their perception of what is needed to maintain reciprocity with any future

reader. That means that a social-interactive approach can ground writing within the specific context in which acts of writing occur while simultaneously describing how that text might function or be received within some distant context of use. But to what extent or in what ways is the context for writing, the actual here and now of composing, functionally relevant to what writers do in composing? To answer that question, we need to look more closely at the development of Nystrand's social-interactive model. One issue is particularly im- portant to this discussion: the principle of reciprocity underlying Nystrand's social-interactive model of writing.

The principle of reciprocity depends upon a view of text that characterizes it in terms of its *semantic potential* rather than its *semantic content* (Nystrand, 1989, p. 76).[4] The origins of Nystrand's argument about semantic potential can be traced to his earlier discussions about oral versus written language. Specifically, Nystrand (1982) created the image of a "textual space" existing between readers and writers. In this early chapter, Nystrand presented the idea of a text being a "manifestation of the textual space whose parameters are defined by reader-writer interactions" (p. 82). Meaning is accomplished when readers enter into the space that writers have created through the texts, when readers close the "circuit" open to all possible meanings by constructing one interpretation during a single act of reading.

The use of a spatial metaphor is intriguing. Especially interesting is the sense of "boundedness" evoked by the word "parameters." It is as if the space in which readers and writers interact could be read as a central context for writing. The question then becomes, which context, the context for the production of writing or the context of eventual use, is referred to in the image of "textual space" or "semantic potential?" I think it obvious that the context of central importance to Nystrand is the context of use rather than the context for writing. The fact that "potential" characterizes meaning implies a concern with eventual uses of text, of what text may mean at any future point. We find additional evidence of Nystrand's concern with context as contexts of use in an earlier discussion (Nystrand, 1987). In this chapter, Nystrand (1987) argued that contexts of production are "functionally irrelevant" to the act of composing because contexts of production are limited to that single moment in time when writers transcribe thoughts into text. According to Nystrand (1987), "the context of use is the key factor in arbitrating these negotiations [between writers and potential readers] and regulates the production at every turn" (p. 206).

In his later writings, Nystrand (1990) acknowledged the role that contexts of production play in helping to establish who may or may not be actual readers of texts. For example, he described how writing in schools affords a particular kind of relationship between readers and writers that results in only certain kinds of reader/writer negotiations. That is, the school is a container for particular participants' roles and uses for texts that affect what writers and readers do. But even in acknowledging the role that the context for writing can play in composing, Nystrand formulated a model of writing that by necessity foregrounds and highlights the importance of contexts of use and one that defines contexts for writing merely as frames for action.

Summarizing the points made thus far, we see that when context is defined as contexts for writing, the most salient features of that context are the most obviously social ones. People and their interactions are studied in terms of how their roles and relationships with others directly affect the composing of any particular text. They constitute part of what Brandt (1986) identified as the "resources available to language users in the social and linguistic networks they participate in" (p. 144). The setting functions as a container for these interactions and relationships, establishing the ground rules for what these resources are and how they can be accessed. When the rhetorical demands for writing are highlighted, context tends to be defined in terms of contexts of use with emphasis placed on the frame for writing as a discourse community or the metaphorical textual space readers and writers enter when negotiating the meaning of texts. In either case, contexts of use are mentally projected by the writer. How researchers might characterize the nature of that projection varies according to whether they believe in the power of discourse communities or the interaction (whether real or potential) between readers and writers to shape that projection. However, these projections are still constrained by the knowledge that participants share about what is possible within specific situations for writing.

There are two major limitations to current conceptions of contexts. First, as contexts for writing, the social environment in which writers work is given. Writers enter into this world and interact with the givens of this environment. Writers are as much contained by the situation as the other social actors. Their perceptions of the givens of the situation for writing remain opaque to writing researchers or are only important in terms of how these perceptions can be translated into writers' awareness of the rhetorical demands for writing. Second, as contexts of use, contexts have been construed as mental construc-

tions that reflect writers' beliefs about the needs of some distant and possibly future audiences. Thus, the "here and now" construction of contexts is actually the construction of potential effects a text may produce for a future audience; it is not the "here and now" construction of the meaning of the environment for writing in which the writer is situated and which may affect composing itself. In other words, we see a kind of mind-body division in most descriptions of context and writing, with the body occupying a social sphere constituting a context for writing and the mind constructing the potential meanings for text in some other contexts of use. What could it mean to consider the meanings writers construct about their contexts for writing through their lived experience in these contexts? And how would this understanding affect what we know about writers' decision making during composing, when they are most concerned about potential contexts of use? Witte's (1992) constructivist semiotic provides one description of the meanings writers come to attach to their contexts for producing writing.

Reintegrating Contexts for
Writing and Use in a Constructivist
Semiotic View of Writing

Witte (1992) presented an idiosyncratic view of context, one that tries to destabilize any neat distinctions made between context as contexts for writing or contexts of use. Witte (1992) defined context as "something akin to a writer's representation of the externally situated or projected self" (p. 289). The construction of this particular definition can be traced to two major ideas developed within the article: the "externally situated" self and the "projected self." For Witte, "situatedness" encompasses both the physical, material location of bodies in externally defined spaces and times and the writer's representation of what it means to occupy these locations or to engage in particular kinds of activities. For example, when Marilee wrote her grocery list, she mentally projected herself into the grocery story where the activities encoded in her list would be enacted. She then actually engaged in grocery shopping, an activity where the self is "externally situated" within "real" spatial and temporal boundaries. But she also constructed the meaning of the activity as either writing a grocery list or doing grocery shopping.

The "projected self" is similarly concerned with the material manifestation and semiotic representation that are a part of the "situated

self." The "projected self" differs from the "situated self" in much the same way that the "context of eventual use" differs from the "context of production." The idea of "projecting" a self takes into account multiple possible "contexts of eventual use," some of which may not even be identified as eventual uses at the time that the writer composes a particular text. Moreover, Witte seemed to imply in his adaptation of Peirce's unlimited semiosis that the "projected" self would be redefined as a "situated" self when the "text" came to be used. That is, "context," as represented by the two kinds of "selves," becomes a part of the process of constructive meaning-making while simultaneously existing as "real" times and places where composing is done and "texts" are used.

Although Witte (1992) presented a theoretical justification for a reconceptualization of context that includes the material world, he provided little analysis of how such a world might affect a writer's composing. We see glimpses of this in his description of Marilee's grocery list, specifically, how the sequence of items in the list followed the organization of goods in the store. In this example, we see Marilee "projecting" a self who will then have to travel through the store along certain paths to accomplish her task in an efficient manner. This "projection" was in turn the result of numerous other visits to the store, each visit helping to build an internal representation of the layout of the store that she then drew upon in ordering the items on her list.

But what might we learn if we were to follow Marilee as she builds this representation of the store? How might our observations of her activities in the store, her reading of this social text, help us understand the seemingly simple task of writing a grocery list? In other words, what might we learn in any study of writing that takes seriously how writers construct the meanings of their situations for writing through their material involvement with the world and their readings and interactions with the social texts presented in this world? This last question addresses the central concern of the empirical study that follows.

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF JOURNALISM
EDUCATION AT BAYVIEW UNIVERSITY[5]

The overall purpose of this year-long ethnographic study was to describe how master's degree students in a professional journalism program learned to become journalists by learning to write news

articles. Given the nature of news work, the socialization of novice journalists is, in many ways, accomplished through their learning to write the news. The full results of this study are reported elsewhere (see Chin, 1991). In this article, I present just one aspect of this ethnography, that is, how students' interaction with, and "reading" of the contexts for the production of writing affected their composing. The next few sections provide a brief account of the study. They include a description of the field site, a description of the participants, and a summary of the methods used in data collection and analysis.

The Setting

The journalism program selected for this study is one of several graduate programs in the Department of Communication and Mass Media Studies at "Bayview University." Bayview is located in a large metropolitan area on the West Coast. The university boasts excellent research facilities, extensive library holdings, a world-renowned faculty, and a select, ethnically diverse undergraduate and graduate student body. Although Bayview supports a number of professional programs like the journalism program, its primary mission is research. This research orientation characterizes the Department of Communication and Mass Media Studies as well, although the graduate-level journalism program and a related professional development program for returning journalists play important roles in the life of the Department. It is important to keep the general institutional character of Bayview in mind as the ethos of this organization determined to a great extent the general history of the Department and the subsequent design and assignment of the departmental offices and classroom space.

The Department grants degrees in communication research and mass media studies to both undergraduate and graduate students. However, the journalism program is open only to students at the master's level. Undergraduates may take journalism courses, but they may not "major" in journalism. The master's degree in journalism is completed within three terms. Students who enroll in the master's program typically have had little or no experience working in newsrooms. In fact, students with two or more years of newsroom experience are usually not accepted into the program.

Bayview's journalism program is not significantly different from other graduate journalism programs in the United States (see Becker, Fruit, & Caudill, 1987, for a description of similar programs). It

combines practical training in newswriting and reporting with course work in media and communication theory, media law, media ethics, and other related topics. In theory, this program is designed to provide liberal arts or science majors with the skills and knowledge needed to enter the world of print journalism.

The Participants

About a dozen students enroll every year in the graduate journalism program. During the year of this study, 13 students accepted Bayview's offer of admission. Three came from foreign countries, one was a fairly recent immigrant to the United States, and the other nine were Americans from a variety of educational backgrounds and work experiences. Because exposure to American media is an important factor in people's learning the discourse of American journalism, I did not ask the foreign students to take part as subjects in the study, although their insights and informal, off-the-record comments provided a different but valuable perspective on the year's activities. Six of the nine Americans, four women and two men, volunteered to participate in this study. All six had undergraduate degrees in either the humanities or the sciences. Only one of the men had taken some undergraduate journalism courses as part of his college major; the rest had never taken any courses in journalism.

The faculty stated that these students had been admitted because they were seen to be excellent students (all were in the top 20% of their graduating classes and had respectable GRE scores); good writers, as was evident in the writing samples they submitted; and highly motivated. That the faculty were impressed by these students' past academic achievements and work experience was regularly communicated to the students themselves.

Each of the students had worked in some capacity for a publication or media organization prior to their time at Bayview (e.g., college newspapers, college literary magazines, local radio stations, in-house newsletters, etc.). Both of the men had had some experience working for a city daily, although this experience was limited and short in duration.

Methods for Data Collection
and Data Analysis

My data consist of field notes, samples of students' writing, and transcribed audiotaped interviews with my informants. The majority

of the field notes were written during classes I observed. During the academic year in which the subjects were enrolled, I observed four reporting and writing courses and a lunchtime journalism seminar (approximately 110 total hours of observation time for all four courses), and occasionally attended three communication theory courses, a media ethics course, a media law course, and two other specialized journalism writing courses (magazine and opinion writing). I also attended any event that students covered for their assignments (e.g., public functions such as speeches, city council meetings) and social gatherings to which all of the students were invited.

Interviews were conducted with all six students, the faculty most closely involved with the students' training, and reporters and editors who read some of the students' stories. There were five occasions in which I interviewed students individually and three occasions when I interviewed students in groups of two or four. The faculty were interviewed twice during the year. All interviews were audiotaped, and selected interviews were transcribed.

In addition, I collected audiotapes of students' responses to questions that asked them to reflect upon the process of writing each article. These responses were usually audiotaped immediately after the students had finished writing an article. These nine sets of questions changed over the course of the year as I refined my study. The students were encouraged to be expansive in their answers to these questions and to talk about any issues concerning their program-related experiences that they found to be troubling or problematic.

Samples of the students' writing were collected throughout the year. These samples included the news articles written for classes and for publications and their other school writing assignments. For some of the news articles, students also gave me their drafts, their notes, and other documents or references to documents, such as government reports, used in preparing an article; audiotapes of interviews they had conducted with news sources; clips of their articles that appeared in campus newspapers or in other publications; and the final copy of stories they submitted to their instructors.

Cultural categories were developed as they arose from my observations and interviews. Story, objectivity versus fairness, reporting versus writing, were some of the categories that emerged from my analysis of the data. To verify the validity of these categories, I checked them against the literature on journalism and asked experienced journalists to comment upon them. I then used these categories in coding sections of the interview and field note data. A modified

version of the Double Helix™ data management program was used to apply the codes and to identify patterns within the data. These patterns form the basis for the ethnographic story about these students' development as journalists.

"Reading" the Social Text of the Context for Writing[6]

Many professional programs located in research universities possess a dual character. They are driven by two different missions: the practical preparation of students for a profession and the pursuit of knowledge about the domains of practice for that profession. Bayview's Department of Communication and Mass Media Studies embodied this same division between the academic and the professional in the identities that members of the Department claimed for themselves. Faculty involved in the study of media effects or communication processes as well as the doctoral students admitted to this research-oriented program identified themselves very much as academics interested in the theoretical study of mass media. Faculty most directly involved in the "practical" preparation of the journalism students held academic positions within the Department but tended to refer to themselves as professional journalists.

Newcomers to these environments come to understand the division between these two orientations in a variety of ways, namely through "reading" the social text of their material environment. In doing so, they learn to lay claim to a particular orientation toward the profession. That students learn to identify with either an academic or a professional perspective on work is not new. However, the *process* by which students come to understand their position and identities within an academic department has received scant attention (e.g., Pearson Casanave, 1990). The following sections describe this process in terms of how students' reading of their material world helped them construct an understanding of their contexts for writing and how this understanding then affected their composing processes.

In the next section, I present two readings of the Department that students developed within their first 3 months there. These readings were not articulated as such by the students at any one moment but are composite pictures of what the students said they felt about their place within Bayview as the year progressed. The next section is divided into two parts: the first provides a benign reading of the

Department that the students constructed during their initial month at Bayview. The second offers a more critical reading of the social text that students developed sometime during the latter half of the first term. The students maintained this more critical view of the Department throughout the rest of the academic year.

A Benign Reading of the
Department as a Context for Writing

Initially, all of the journalism students said they were impressed by the resources and material supports the Department had provided them. About half the students admitted to the program received substantial financial support so that they could attend Bayview. For two of the participants in this study, this financial aid was the key factor in their choice of graduate programs. Other resources included a fully equipped computer lab where students could do all their assigned course work and where they had access to free laser printing, a luxury provided for students in just a few other departments at Bayview. The journalism students were given priority over all other students in gaining access to the lab outside of times when classes were scheduled to meet there.

Besides the use of the lab, each student was assigned an individual carrel in a room just down the hallway from the computer lab and the other classroom where most of their courses took place (see Figure 1).[7] By housing the journalism students in this one area, the Department set up a situation in which students could easily develop an *esprit de corps*. For local phone calls, students had access to the use of two free phones, one located in the computer lab and one in the hallway just outside the room containing their carrels. In addition, students could draw from a small pool of money to offset costs for travel, long distance phone calls, and other expenses that they incurred in doing their course assignments for the year.

Although the exterior doors to the Department's building and the doors to the computer lab were locked every day by 6 p.m., the journalism students were given keys that gave them easy access to the building and the lab itself any day of the week, any time of the day. This arrangement was particularly helpful to students when they stayed late to finish copyediting assignments that required the use of software available only in the lab.

Throughout the year, the faculty planned a number of activities that they believed would help students better understand the profes-
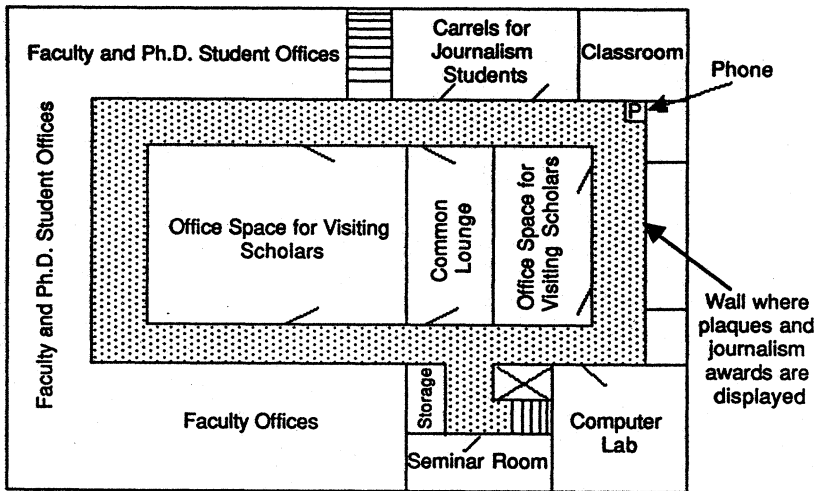
Figure 1: Floor plan of the top floor of Bayview's Department of Communication and Mass Media Studies.

sion they were about to enter. For example, the faculty planned excursions that acquainted students with the types of work sites reporters routinely occupied. Students made field trips to two local newspaper offices to get an overview of how newspapers are produced and to meet reporters and editors. Similarly, students were taken to the state capitol where they were briefed by staff members about the workings of the state government and where they met influential lobbyists and state legislators who headed some of the major subcommittees. The trip to the state capitol was taken in conjunction with one of the news writing assignments students were required to do during the second term.

During the first month, one faculty member held a party in her home to welcome the students. A group of visiting journalists was also invited to this party and introduced to each of the students. Students were advised to make contact with these experienced reporters at the party so that they could learn firsthand what it was like to write for the various news organizations these reporters represented. When a media conference was held that fall at Bayview, the journalism students were invited to attend free of charge. Again, the faculty made efforts to help the students meet the conference participants, many of whom were editors and publishers for local media outlets. In general, the faculty worked hard to ensure the students visited places and met

people who might play a role in hiring or working with them in the future.

In many respects, Bayview provided students with an ideal environment for learning journalism. The students had access to an extensive array of Departmental and university resources. However, despite the obvious advantages of attending a school like Bayview, it was not long before students began to express their view that they were second-class citizens within the Department.

A Critical Rereading of the
Department as a Context for Writing

Although few of the students would deny that they benefited from the material support provided by Bayview's Department of Communication and Mass Media Studies, these benefits were offset by the sense of exclusion they developed as members of this Department, and in particular by the liminal state they came to occupy within the Department itself. The students soon came to understand that they existed in the outer boundaries of the Department. They developed this belief through their reading of the Department's "social text," specifically through their reading of the Department's design and use of physical space, the allocation of important material resources crucial to reporting work, and the economic value assigned to research versus professional work. None of the students ever talked about the Department as being their academic "home."

If we review the physical design of the Department, we can see a sharp distinction made between the space occupied by the journalism/master's program and that controlled by the communication research/doctoral programs. The Department of Communication and Mass Media Studies occupies one wing of a larger complex of buildings housing other academic departments. Within this wing are two floors. The top floor is devoted to the graduate program in journalism and a professional development institute for mid-career journalists and visiting scholars who wish to expand their knowledge about media studies or other disciplines such as economics, political science, or history. The bottom floor is home to the graduate programs in mass media and communication. The assignment of faculty offices follows this general pattern of a division between research and professional training. Faculty most closely involved with the training of the master's students have offices on the top floor, whereas those engaged in media research have offices on the bottom floor.
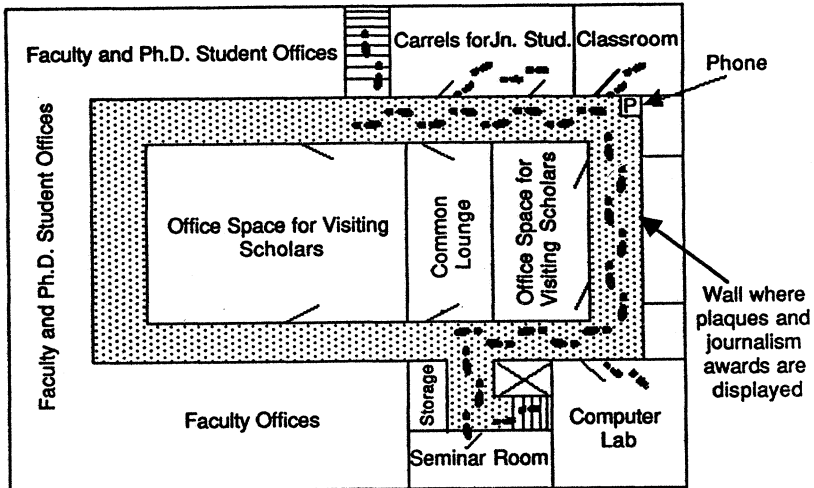
Figure 2: The footsteps show the general pattern of traffic for the journalism students.

As I stated in the previous section, the Department assigned the journalism students to one carrel area so that they would have opportunities to develop close ties with one another. However, it also served to isolate them from the rest of the Department. In fact, the carrels are located in a corner of the top floor. Unlike the doctoral students whose offices occupy areas adjacent to or immediately outside of a faculty member's office, the journalism students' carrels are in a space physically removed from the faculty or from other students in the Department. Although the location of the carrels made it easy for students to travel between their office space and the computer lab or the classrooms where most of their course work took place, it also established a pattern of traffic that maintained a separation between the journalism students and the rest of the Department. The journalism students rarely wandered past either of the two staircases that flanked the computer lab or the students' carrel area (see Figure 2 for an illustration of the spaces they typically occupied or visited on the top floor). Because the two staircases linked the top floor to doors that led out of the building, they could easily enter and exit the Department merely by using one of the two staircases flanking the room containing their carrels or the computer lab. They had no need to enter any other area of the Department other than in their infrequent visits to the faculty teaching their courses. Ironically, students were barred

from entering the area where the visiting reporters were housed even though they had met and were encouraged to develop professional relationships with these journalists. Only administrators of and participants in the visiting journalists' program had keys to the areas where the visiting journalists had carrels or to the lounge where they gathered for seminars or informal meetings.

Similarly, the doctoral students tended to avoid the wing of the top floor used by the master's students, using the two staircases for the same means of entry and exit. By using either of these two stairwells as ways of exiting the building, the doctoral students rarely had to walk along the back corridor, which joined the computer lab to the master's students' carrel area. Citations and plaques for awards in newswriting and newspaper design won by previous journalism students were prominently displayed along the wall of this back corridor. This display was the only place within the Department where journalistic work was given public recognition. I found it curious that recognition of this kind would be placed in the one area of the Department least frequented by anyone other than the journalism students. If nothing else, the placement of this display in the back corridor symbolizes the value the Department seemed to place upon journalistic work.

In addition, although the journalism students seemed to enjoy many of the material benefits the Department had to offer, they did not have ready access to the one resource crucial to the work they had to do as reporters—telephones.[8] As I stated earlier, students had access to two phones within the Department, one in the computer lab and one in the hallway just outside of their carrel area. However, there were severe limitations placed upon their ability to use these phones. For example, the phone outside of the students' carrel was the only phone available for students to use any time of the day or night. The phone in the computer lab was only available during times when classes were not held in the lab itself. All 13 students used the hall phone, sharing it with each other and with anyone else entering the building who wished to use it. In addition, students could call only those cities and towns within a 20-mile radius from Bayview. All other nonlocal calls to communities outside of this radius could be made only if students knew a special long-distance access code. The journalism students were not given this access code. This situation presented particular problems for the journalism students when they were assigned to write news stories that involved their interviewing

or contacting sources who resided or worked outside of the calling radius.

To solve the problem of long-distance calling, students were often forced to carry around pockets full of change (for those without a calling card) or to run home between classes to make their calls. This system rarely worked well for the students as their news sources were rarely available when students were able to call them. For example, the following comments by Mike reveal some of the frustrations students felt about not having ready and easy access to a phone during the day. In these remarks, Mike contrasts his experience at a daily paper as a summer intern with his experience at Bayview.

> When I was working with the *Star*, I was doing the same kind of thing, but I was sitting in one office all day, next to one phone. So when they said, "Can I call you back?" It's like, "Yes, I'll be here." But if I'm making calls from school, I'm normally only going to be at school from such and such a time or I have class. And they say, "I need to call you back." It's like, well, my messages would always come with this huge, long list of instructions, like from 3:10 I'm going to be at this phone number. And then starting at 3:25 until five o'clock, I'm going to be at this phone number. And secretaries used to get mad at me and say, "I can't leave a message like this." That's the only way he can call me back. (Conversation with Mike recorded in March)

Not only did Mike have to shuttle between the Department and his dorm room on campus, which was about a half-mile away, but he found that he spent an inordinate amount of time leaving messages for people who did not return his calls. The pressure to complete an assignment within a short space of time contributed to the students' sense of frustration about the lack of phones. During this same conversation, Mike also commented on how Katherine and Stan also admitted to having missed some of their classes to interview sources for their newswriting assignments, incidences I observed when visiting the media ethics and media law courses. This practice of missing theory classes to do reporting work did not sit well with the instructors for those courses.

In contrast, many of the doctoral students had easy access to phones in the Department. They rarely used the phone in the hallway because some had phones in the offices they occupied while working on research projects. Others shared the phone located in the common area of the research offices on the bottom floor, a phone that only had

to serve about six to seven doctoral students. Some of the doctoral students also knew the access code for making long-distance calls. They came to know it because of their work on faculty research projects or were told it by other doctoral students in the Department. Few of the doctoral students, however, needed the phones to accomplish their research or course work.

The material context for writing within which these master's students worked directly affected their ability to do journalistic work. In particular, their reporting for their newswriting classes was hampered by the restrictions put upon on their access to phones. But the context for writing had another effect upon the students' learning to write the news. From reading the physical design of the Department and experiencing the frustrations of trying to do reporting without adequate facilities, the students came to believe that their activities were less valuable to the Department than those required for doing research. Although no explicit statements were ever made to students about this hidden economy, each of the students admitted in their conversations with me that they understood such an economy existed. In fact, several months after they had left Bayview, I sent them the chapter from my dissertation from which this analysis is drawn. Only five of the original six students responded to my request for feedback on this chapter. But of these five, all stated that the description had captured their sense of exclusion from the Department and had helped them make sense of why they had not felt entirely comfortable there. In particular, they said that the business with the phones was emblematic of what they perceived to be the Department's general assessment of their value.[9]

We might argue that such an economy exists within any academic unit where professional and research-oriented preparation programs coexist.[10] But, we have not considered how students' interpretations or understandings of such an economy may have affected their practices in constructing written texts. Nor is there any evidence that these students were simply resisting the Department's efforts at professional education. In fact, the journalism students were quite successful as students, earning high grades in each of their courses, and were perceived by the faculty as being "good" students. Perhaps as a way to alleviate their sense of frustration and alienation, students instead learned to construct an alternative framework for their work, to create a set of contexts for writing that emerged out of their reading of the material conditions for doing journalism. In the next section, I exam-

ine the students' construction of two contexts for writing—"school" and "real life."

The Students' Socially
Constructed Contexts for Writing

As the year progressed, the journalism students came to use the words *school* and *reality* or *real life* to refer to two different situations for writing. School generally was used to refer to activities that centered around the experience of going to classes, interacting with certain kinds of people (others students, faculty, or departmental staff), writing course papers or completing other course-related assignments. Reality or real life was usually equated with journalistic work these students had done, were doing, or expected to do for outside news organizations. Sometimes the terms reality and real life were also used to refer to the reporting and writing they imagined working journalists did.

The distinction between school and reality did not begin to emerge in the students' conversations, however, until sometime late in the first term. Until then, the students did not talk about their course assignments as being somehow different from the work reporters do. They seemed to regard classroom exercises as a reasonable simulacrum of "real" reporting. Moreover, the "realness" of school work was enhanced by the fact that students sometimes engaged in tasks that paralleled those accomplished by local reporters. These assumptions about the realness of school assignments can be seen when we compare the students' responses to two similar assignments, one given at the beginning of the academic year and one during the second term, when the distinction between school and reality became evident.

Early during the first term, students were assigned to write a story about a local city council meeting, a routine occurrence that is always summarized in the local papers. Public testimony about proposed new housing regulations would be given at that council meeting. To prepare students for the city council meeting, Professor Morris, the instructor for the first newswriting course, invited the mayor of Green Acres to a "press conference" with the journalism class the morning before the city council was to meet. The press conference took place in the computer lab where the course was always held. During the press conference the mayor provided students with some background information about the City of Green Acres, its governing structure,

and central concerns. Students then engaged the mayor in questions and answers. Many of the questions students asked focused on the housing regulations that were to be debated at that night's meeting. At no time before or after the press conference did any students make remarks that questioned the legitimacy of the press conference as press conference even though it took place on campus rather than in the mayor's office and did not include any other local newspaper reporters.

In covering the city council meeting itself, students' perception of the realness of that assignment was probably reinforced by the presence there of other local news people. Two of the students even approached one of the local reporters to talk with him about that night's meeting. Their belief in the realness of the assignment was also revealed in the students' comments about writing the story. All of them talked about the need to be fair and objective to avoid misleading their readers, who had been defined for them by Morris as local citizens who would be affected by the city council's ruling. They expressed the greatest concerns about getting the facts "right," quoting people accurately, and abiding by the space constraints set by Morris, concerns that Morris had told them real reporters worry about. For example, in describing how she might have written the story differently, Lisa stated that she would have listened more carefully to her audiotape of the meeting or would have been more careful in taking down quotes because she's "especially paranoid in Morris's class about misquoting people." The students may have been especially anxious about being accurate because Morris had himself attended the meeting, albeit as a concerned citizen rather than as the instructor of the newswriting course. Two of the students went so far as to tabulate the number of responses for and against the proposed regulation so that the quotes they chose to include in their article would accurately reflect the proportion of comments made on each side of the debate. In addition, a story about the city council meeting the students attended appeared in the next day's edition of a local paper. That this story appeared in a publication reinforced students' belief in the realness of their course assignment.

Three months later, students participated in another "press conference." This press conference was designed to help students do the first assignment of their second newswriting course, which was taught by Professor Nabors. For this assignment, students attended a press conference with the city manager rather than the mayor of Green Acres. Like the first one, it was held in the computer lab where the

students usually met for their second newswriting course and it followed the same general format. The city manager spent about half the time identifying issues of current concern to the residents of Green Acres. The other half of the time was reserved for questions and answers. Although the press conference itself was supposed to be the focus of their stories, students were encouraged to expand on topics raised at the press conference in ways that would tie in with the "beats" they had chosen for this second newswriting course. The two press conferences were structurally identical and functionally equivalent.

Despite the similarities between the two situations, students expressed skepticism about the value of this second press conference. They were bothered by the artificialness of the situation, stating that it was "set up," "not real." The comments made during the following conversation between myself and two of the students are fairly representative of the kinds of concerns students raised about the realness of the press conference.

In this conversation, I had asked Anne and Stan to give me their reactions to having to write the story on the press conference. Anne's question picks up on an earlier remark made by Stan about his not having "enjoyed" doing the story.

Anne: What bothered you, that it was set up?
Stan: Yeah, I didn't . . .
Anne: The fact that it wasn't real?
Stan: The fact that he was coming in and talking to us. It would have even been better if we had to drive somewhere like the city hall, just having him come and having us write it.
Anne: It was like we were given a handicap.
Stan: Yeah.
Elaine: But why was it a handicap?
Anne: Just to help us out, I think. I mean, it was easier because he knew we were students, and it was like he went out of his way to explain the situation to us, like gave us the background. (Conversation recorded in January.)

In this excerpt, both recognized quite clearly that the press conference served a school purpose rather than a "real" news purpose. Stan complained about having to attend the meeting on campus instead of downtown at the city hall where a reporter would normally find the city manager. Anne's subsequent remarks seem to endorse Stan's viewpoint. She said that students were given a "handicap," an artificial advantage: The city manager "knew we were students and it was

like he went out of his way to explain the situation to us [the students], like gave us the background." For Anne and Stan, the press conference was no longer a reasonable simulacrum of real journalistic work but instead a school situation set up for the purpose of having the students do a course assignment.[11]

I am not claiming that the journalism students were so naive as to believe that the press conference with the mayor was in some sense real. However, it is significant that no one raised the issue of realness about the first press conference when five of the six did complain about the unreality of the second press conference. Their comments about the second press conference, then, can be interpreted as evidence of the distinctions they had all begun to draw between a real world and a school world by the beginning of the second term. In doing so, they showed that they were unwilling to maintain the fiction of realness as a frame for their work on this assignment, a frame that seemed to exist when they wrote the story related to their meeting with the mayor. In other words, students constructed a different context for writing the second press conference story although the specific material conditions for gathering information and for writing the stories had not seemed to change. Although the actual material context for writing remained the same, students did not talk about this writing situation in the same way. This change in their understanding of the material world can be linked in some way to their readings of their positions within it, a point I made in the previous section of this argument. In fact, the distinction they learned to draw between school and reality seemed to correspond to their growing sense of alienation from what they said they believed to be the academic mission of the Department—doing research on mass media.

Let me recapitulate the points made about contexts for writing that are revealed in the analysis presented thus far. In closely describing the physical organization and design of the Department and in documenting the various material resources that affected students' composing, I have tried to reintegrate the material world into the study of composing. In particular, I have been concerned with situating the students in their material world to show (a) how the material environment can constrain writers' activities in important ways (e.g., in limiting their access to the very tools necessary for the production of certain texts), and (b) how it forms the basis of a social "text" writers read in making sense of their position within the situation for writing. The journalism students learned to construct their positions as being within the sphere of school or the real world of journalistic work,

positions that were related to their construction of the economies of these two arenas for work.

We now must ask, to what extent is the construction of these positions for writing within these settings consequential to composing itself? It is to an examination of this final question that I now turn. My analysis is informed by Witte's (1992) claims about the ways in which multiple "texts" inform writers as they write. In looking closely at one case of how a journalism student wrote her story of the second press conference, I explore and try to delineate some aspects of texts that may be encompassed by, but are not explicitly addressed, in Witte's constructivist semiotic.

Toward a Reconceptualization of Context and Writing

Witte's (1992) "constructivist semiotic" pushes composition theorists to consider how a single act of writing can be intertextually linked to a variety of texts extending out infinitely through time and space. His conception of writing encompasses more than the singular moment of production, as is revealed in his argument for the writer's use of *memorial texts*, which are memories of key events, interactions, or activities semantically related to the text produced. Similarly, in describing the various *projected texts* that writers may envision their *material texts* as serving, Witte made a case for the possibility of unlimited semiosis. As a result, our readings of singular acts of composing may not capture the complex network of trails, missteps, detours, backtracking, and sideways movement writers may actually make in composing any text.[12] Witte confined his description to the semantic web linking the various texts informing the writer's construction of a material text. Although composition theorists can interpret his constructivist semiotic model in ways that go beyond semantic relationships, that approach is not made explicit in Witte's discussion. To do so would entail examining the multiple forces—personal, social, economical and historical—that shape conditions for writing within particular contexts of production and which, in turn, affect how writers compose.

Thus far, I have tried to write the history of the journalism students' social construction of contexts for writing and to document how their perceptions of their positions as writers came to take specific shape. I have been concerned to trace the development of the students'

construction of two contexts for writing because knowing how these contexts were constructed can provide us with a frame for interpreting the case presented below. In particular, we want to pay attention to the choices one student made in writing her news story and how these choices are related to (a) her understanding of how her writing would function within the Department and within the larger world of journalism, and (b) the practices she learned to adopt to maximize her "profits" in writing the news. What we may discover is that the context for writing that this writer, and by extension, the other five writers in this study, learned to construct over the year had a profound effect upon what she could conceive of as projected uses for her material text. These projected uses in turn influenced the choices she made in writing.

Writing the Story of the Second Press Conference

By the second press conference four of the six students were employed as interns at local news outlets. The other two were either unsuccessful in securing an internship for that term or had not pursued one at that time. Thus, the distinction between school and real life became sharper as students gained greater experience working outside of the school context. This distinction affected the choices they made in writing course-related assignments, as evidenced by their approach to writing the story of the second press conference.

In talking about their approaches to writing this story, the students admitted that they had expended little time and energy gathering information and writing the story itself. Most students merely summarized the key points that the city manager had made, focusing perhaps on an issue of particular interest to them. For example, in her story, Katherine merely recounted what the city manager said about the need for neighboring communities to work together to solve regional problems. When I asked her why she took this approach, she explained that she was looking for "the quickest way to do it." By writing about this topic, she stated she was taking a "utilitarian" approach; she said she lacked the ambition or drive to do anything more than "rewrite" what the city manager had said. For Katherine, it was not worth the effort to spend more time than absolutely necessary to write this course assignment because it (a) interfered with her work for her internship and (b) would not result in a "clip," a

published news article. These reasons are apparent in the following remarks she made about writing this story:

> I was so unambitious about this one. I was bogged down in other stuff and I was interested in other stories I'm doing for the *Weekly* and I'm getting selfish to the point where it's like, how am I going to get this published and bylined? (Conversation with Katherine recorded in March)

Given the economy of the professional marketplace, Katherine's decision made sense. After all, clips are the currency of exchange in the world of journalism. Students learn to value clips highly because they are proof to would-be employers that students are capable of reporting and writing the news. Securing clips is a sure way of increasing one's value as a reporter in this marketplace. In fact, any work that appears in a publication could be construed to be a clip. Terry, for example, worked as an intern for a national news magazine during the third term. Interns and the reporters who gather information for the articles appearing in this magazine are rarely given credit for their work in the publication. Usually, the names of reporters may appear at the end of an article, but the byline is always assigned to the people who assemble and write the piece. A regular feature of the magazine is a short column called "Wordplay." For one issue, Terry collected examples of truck drivers' lingo. These examples appeared in "Wordplay" without credit being assigned to Terry. However, Terry admitted to me that she was going to include this column in her portfolio as a clip, even though her name did not appear as a contributor to the "Wordplay" column.

Students also knew that the greater the number and variety of clips the better the portfolio. These portfolios would function as passports for students trying to enter the world of journalistic work. In fact, students understood that good clips were more valuable on the job market than good grades, even when those grades were earned at well-respected journalism programs, like Bayview's. So it is not surprising that Katherine chose to expend her time working on stories that might lead to clips rather than merely good grades. In other words, Katherine projected only one context in which her story could function—school. Because school was not a context in which her journalistic writing would be valued, there was little incentive for Katherine to expend much time and energy doing extra work for a school project.

If we had examined Katherine's case without knowledge about the students' construction of two contexts for writing and the projected uses for and value of texts that were possible within each context, we might have concluded that Katherine's remarks revealed that she held an impoverished view of what it means to do news work. This interpretation would be supported by the evaluation of her story made by other working journalists who had read it. They claimed that Katherine's story was not "news." It did nothing more than report the uninteresting comments made by the city manager. These journalists did not feel that Katherine's story would be worth publishing in any newspaper. From the journalists' point of view, Katherine did not understand what constitutes news value.

From another vantage point, we might interpret Katherine's comments about writing as evidence of a simplistic view of what is entailed in writing news stories, that it is possible to write a "good" news story by drawing upon only one source text—the press conference. However, such interpretations would have ignored the complex set of readings about her position as a writer in Bayview's program that Katherine had done prior to her having written the press conference story. That is, Katherine was sensitive to and able to do an adequate reading of this social text and to adjust her practices in accordance to the demands of this context. And they would ignore the considerable emotional investment Katherine and the other students had made in becoming journalists, an investment that was challenged by their sense of being on the fringes of a Department that was purportedly supportive of their efforts.

The texts that Katherine brought to bear in writing this story are not only those texts that are topically related to the story itself. In a sense, we can say that Katherine's decisions developed from a construction of herself in the social text, what Witte (1992) identified as the "externally situated or projected self"—the *context* in the triadic relationships among context-text-intertext. In other words, the writer as independent self is collapsed into the writing situation so that self is always defined situationally. The *context for writing* always includes the material conditions, the time and space writers occupy as they write, as well as the web of social interactions affecting composing. But more importantly, the context for the production of writing needs to be conceptualized as the writer *in situ* in that it is the social text that writers create for themselves and in which they situate themselves. This interpretation of writer in situ as context for writing allows us to consider the ways in which each individual writer's reading of the

social, emotional, political, economic and cultural texts plays into the construction of their own social text for writing. That is, the contexts for writing constructed by these students resulted from their frustrating attempts to negotiate the lack of access to phones necessary to their work, to their being placed physically in the periphery of the Department, and from their recognition that writing done for contexts outside of school was of more value than that done within school. We could say that these various texts inscribe themselves upon the bodies of writers as they write the text of their own production and that *this* text locates them within various fields of practice.[13] In other words, cultural practices constitute the various contexts for writing and embody as well ways of writing and being within these contexts.

CONCLUSION

The argument I have made throughout this article has focused on the ways in which writing involves both the bodily experience of occupying spaces and times that constitute the material world from which writers compose as well as the meanings writers construct about what it means to inhabit such worlds and to do writing in them. By problematizing context, I have tried to define a different vision for studying writing that takes into account the personal, the political, and the sociohistorical dimensions of human activity so that writing can be seen as an experience encompassing both material and mental worlds. This article, then, represents one attempt to define writing as *practice* and to suggest how such an orientation may change what we try to understand in our research on writing.

In conceiving of writing as practice, we can begin to build descriptions of writing in situ that help us make sense of writers' decision making that may seem to defy the logic of what a rhetorical situation demands. As teachers of writing, it affords us different ways of thinking about students' "failures" or "errors" in writing. What may appear to be a failed attempt at producing competent prose, as judged by "experts" of a genre, may in fact be students' attempts to use strategies that maximize their efforts within the confines of a specific social environment. There may indeed be a logic to seemingly incompetent performance that escapes our analysis if we look at writing performance strictly in terms of how well it emulates expert practices. To understand the "logic" underlying writers' approaches to writing

tasks will require us to examine aspects of the composing process that have not been usually considered important to composing itself.

NOTES

1. In exploring manifestations of context, I use Nystrand, Greene, & Wiemelt's (1993) categories for each of the traditions that currently define the field of writing research: constructivism, social constructionism, and social interactionism. I would add to this list Witte's (1992) constructivist semiotic, which shares features of a constructivist view of knowledge production but emphasizes the key function of semiosis in composing. Readers might take issue with the placement of any researcher within a specific category, but these categories provide an analytic tool that can help us see commonalities among the various traditions' conceptions of context.

2. According to Lave (1993), conventional views of context conceive of it as a container for social activities that constitute a culture; the head acts as a container for the knowledge of how one engages in these social activities. The conventional view of context seems to underlie all current references to context in writing research, with the exception of Witte's (1992) constructivist semiotic characterization of writing. This point will be discussed in greater detail in a subsequent section of this article.

3. Prior's (1991) study is particularly interesting because he tried to account for the ways that the personal life histories and ideological beliefs of writers affect their writing. His subject, Theresa, for example, responded to a course assignment by producing a research proposal that was far more detailed in its description of procedures than those of the other students. According to Prior, her decision to write such a text could be explained in part by her personal history. Theresa was committed to her topic because it addressed issues she had faced in her own schooling experience and because the research proposal functioned as a draft for the Human Subjects Review Form that she had to write in order to proceed with her research plans.

4. We can trace the initial distinction made between semantic potential and semantic content to Halliday's (1975) discussion of Nigel's oral language development. Nystrand extends this idea to written texts and explores how such a distinction changes our conception of the functions of texts.

5. Bayview is the pseudonym used for the university where this study was conducted.

6. In using the word *reading* here, I mean to evoke Freire's (1991) discussion of how people make sense of their sociopolitical environment by reading the material and cultural signs of that environment.

7. Details of the floor plan and overall design of the Department were altered slightly so that readers would be less likely to identify the specific institution studied and thus would better maintain the anonymity of the research participants.

8. One of the most striking features of any newsroom is the number of phones to be found there. From time spent in a news room, I discovered that reporters spend the majority of their time on the phone, making contacts, doing interviews, checking facts, or responding to their source's complaints about an article. The phone is such an important and necessary tool for reporting that I found that even small weeklies would provide each of their reporters with his or her own phone and phone line.

9. As many who have done ethnographic fieldwork can attest, ethnographers rarely gather data of specific instances where participants say exactly what they mean and explain in ways that are easily reportable in research accounts how their perceptions change over time. More often, this evolution reveals itself much after the fact, although careful observers may note the telling details that mark these changes. "Member checks" are one means by which ethnographers can confirm or disconfirm their emerging interpretations of people's beliefs and attitudes. In this case, the member checks were particularly important because I constructed the argument about the students' changing perceptions of their place in the Department from a variety of data collected over the course of the year. Parts of my interpretation were built from fragments of conversations I had with students or overheard in hallways and classrooms. Other parts developed from small details written in my field notes, the glances, shrugs, tiny actions, that communicate much in context but are difficult to reconstruct when writing an analytic account of these human behaviors. I recognize that any ethnographic account is limited by any textual form, and this account is no less limited in its ability to convey the numerous small incidences that, taken out of context, mean little to the uninvolved, but which constitute how people make sense of their lived environments.

10. Although there are many studies of professional education (Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961; Granfield, 1992; Light, 1980), none of this research that I am aware of situates professional preparation programs within the context of research universities even when the professional programs are located within research institutions. We may have little evidence from current research that there exist two different economies within these contexts. However, my description of the differing economies of academic versus professional work struck a chord with reviewers of an earlier version of this manuscript as well as with reviewers of another manuscript that elaborated on some of the analyses presented here. Within each set of reviews, at least one or two of the reviewers stated that my analysis of the deep division that existed between research and practical training "validated common sense intuition" or "affirm[ed]" one reviewer's "own experience as both graduate student and now faculty member" in a communications department. In my own experiences as a graduate student in one School of Education and then as a faculty member in another School of Education, I found that the distinction between the value of academic work of research versus the value of the practical work of teaching is similarly marked and maintained through the division of symbolic and material capital.

11. Readers might be inclined to attribute differences in the instructors as a major reason for the students' expressions of dissatisfaction with the second press conference. It may be that Professor Morris was a more effective instructor than Professor Nabors and thus his assignments would appear more real to the students. However, such an interpretation does not hold up given the evidence from my observations of their teaching nor from the students' own comments about these two instructors. In terms of their teaching approaches, I saw no discernible differences in the presentation of course material. Each of the instructors relied heavily on lectures sprinkled with anecdotes about their own professional experiences. One difference in their presentation was that Professor Nabors engaged students more often in discussions in class. All of the students said that they particularly like Nabors and the second newswriting course because it allowed them to pursue in greater depth topics of interest to them. Five of the six students also said that they found Nabors more accessible than Morris. The sixth student did not make this claim, but she also was taking a second course from

Morris during the second term and so had greater opportunities to interact with him during the second term.

12. Witte's illustration of unlimited semiosis, seen in the figure showing the semiosis of context, text, and intertext, seems to depict a linear view of meaning-making (Witte, 1992, p. 285). We read the figure as moving forward in time, with the initial triadic relationship between context, text, and intertext being instituted at the beginning of a composing activity. That is, writers occupy a context for writing at Time 1 where they interact with various texts and intertexts to construct yet other texts and intertexts that then lead them to a context for meaning-making at Time 2. However, this figure can be read as bidirectional instead of unidirectional with any triad occupying a Time n and the other triads occupying Time $(n - 1)$ or Time $(n + 1)$. What we designate as Time n depends upon where we choose to begin looking at the process of writing, but we need to be aware that the process for making meaning that informs this single moment of composing extends forward and backward in time from this single moment.

13. The term *practice* is used here to evoke Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice. For Bourdieu, social action is located within a field of activity defined by and bounded by rules of action that operate on the basis of an implicit economy of social relations. Individuals enter the field at birth and gradually come to "embody" the values of the community and the "game" played out on this social "field." Bourdieu's theory of practice resembles Wittgenstein's conception of language games (Wittgenstein, 1953) in its emphasis on the rule-governed nature of human interaction. However, unlike Wittgenstein, Bourdieu insists upon a bodily component to practice and on analyzing the economy underlying all social activity.

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Elaine Chin is an assistant professor of education at the University of Michigan. Her publications have appeared in the 1993 National Reading Conference Yearbook and Speaking about Writing, *edited by Peter Smagorinsky. In 1993, she received one of the NCTE Promising Researchers of the Year Award. She is currently studying how chemists use multiple forms of representation in bench work.*