

# NAMING WHAT WE KNOW

*Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*  
CLASSROOM EDITION

*Edited by*

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# Introduction

## COMING TO TERMS

### *Composition/Rhetoric, Threshold Concepts, and a Disciplinary Core*

Kathleen Blake Yancey

From the modern beginnings of the field of rhetoric and composition, we in the field have shared a self-evident claim about the primary focus of rhetoric and composition: that it has at its center the practice of writing and its teaching. At the same time, this observation, as straightforward as it may seem, begs more than one question. What do we mean by writing? Is it practice, or practices? Is what we are talking about writing, or composing, or both? What concepts can or do we draw upon to theorize writing practices? What of any of this do we share with students, when, and how? Historically, questions such as these, typically using the classroom as the site where they are worked out, have defined the field. In the first issue of *College Composition and Communication*, for example, John Gerber (1950, 12) spoke to this point exactly:

Someone has estimated that there are at least nine thousand of us teaching in college courses in composition and communication. Faced with many of the same problems, concerned certainly with the same general objectives, we have for the most part gone our separate ways, experimenting here and improvising there. Occasionally we have heard that a new kind of course is working well at Upper A. M. or that a new staff training program has been found successful at Lower T. C. But we rarely get the facts. We have had no systematic way of exchanging views and information quickly. Certainly we have had no means of developing a coordinated research program.

Some fifty-five years later, Richard Fulkerson, delivering in 2005 a third iteration of analysis in a career-long search to trace the field's coherence—he published his first analysis in 1979, the second in 1990—speaks to the situation of the field in the early twenty-first century, and from a Gerberian perspective, it's both good news and bad. On the one hand, we have what Gerber longed for, the scholarship and multiple venues permitting “a systematic way of exchanging views and information

quickly.” On other hand, that very scholarship allows Fulkerson to make a claim not unlike Gerber’s: we are not coherent, do not have a core set of beliefs or values.

Within the scholarship, we currently have three alternative axiologies (theories of value): the newest one, the social or social-construction view, which values critical cultural analysis; an expressive one; and a multifaceted rhetorical one. I maintain that the three axiologies drive the three major approaches to the teaching of composition[: ] (1) critical/cultural studies [CCS], (2) expressivism, and (3) procedural rhetoric. (Fulkerson 2005, 655)

What we do have despite our differences, according to Fulkerson, is our teaching of writing process and a commitment to writing pedagogy, even if, as Fulkerson claims, our commitment is really plural; it takes different forms. What seems to be missing, since the beginning of the field and even in this late age of print, is any consensus in the field on what we might call the *content of composition*: the questions, kinds of evidence, and materials that define disciplines and would thus define us as well.<sup>1</sup> Fulkerson’s theory is that, at least in the case of CCS, its focus on texts allows for a kind of content that faculty find inherently satisfying and that, in the specific instance of CCS, scholars and teachers in rhetoric and composition value given their backgrounds and their commitments to social justice.

Both the lit-based course and the cultural studies course reflect, I suspect, content envy on the part of writing teachers. Most of us (still) have been trained in textual analysis: we like classes built around texts to analyze. (And I am certainly not immune to that envy. I *enjoy* leading discussions of complex nonfiction that challenges students to think hard about basic beliefs.) (Fulkerson 2005, 663)

This, then, is the field-specific scene for *Naming What We Know*, which proceeds along very different lines and makes a very different kind of argument than the field has seen previously. As coeditors Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle explain in the next chapter of this volume, the project has two parts: (1) identifying threshold concepts, in this case thirty-seven of them, providing a core for the field in terms of what we know; and (2) outlining how they can be helpful in various writing-focused and writing-related contexts. To develop the thirty-seven threshold concepts, Adler-Kassner and Wardle invited many scholars to “[look] at the research and theory to determine what they could agree we collectively know” (4). In addition, drawing on these concepts, a subset of these scholars share with us how we might use the concepts in our pedagogical projects and in our extra-classroom work with students and colleagues.

Invitations to contribute to this project, then, provided an occasion to think about the field in the company of colleagues, about what it is we have learned over the last half century, and about what it is we think we now know—about writing and composing, about the features and practices of writing we take as axiomatic, and about the terms that locate and define writing. Put another way, Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s invitation functioned as an exigence, an opportunity to uncover and interrogate assumptions; in that sense, identifying the threshold concepts presented here was a collective philosophical exercise involving exploration as much as consolidation of what we know. Moreover, that there *are* such concepts, features, and practices is evidenced by the conceptual map presented in the first part of *Naming*. At the same time, our work, the work of rhetoric and composition located in rhetoric writ large, has historically included a practical component; threshold concepts are helpful in this sphere as well, as we see in the second half of the book, where contributors recount the various ways—in retrospect, in the current moment, and in a future time—that threshold concepts help us engage as teacherscholars, whether we are teaching first-year composition students, designing a new major, engaging with doctoral students, or working with our colleagues in general education or writing across the curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

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What do threshold concepts offer composition studies? At first glance, they may seem like a kind of canon, a list of the defining key terms of the discipline, with an explicit emphasis on definition and the implication of dogma. At a second glance, and according to all the writers in part 2 of *Naming*, they seem much more contingent—presented here not as canonical statement, but rather as articulation of shared beliefs providing multiple ways of helping us name what we know and how we can use what we know in the service of writing. That use value, as described in the chapters, takes various forms. In one version, threshold concepts function as boundary objects, allowing us to toggle between the beliefs of the discipline and those of individual institutions; in another version, they function as a heuristic or portal for planning; in yet another version, they seem a set of propositions that can be put into dialogue with threshold concepts from a subdiscipline or from a different discipline for a richly layered map of a given phenomenon. Each of the chapters within shows us how such versions might work.

Heidi Estrem opens the first set of chapters in part 2, “Using Threshold Concepts in Program and Curriculum Design,” with her chapter outlining the role threshold concepts have played in general education reform efforts at Boise State University. Writing outcomes, she

observes (as do others like Elizabeth Wardle and Blake Scott), are too targeted to the end point, too keyed to a linear trajectory of learning, too decontextualized, and over time too standardized.

Generalized, outcomes-based depictions of student learning about writing hold two immediate challenges: (1) they locate evidence of writing at the *end* of key experiences—certainly one valuable place to begin understanding learning, but not the only place; and (2) they often depict writing as only a skill (albeit an “intellectual” or at least “practical” one) (AAC&U 2013). While outcomes-based depictions hold a certain kind of currency and explanatory power in educational reform efforts and will likely continue to do so, a threshold concepts approach provides a differently meaningful framework for intervening in commonplace understandings about writing. Threshold concepts offer a mechanism for faculty to articulate the content of their courses, identify student learning throughout the course experience, and create shared values for writing in a way that a focus on end products—on outcomes—cannot. (89)

Focusing on upper-level communication in the disciplines (CID) courses, Estrem demonstrates how an approach to writing in the disciplines shaped by the idea of threshold concepts changes the game, in part through highlighting the idea underlying the threshold concepts that writing is a discipline with the discipline hosting the CID and *its* threshold concepts, in part by creating a common framework for the institution locating the CIDs both vertically and horizontally:

Within our new learning outcomes framework, the communication-in-the-disciplines (CID) courses are both discipline specific (housed in departments, taught by departmental faculty) *and* explicitly linked to the Writing Undergraduate Learning Outcome. In these courses, then, writing is taught not as an isolated skill but as disciplinary practice, an embodiment of “how people ‘think’ within a discipline” (Meyer and Land 2003, 1). The CID courses are thus a particularly rich site for considering (1) what the threshold concepts for writing *at the introduction to the discipline* might be; (2) how they illuminate or complicate the Writing University Learning Outcome; and (3) how their depiction might begin to foster particular kinds of identification and alliance, both vertically along the Writing Undergraduate Learning Outcome trajectory (how might threshold concepts for writing connect from English 101 and 102, UF 200, CID, and Finishing Foundations?) *and* horizontally, among faculty who teach communication-in-the-disciplines courses across campus (how might these courses with substantially different content and focus foster student writing development in appropriate ways?). (96)

In the second chapter in part 1, Doug Downs and Liane Robertson take up the role of threshold concepts in first-year composition (FYC), which, given the field’s recent attention to transfer, seems a timely question. Even without that salience, however, the role threshold concepts

might play in FYC is a good question since, by definition, writers *are* nascent members of the field, at least to the extent that they are informed practitioners. What can threshold concepts help us understand about what it means to be informed? Downs and Robertson write in retrospect since they have not used threshold concepts to design curriculum, but they agree that FYC should focus on two aspects of threshold concepts: “To say that FYC will focus on threshold concepts, then, is to say that it will, in part, focus on misconceptions and work toward richer conceptualizations of writing” (105). For purposes of transfer, four areas or categories in FYC are crucial:

Our experiences have suggested that four areas present particular challenges when we attempt to address FYC’s twin missions (addressing misconceptions and teaching for transfer): writing as human interaction (rhetoric); textuality; epistemology (ways of knowing and the nature of knowledge); and writing process. Students’ misconceptions about writing most often relate to one of these categories. (107)

The goal of this approach isn’t only a change in writing practices or a greater understanding of writing, but, much as Yancey, Robertson and Taczak (2014) argue in *Writing across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing*, that students develop their own theory of writing. As Downs and Robertson explain:

Every writer has a set of knowledges and beliefs about writing, some explicit and some tacit, that make up their personal theory of writing. The conceptions that make up this personal theory are developed through education, experience, observation, and cultural narratives of writing; few writers will ever explicitly articulate their theory, but they will live by it. By *theory*, we mean a systematic narrative of lived experience and observed phenomena that both accounts for (makes sense of) past experience and makes predictions about future experience. The “better”—the more completely, consistently, and elegantly—a theory accounts for past experience, and the more accurate its predictions about future experience, the stronger or more robust it is, and thus the more useful it is. The writer’s personal theory of writing—their conceptions of what happens when they write, what ought to be happening, why that does or does not happen—shapes both their actions while writing and their interpretations of the results of their writing activities. This theory of writing and the set of conceptions that make it up are how a writer—in our case, an FYC student—understands “the game” of writing. (110)

In the next chapter, J. Blake Scott and Elizabeth Wardle’s account of how threshold concepts can inform the design of a major in rhetoric and composition, we see a plan for students to take up threshold concepts in a more sophisticated way, as is appropriate for a major in the field

involving several courses. Scott and Wardle's narrative of their experience at the University of Central Florida raises two sets of questions about the role threshold concepts can play in the design of a major: What are our threshold concepts, assuming we agree there are such concepts, and if named, what assumptions does their naming reveal? and How can they function as a framework for curriculum design?

Like Downs and Robertson, Scott and Wardle did not begin their curricular design process "by directly considering threshold concepts" but rather "have come to believe that doing so could have been a helpful addition to [their] curriculum planning" (123). More specifically, like Estrem, Scott and Wardle see the value of threshold concepts in curricular planning in their use as an adaptive framework, in the "flexible alignment" provided by threshold concepts, in contrast to what they see as the "standardization" of outcomes: "*The nature of threshold concepts*—not goals, not learning outcomes, but foundational assumptions that inform learning across time—makes them *flexible* tools for imagining a progression of student learning across a curriculum rather than at one specific moment or in one short period of time" (123). In creating their design for the major, the writing department at UCF employed multiple frameworks, each of which is keyed to the overarching threshold concept that writing and rhetoric is a subject of study:

We began by identifying three overlapping strands of the field's scholarship: rhetorical studies, writing studies, and literacy and language studies, the latter including linguistics. We also categorized the field in another way—naming pedagogical, historical, and theoretical scholarship as important overlapping dimensions of the field's work. (124)

Moreover, in drawing on threshold concepts, the UCF group created variations of them through three processes: modification, extension, and boundary marking. Thus, for example, in designing the curriculum, the UCF group was implicitly guided by two related threshold concepts discussed in part 1 of this collection—that Writing Is a Rhetorical and Social Activity (1.0) and that Writing Speaks to Situations through Recognizable Forms (2.0)—along with the premise that *practice adapting writing in various types of contexts is an effective way to improve writing competencies*, a variation of the threshold concept that Learning to Write Effectively Requires Different Kinds of Practice, Time, and Effort (4.3, 126).

Ultimately, the major at UCF will ask students, much like Downs' and Robertson's students, to create their own theory of writing, in this case using an electronic portfolio inside the capstone as the reflective site for this work.

In considering doctoral education in rhetoric and composition, Kara Taczak and I take up another site where threshold concepts are integral: the question is how they might be so.

More specifically, as this volume explains and illustrates, given that faculty can identify threshold concepts they believe locate the field, it's reasonable to expect we would also see them informing doctoral education given the nature of such education: they introduce students to, and in some ways socialize them into, the field, whether explicitly or more implicitly (142).

Using the Florida State University doctoral program in rhetoric and composition as a site for analysis, Kara and I use three integrated doctoral curricula—the delivered, lived, and experienced curricula—as lenses for inquiry.

The *delivered form of the curriculum*, which we take up first, is defined . . . as the curriculum “we design. We see it in syllabi, where course goals are articulated. . . . We see it in assignments, where students deal with the specifics of the curriculum. We see it in readings, where students enter a specific discourse and specific ways of thinking” (Yancey 2004, 17). In the case of the FSU doctoral program in writing studies, we would expect to find threshold concepts in courses—in descriptions, syllabi, and assignments—as well as in nonclassroom sites like preliminary exams and the dissertation (142).

The second kind of curriculum, . . . the “lived curriculum,” is the set of “prior courses and experiences and connections that contextualize the delivered curriculum” (Yancey 2004, 16) as well as the curriculum into which students will graduate: as our review of the FSU doctoral program in RC shows, its purpose is to prepare students through the delivered curriculum for the lived curriculum of the field.

But of course, students will make their own sense of the curriculum, and that's a third and final curriculum, the *experienced curriculum*, “what some call the de facto curriculum—that is, the curriculum that *students construct* in the context of the delivered curriculum we seek to share” (Yancey 2004, 58). This curriculum, then, is the enactment of the delivered curriculum by the students themselves. (142)

In sum, the three different curricula provide different opportunities to encounter and work with different threshold concepts.

In the context of the other curricula discussed in this volume, one of the more interesting dimensions of this model of education is the kind of opportunity we see for learning inside the lived curriculum, given that “it operates in a context outside of the program and sometimes . . . outside of the academy” (Taczak and Yancey, 146). It's here that “students are more inclined to experience another threshold concept, that of failure” (146), a threshold concept defined by Collin Brooke and Allison Carr:

As students progress throughout their educational careers and the expectations for their writing evolve from year to year and sometimes course to course, there is no way that we can expect them to be able to intuit these shifting conditions. They must have the opportunity to try, to fail, and to learn from those failures as a means of intellectual growth. (63)

How to help students learn from *failures as a means of intellectual growth* is particularly important as graduate students cross the threshold from doctoral education into faculty positions in the field.

Addressing writing assessment as she opens the second section of chapters, Enacting Threshold Concepts about Writing across the University, Peggy O'Neill considers how threshold concepts from two disciplines contribute to a cross-disciplinary field, in this case the field of writing assessment, located in assessment and in writing. As O'Neill explains, neither set of concepts is subordinate to the other; to work effectively, practitioners need to understand both.

While writing studies' threshold concepts are central to understanding writing assessment, they are not sufficient to such understanding because writing assessment lies at the intersection of threshold concepts specific to writing studies and those specific to educational assessment. Understanding writing assessment therefore requires understanding both sets of concepts and how they interact. Writing studies professionals who design and administer assessments must learn to understand critical concepts of validity and reliability associated with psychometrics since these concepts are widely used across disciplines and assessment contexts and have established power in the discourse of education and assessment. Conversely, assessment specialists, who may be responsible for designing and evaluating assessments across a variety of disciplines and contexts, must understand the threshold concepts associated with writing (articulated in part I) if they are working in writing assessment. Both sets of concepts are required to create assessments that produce valid results and to use those results effectively and responsibly. (158)

In developing this line of thinking, O'Neill makes two other important points. First, she observes that writing assessment addresses many situations, from classroom to program. Second, she points out that it's through tapping the interdisciplinary threshold concepts that we can develop new practices and make new knowledge.

Rebecca S. Nowacek and Bradley Hughes take up the question of how threshold concepts might enhance the tutoring of writing, focusing on three areas: writing-tutor education, writing-tutor practice, and the development of threshold concepts at the intersection of writing studies and tutoring. Nowacek, for example, raises the issue of priorities as a way of deciding what to include in a course preparing students to tutor, and, like many of the chapter authors, she begins with questions.

The notion of threshold concepts implies that writing tutors will be better equipped for their work if they learn to see with and through the threshold concepts of writing. If that is the case, how should a tutor-education program sequence the work of grappling with those threshold concepts? Are some threshold concepts more central to writing center work than others? Asking these TC-inspired questions has helped [me] better understand three dimensions of the tutor education program at Marquette: choosing what to prioritize during the initial tutor-education course and what to defer until ongoing tutor education, making clearer decisions about hiring processes, and revising the content of the tutor-education course. (174)

As important, once fully engaged in writing center practice, tutors may find threshold concepts useful in understanding practice, especially that occurring within the less successful tutorial; as Nowacek and Hughes put it, threshold concepts can be helpful in “illuminating possible explanations for writers’ resistance” (178). Last but not least and perhaps most intriguing, they propose the category of writing center-specific threshold concepts. As an illustration, they nominate “tutors need to learn that *experienced, effective conversational partners for writers regularly inhabit the role of ‘expert outsider,’* and tutors need to learn the skills necessary for inhabiting that role” (181). Here, then, the role of expert outsider is identified as a rhetorical situation through which practice can be understood.

Linda Adler-Kassner and John Majewski take up another issue, the role threshold concepts can play “in the service of professional development.” Borrowing Jan H. F. Meyer’s trajectory of faculty engagement, Adler-Kassner and Majewski add two other frameworks for a robust approach:

The trajectory [of professional development] includes four phases: (1) describing threshold concepts of their discipline; (2) using threshold concepts as an “interpretive framework” through which to consider teaching; (3) reflexively incorporating them into teaching practices; and (4) conducting research on teaching and understanding teaching as research (Meyer 2012, 11). Meyer’s study echoes elements of other literature focusing on professional development, such as Middendorf and Pace’s (2004) *Decoding the Disciplines* (DtD) process, which leads faculty through a seven-step process beginning with identification of “learning bottlenecks” (points where students get stuck in a course), which leads to an examination of expert knowledge related to the bottleneck, finally resulting in the design and assessment of pedagogical activities that address the sticking point ([decodingthedisciplines.org](http://decodingthedisciplines.org)). In the frameworks of both Meyer and Joan Middendorf and David Pace, teaching is intimately connected to creative application of expert knowledge in a manner similar to academic research. As Sarah Bunnell and Daniel

Bernstein argue, the application of this knowledge (here, represented in threshold concepts) to teaching is a “scholarly enterprise” that includes understanding teaching as an “active, inquiry-based process” and seeing teaching as a “public act contributing to ‘community property’” that leads to “open dialogue about teaching questions and student work.” (Meyer 2012, 15; 186)

At the heart of this approach are two kinds of expertise: first, threshold concepts in the discipline; and second, “expertise associated with knowledge about how to learn and represent threshold concepts” (Adler-Kassner and Majewski, 187).

Professional development, of course, is predicated on the idea that something will change; as Adler-Kassner and Majewski put it, “A key question is how an introduction to threshold concepts [can] change actual teaching practice” (196). More specifically, focusing on Majewski’s general education class in history, the coauthors point to the role of explicitness as critical for such change, the ways it can highlight disciplinarity, and how, working together, the two can assist learners:

More emphasis was put on teaching skills specific to a history course, such as reading primary sources or connecting historical evidence to arguments. To illustrate the way historians read and the importance of identifying context, for instance, students viewed a video of a think-aloud exercise in which John struggled to interpret a primary source document from ancient Rome. In a similar fashion, students were instructed in lecture on specific ways historians craft arguments, especially how to approach an analytical thesis and how to directly link evidence to argument. The necessity of having a meaningful argument was repeatedly emphasized—to write history, students could not just summarize facts but had to interpret facts in ways that made them significant. To do so, they had to write analytical narratives that flowed chronologically but still made an overall argument. The course thus explicitly reminded students that their analytical narratives were particular to the threshold concepts of history and reinforced these concepts through lecture and hands-on activity. They were writing in a particular context that would develop a different set of skills than would courses in other disciplines. (198)

In the final chapter, Chris Anson considers how writing as it occurs across a campus can be enhanced through the use of threshold concepts. Defining writing as a disciplinary activity, Anson explains the role that six threshold concepts can play in this work:

- defining writing as a disciplinary activity;
- reconceptualizing the social and rhetorical nature of writing;
- distinguishing between writing to learn and writing to communicate;

- establishing shared goals and responsibilities for improvement;
- understanding the situated nature of writing and the problem of transfer; and
- viewing student writing developmentally. (205)

As important, Anson points out how important it is to work with threshold concepts in what we might call their *fullness*. When we don't, when for example "threshold concepts are reduced from verbs to nouns, from their fully articulated, active form (along with plentiful explanation) to buzzwords and catch phrases, many faculty will balk, and resistance can follow" (216). As a corrective to this, Anson notes the relationship of a single maxim to a full set of threshold concepts. Much as we see in the explanation of the threshold concepts in the first part of *Naming What We Know*, each one is in relation to several others; to understand it, we have to understand it in the context of the others.

During some campus visits, my hosts have counseled me never to use a specific word among the faculty, such as *outcomes* or *rubric* or even *WAC*, usually because some earlier curricular disaster or failed innovation poisoned the entire campus to whatever the term meant at the time. Although it is less likely, certain threshold concepts introduced too glibly can trigger false assumptions, resistance, or confusion among faculty. An example familiar to most WAC leaders takes the problematically reduced form of advice not to focus first (or even at all) on the surface features of students' writing: "students' grammatical mistakes are not as important as what they are trying to say" or even "don't focus on grammar." Unpacking this assertion means delving into the relationship between form and meaning, the effects of certain pedagogies on students' self-efficacy and further writing behaviors, the relationship among writing assignments and learning goals, students' linguistic backgrounds, and a host of other complicated issues. (216)

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Reading across these chapters, we can see eight points of agreement.

First, we agree on the metaconcept that writing is an activity and a subject of study. This threshold concept thus expands the field's historical focus on practice to include writing as a subject of study as well. For some colleagues, as Blake Scott and Elizabeth Wardle suggest, this is a provocative claim; not all faculty agree that there are threshold concepts in the field, much less agree on what they might be. At the same time, what we also see in the claim that writing is a subject of study is that writing has a content, a claim that the rest of the threshold concepts detail. If this is so, we need have Fulkerson's content envy no longer.

Second, we agree that a threshold concept functions as both propositional statement and heuristic for inquiry, a heuristic we can, in

Heidi Estrem's terms, see with and through. Their value as propositions is twofold: we articulate what we know, and we can use that articulation as a point of departure for additional scholarly investigation.

Third, we agree that threshold concepts provide a way of thinking, a framework for multiple kinds of work, be it the design of general education or the foundational principles for writing across the curriculum.

Fourth, we agree that threshold concepts aren't fixed but are rather contingent and flexible, and that to be helpful, they need to be so. Entailed in this agreement is a sense that outcomes, which have offered both promise and help to writing programs, have become rigid and standardized; as such, they provide a foil to threshold concepts.

Fifth, we agree that threshold concepts are neither acontextual nor arhetorical, but are specific to a discipline and community of practice; they often function as a kind of boundary object in dialogue with local situations and/or other frameworks, including those connected to the discipline, as in Downs and Robertson's design for FYC, and to other fields, as we see in O'Neill's discussion of writing assessment.

Sixth, we agree, as Scott and Wardle and Nowacek and Hughes illustrate, that as threshold concepts are employed in a given setting, variants of the threshold concepts can develop, ones that themselves toggle between more general threshold concepts and understandings informing the local.

Seven, we agree, as Adler-Kassner and Majewski argue, that we need to be explicit in working with both faculty and students, and that such explicitness, as explained in *How People Learn*, facilitates transfer.

And eighth, we agree that all of us—including students—can use threshold concepts to inquire, analyze, interpret, and, ultimately, make knowledge.

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We have long been interested in mapping our field. In 1984, for example, Janice Lauer took up that task, beginning by identifying the core features of a discipline to contextualize her argument that at that time, rhetoric and composition was an emerging discipline.

At its deepest level, a discipline has a special set of phenomena to study, a characteristic mode or modes of inquiry, its own history of development, its theoretical ancestors and assumptions, its evolving body of knowledge, and its own epistemic courts by which knowledge gains that status. (Lauer 1984, 20)

Some twenty years later, then-*CCC Online* editor Collin Brooke employed databases and linking to create another kind of map; and nearly ten years after that, Derek Mueller (2012) plotted the long tail of

composition, and graduate students at CUNY began sharing their academic genealogy project. The exploration into threshold concepts and their uses presented in this volume provides yet another approach to the field's larger mapping project, here a process identifying not only the map, but also *what* there is to map. In this sense, threshold concepts are kairotic: they articulate the substance of the field as a mechanism for mapping the field itself.

It may also be that threshold concepts, as presented here, mark another kind of threshold for the field, an idea that's occurred to me as I've participated in articulating key concepts, in providing definitions for two of the threshold concepts, in coauthoring a chapter, in reading this volume, and in writing this introduction. In reviewing the list of contributors to threshold concepts, for example, I was interested in the timeline we might draw, collectively accounting for their scholarly contributions. A back-of-the-envelope calculation might begin with Andrea Lunsford's "Classical Rhetoric and Technical Writing," published in a 1976 issue of *College Composition and Communication*, and continue through the 2015 publication of this volume: that's nearly forty years of a sixty-five year history of the discipline.

But my review of the list of chapter authors prompted another insight, in part because I had just read Robert Connors's observations about "generations" of "modern composition specialists": he dates the first generation as occurring between the "late 1940s and the early 1960s" and the second occurring in the 1960s into the 1970s, and he notes that the specialists of both these generations "retool[ed] as writing specialists after literary doctorates" (Connors 1999, 9). The third generation—and he counts himself in that generation—took their doctorates in rhetoric and composition at a limited number of institutions,<sup>3</sup> and Connors cites this generation as something of a dividing line, in the development of the field, between those who retooled to found a field and those who entered a field already in progress. I'm not sure precisely how I would date the generations, but there's no doubt that early leaders of the field took their doctoral work in literature and English education;<sup>4</sup> and there's no doubt that these early leaders—and leaders in some of the succeeding generations as well—were attracted to the field in large part because it wasn't established and they thus could make significant contributions to what they saw as an emerging field (Craig et al. forthcoming). The assumption underlying *Naming*, of course, is that the field *is* now established, and it thus would be a useful enterprise to consider together what it is that we do know. This established field, of course, is the field that

most of the chapter contributors entered: teacher-scholars who saw not only an established field, but a field so established that it includes defined subfields—among them writing centers, writing assessment, and WAC—often providing their own pathways into the larger field; who chose graduate study in rhetoric and composition from one of more than eighty institutions currently offering the doctorate in rhetoric and composition; and whose education was not necessarily taken in English departments nor, even when it was, defined by literature. It occurred to me, in other words, that the literary context so prominent in so many accounts of our history and even in accounts of our pedagogy, as Fulkerson explains, is, for these contributors, as for new generations, no longer our default context—or, and at least as important, our default *content*. And it also occurred to me that our shared interest in threshold concepts, which is an expression of an interest in disciplinaryity, is a logical next step when a field has matured, as ours has.

If this is so, then by means of this project, we are entering another threshold for the field, one with enormous potential to help shape the field's future.

#### Notes

1. The field has intermittently taken up the question of the content of composition, most recently in 2006 and sponsored by the CCCC, though it was quite clear that not everyone agreed that there is such a content. For a summary of the CCCC-sponsored discussion, see <http://compfaqs.org/ContentofComposition/HomePage>.
2. It's worth noting that taken together, the chapters address the full set of responsibilities a faculty member in the discipline of rhetoric and composition might take up, including the one program that has now completed the set, the major in rhetoric and composition. In 1999, Robert Connors made the argument that to coalesce as a discipline, composition needed two "elements": "methods of intellectual tradition in a great burgeoning of journals and books" and a "method of scholarly reproduction" (Connors 1999, 8), by which he meant doctoral programming. In 2004, I argued that for the field to become a discipline, another element was needed, the major in rhetoric and composition: "In other words, it is past time that we fill the glaringly empty spot between first-year composition and graduate education with a composition major" (Yancey 2004, 308).
3. There were several other programs predating the ones on Connors's list, including the well-known doctoral program at the University of Iowa.
4. See, for example, Stock's 2011 edited *Composition's Roots in English Education*.

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