

EDITOR'S NOTE

Here is the question that motivates me to write: Why would anyone want to read a bunch of papers written by undergraduates in a required introductory writing class? In Writing Program classes students learn fundamental skills that help prepare them to satisfy any given professor's expectations for any given college paper assignment. Admittedly, that very tall order does not necessarily sound like the recipe for a great read. As Writing Program students begin to learn *how* academics write, however, they also begin to understand *why* academics write. At some magical moment, students stop approaching papers simply as assignments—writing them the way they think their professors want them written—and begin instead to think of them as projects, their own projects, projects that offer an opportunity to say something that needs to be said.

Therefore, the criteria we editors kept foremost in mind as we read, discussed, and evaluated the more than 500 excellent papers submitted this year to *WR* were: Does this paper engage authentic questions in terms that make readers care about them? Does the paper communicate ideas that are relevant beyond the four walls of the class for which it was composed? The papers selected for Issue 5 clear these high bars with exceptional grace. They illustrate the range and flexibility of the Writing Program curriculum as well as the range and flexibility of some of our most remarkable students.

From WR 097 through WR 150, Writing Program classes acculturate students to the place of writing in the life of the university. The need for such acculturation is apparent for BU's growing population of interna-

tional students. The papers from ESL courses (WR 097 and 098) selected for publication in Issue 5 show not only an impressive command of English but also a lively awareness of what makes a college essay tick. Yiyang Chen makes a compelling argument about the use of hypotheticals in philosophical reasoning, an argument that would not be possible without the insight wrought through critical reading. Danyang Li demonstrates not only her ability to offer a sensitive ethical interpretation of a novel but also her understanding of conventions of argumentative writing, some of which are culturally specific to the Western or American university.

Though it may not be as obvious, students placing directly into WR 100—most but not all of whom are native English speakers—also undergo acculturation of a sort. They too learn what college writing is and how it differs in form and ethos from the kinds of writing they have been asked to do previously. The authors of the WR 100 papers selected for publication write, as far more experienced scholars do, in order to take on complex conceptual problems and shed light on some small, carefully defined part of the world. Narula Navraj challenges the critical consensus on the meaning of epiphany in the work of James Joyce. And in “Down the Street and Around the World,” her essay on the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Katie Griswold offers a nuanced and historically informed exploration of the museum’s idiosyncratic organization.

WR 150, which integrates instruction in writing and research, offers students a fuller context for understanding why academics write. While most students begin research looking for answers, in WR 150 they figure out that research can also help them define authentic questions that they are then compelled to try to answer. Sabrina Patrizio discovered scholarship on Richard Yates’s midcentury novel *Revolutionary Road* to be scarce, which inspired her to fill this gap in “Wouldn’t You Like to Be Loved by April Wheeler.” Ryan Chernin moves an emerging scholarly conversation forward by proposing a literary antecedent for the HBO series *The Wire*. Levi Mastrangelo answers a question raised by Mark Twain about the durability of Jewish culture through analysis of a contemporary novel and film. And Lisa Lau addresses questions raised by earlier thinkers about what constitutes national history in her analysis of recent Egyptian political street murals.

There is, of course, a strong correspondence between why academics write and why other professional writers do. For this reason, some Writing Program instructors have begun to offer an “alternative genre” assignment in WR 100 or 150, inviting students to write for another purpose and audience. For the first time in Issue 5, three such alternative projects have met the same high standards as the best academic papers, and we are delighted to present them as a reflection of another dimension of our program. In “Serotonin Keeps You Sad and Sleepy,” Jane McClenathan takes on a science journalist’s challenge to communicate new neuroscience research to laypeople. Yash Soni writes as an environmental advocate testifying before the EPA about fracking. And Robert Pressel introduces an (imaginary) edited collection of speeches to prepare readers to appreciate their relationship to one another and their significance to American culture. I have a fresh appreciation for the rhetorical demands of this last task in particular because it has so much in common with the one I face in composing this editor’s note.

What these diverse essays share is their writers’ palpable and purposeful desire to communicate ideas they have discovered. Peruse this issue and you will probably become interested in something you had never thought about before. Read cover to cover and you will certainly learn something that inspires or provokes you.

— Sarah Madsen Hardy, Editor