

SUNY Potsdam — LTEC Grant Report
Grant Period: Fall 2002-Spring 2003

Project: Using Archival Resources in the Study of Writing Instruction & Composition Theory
LTEC Fellow: Dr. Anne Righton Malone, Associate Professor of English

Project Overview: The impetus for this project was an outgrowth of the Amelia Morey Project begun in the Summer of 2002 with a grant from the Merwin Rural Services Institute. Whereas Amelia Morey Project focuses on the overall college and teaching experience of students at Potsdam Normal School during the 1930s, this LTEC grant project focused on the first year experience of students attending SUNY Potsdam in the period 1940-1980, looking specifically at the integrated writing, art, music program for first year students during this time.

Project Goals and Objectives: This grant provided opportunities for student–teacher collaborative research during Spring 2003. conducted by students taking COMP 402: Composition Theory. This research project provided these students with the opportunity to better understand composition theory and praxis from both a personal and an historical perspective. According to the Course Catalog, COMP 402:

Focuses on enduring debates within the field of composition, showing how each new theoretical development has extended the work of its predecessors. Although much of what is covered has been formulated since the late 1960s, the course emphasizes how contemporary views remain linked, if not indebted, to the centuries of theoretical analysis that have shaped the rhetorical tradition.

Historical Perspective: Traditionally Composition Studies courses have focused on this objective historical perspective in an attempt to better understand the work of the predecessors of current composition theory. They read historical accounts of this period using James Berlin’s 1987 classic text, *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985*. However this text overlooks the student perspective. This project provided students taking COMP 402 with opportunities to personalize composition studies by providing these students with the opportunity to study writing instruction of the past five decades using primary documents — essays, student diaries, and letters written by SUNY Potsdam students from the period 1940 to 1980, student writing published in the college newspapers and literary magazines, and composition theory and praxis textbooks collected in the College Archives. In addition to having access to these primary documents students had the opportunity to interview “older” faculty about their college and high school writing instruction and to interview SUNY Potsdam alumni (1940-1980) about their experience as writers in the College’s first year program. According to historian Charles Lahey, author of *The Potsdam Tradition*, this period was a vibrant one in the history of the college and the programs instituted for first year students were strikingly innovative. SUNY Potsdam’s freshman writing program showed delightfully deliberate connections the creative arts and the liberal arts that are worth reconsidering as we now expand and develop the learning community programs for first year students.

LTEC Support: This grant provided funds for archival research prior to the class, development of an archival database of faculty and alumni for these interviews, supplemental funding for interview equipment, and the use of LTEC support personnel and poster making equipment to assist in publication of the reports published by students and presented at the Annual Learning and Research Fair. This provided materials for use in future composition theory courses.

Long Term Goal:

In addition to continuing to have the students in COMP 402 interview SUNY Potsdam alumni about their experiences in the first year program at SUNY Potsdam during these five decades, my long term goal is to record these interviews so they may be placed in the college archives. Currently our histories of Potsdam Normal School and Potsdam College are focused on the broader aspects of the college — the presidents and the music program successes. What has not been recorded are the stories of the women and men who were students during these years.

My goal is to edit these tapes along with other taped interviews of faculty and community member to develop a video presentation. I have experience editing video using software on an iMac and will work with students to develop this project more fully. This presentation will be part of a larger project connected with the Amelia Morey Project. These taped interviews and the video presentation will provide opportunities for student and faculty and community researchers to learn more about the college and about the teaching of writing during these years. In addition, it will provide a student view of an important decade in the college's history. My long-term goal is to develop a revised history of Potsdam College that focuses on the data collected from this project and from the Amelia Project. Throughout this project I have been working closely with Crumb Library Archivist Jane Subramanian to learn the procedure for collecting and storing materials and to carefully document interviews and obtain accurate permissions from those we interview. The LTEC Grant provided one more link in the collection of the data for this project.