美國大學英文系成立之歷程·

十九世紀末至二十世紀初

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摘要

在臺灣的英文系的課程設計與師資安排等方面有諸多是參考美國的英文系而設的，除了這些課程安排的相似外，對於教授寫作課程的態度也很相似，雙方的英文系教授都很不情願將才能和精力花在這種課程上。

這種態度當然其來有自，本論文即追溯英文系於十九世紀末及二十世紀初在美國的大學剛成立時的背景，以勾勒出這種制度性的職業態度的來龍去脈。

關鍵詞：修辭學、寫作、專業菁英、自由教育

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The Path to the Founding of English Departments in American Universities—Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

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ABSTRACT

The design of English departments in Taiwan’s universities bear quite some resemblance with those in the U.S. Of all the similarities, the attitude toward writing (or composition, depending on locations) is very intriguing. Both sides show a distinct attempt to shun away from it as much as possible. In Taiwan, the ability to write in English is regarded as very important and very difficult to master and English departments are supposed to invest quite some energy and resources in it.

This paper attempts to trace the origin of such an attitude in the early development of English departments in U.S. From its fledging moments, writing (or composition) had taken on a bad name for wasting learned scholars’ talents and energies. It should not be surprising that English departments had managed to find a path around this subject and relegate it to either Rhetoric or secondary schools.

The findings in this paper confirm the similarity of such an institutionalized professional attitude in English Departments in U.S. and Taiwan.

Key Words: Rhetoric, Composition, Meritocracy, Liberal Education
I. Introduction

English departments of universities and colleges in Taiwan are structured on American model. Of course, there have been quite some modifications on the curriculum, on account of local expectations, like the teaching of conversation, translation, TESL... et. al.. Nevertheless, the core of the curriculum still bear some resemblance to English departments in the U.S. The most obvious evidence is that the core of the curriculum design always centers around literature and linguistics.

On one specific area, this resemblance is most noteworthy: the attitude towards Rhetoric and Composition. In the U.S., the course Rhetoric has long since been marginalized or even excluded from the English departments; in Taiwan, the course Rhetoric has started being replaced just recently, it can still be found in a few established English departments though.

In the U.S., there is no more such course as Composition in English departments, which is left for high schools. Colleges only offer higher level writing classes, like Writing or Creative Writing. Whereas in Taiwan, because of the nature of English as a foreign language, entry level composition courses are still being emphasized. Nevertheless, English department professors of both countries show a similar attitude towards teaching composition: Not My Business (Berlin, 1987; Chen, 1997).

Is this attitude a matter of personal preference or a long-standing institutionalized stance? This paper attempts to answer this question by tracing the origin of English departments—the founding of English departments in the U.S. during late 19th and early 20th century. Specifically, how English departments dealt with the classic course Rhetoric while striving to establish English as an independent discipline will be the focal point.

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1 The narrative about the history in the following chapters is based on two excellent sources: Applebee (1974) and Berlin (1987).
II. The Birth of English and Writing—19\textsuperscript{th} Century

The Origin: Rhetoric

English did not become a separate academic subject in American universities until late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, when Harvard first established the English department (Parker, 1912). During those early years, the primary responsibility of the English department was to teach English writing\textsuperscript{2}, a required discipline for all college students. However, the title of the course was not called Writing or English; instead, it was called: Rhetoric, following the centuries old tradition of Rhetoric, in spirit, methodology, and course design.

Rhetoric had long been the main staple of western education up till late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. It was started in the Greek world around 5\textsuperscript{th} century BC and became an important part of Roman education during the first century BC. Rhetoric as a subject for persuasion was composed of five elements: invention, arrangement, diction, memory, delivery (The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, 1996). From medieval century to eighteenth century, Rhetoric had become one of the central disciplines (along with Theology, Natural and Moral Sciences, and Law) in universities across Europe (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics, 2003).

Rhetoric was first conceived as the art of speaking as a means to persuade. The focus on the art of persuasion has great appeal to the general public. On the other hand, this focus inevitably conflicts with the pursuit of truth. Throughout history, Rhetoric has had its critics, from Plato to the empiricist and positivist methods of social sciences as well as modern sciences (The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics, 2003).

\textsuperscript{2}The terms “writing” and “composition” are not well-distinguished, as far as this author is able to discern. It seems that writing is almost always associated with higher level activity, like in colleges; composition is mostly associated with basic level writing in secondary schools or lower. Where does composition end and writing start?, not to mention the term “Rhetoric.” Since any study of composition instruction in American high schools can not be conveniently separated from the “writing instruction” in university, not to mention the traditional “Rhetoric,” these two terms are sometimes inevitably and inadvertently employed as if interchangeable. This author did try to avoid this situation as much as possible, though.
Dictionary of Politics, 2003). Notwithstanding, the desire of cultivating the power of language as a persuasive tool has always managed to keep Rhetoric in western educational system for centuries.

In practice, the essence of Rhetoric at mid-nineteenth century was rules and formats—embodied in intensive practice of grammar rules and close reading of classics, almost exclusively in Latin (Applebee, 1974; Berlin, 1987; Genung, 1887). Since Latin was a “dead” language, reading was in fact another term for translation practice. This had been the accepted practice through centuries, on the ground that Rhetoric builds the foundation for “mental discipline” and “faculty psychology” (Lull, 1913).

However, teaching Rhetoric was hard work—reading, correcting, and grading a lot of student papers. From the view of those learned scholars who had accomplished a lot to achieve this position, it is not surprising that they felt their talents and energies were wasted on the laborious task of teaching Rhetoric.

On the other hand, one hundred years after its founding and just a few years after a devastating civil war, United States was in the mood to build the still young nation a true “Union.”

**The Birth of English as a Subject**

In 1874, Harvard took two historic actions:

1. It offered the freshman English to its students, which by 1894 became the only requirement for all college students.
2. At the same time, Harvard introduced a freshman entrance requirement, in which a writing test was included.

This move set in tone three profound implications:

1. English would be the official language of college education.

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2. The ability to write well in English is a skill that students should have learned well enough in high school.

3. English departments, in an effort to establish itself as a recognized discipline, attempted to distinguish itself from Rhetoric by focusing on the study of literature and language. They tried to relegate the teaching of writing to a minor role, at least.

In 1876, the establishment of Johns Hopkins University was the first American university dedicated to graduate education. Its English department focused specifically on the study of literature and language. The department attempted to lure a renowned Harvard Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, Francis James Child, to Johns Hopkins. Harvard, in an effort to retain Prof. Child, offered him the first professor of English and relieved him the burden of teaching Rhetoric—writing.

Thus, Harvard and Johns Hopkins inadvertently set a new model for English departments. In this model, literature and language studies were to become the center and writing instruction was to be relegated downward to undergraduate Rhetoric and high school language courses. English departments were to disassociate the responsibility of teaching writing as much as possible. In most universities, the job was relegated to Rhetoric (Mead, 1902), which had always been reluctant to be confined to the laborious and degrading role of grading and correcting student papers. It, too, was struggling to establish its own identity. This trend has been followed ever since.

Johns Hopkins modeled its graduate study from Germany universities for their Germanic ideals of research. Along with this model, the English department first introduced the study of Philology to help establish English study as an independent, respectable academic discipline.

Prior to this new field, English study and Rhetoric were hardly distinguishable, in terms of faculty, course material, and course methodology. The professor of English or Rhetoric used to come from two types of learned scholars: (1) a clergyman whose oratory skills gave him the license to lecture
on language and rhetoric or (2) a learned scholar in disciplines like law, logic, or modern history.

The establishment of graduate school and the introduction of Philology into English study gave English departments the appearance of a unique discipline. Philology ultimately paved the way for the study of modern language that further set English apart from Rhetoric.

**College Entrance Examination and High School Education**

When Harvard created the English department, writing was required for the last three years for all college students. Harvard president Eliot added a Freshman English course in 1874. However, by 1894, Freshman English was the only requirement for college students, except for a course on Modern Language. By 1897, Freshman English was the only required course for all college students.

As of late nineteenth century, Greek and Latin were still the focus of language study, both in colleges and high schools. English was primarily for business schools or finishing schools (for girls only). As late as 1889, the U.S. Commissioner of Education in his annual report was tallying students taking English in business schools and in schools for the blind, deaf, and feebleminded, but not in private or public schools. The underlying assumption was that English was still not a formal subject for college-bound high school students.

However, in this nation of “ethnic melting pot,” the role of English language as a common language for all ethnic backgrounds as well as an identity for this country was gaining credence. The needs of the education community as well as the society brought about a shift of focus in language curriculum, though slowly. Established universities, as always, were leading the change.

Harvard initiated the entrance examination as early as 1865. By 1874, it launched a writing test in the entrance exam. The subject of the test was about
literature topics that students were supposed to study in advance. This move shaped high school college-preparatory curriculum.

Other universities followed suit soon. This trend obviously created a tremendous burden on high school students, because they could not prepare for every university’s diverse requirements. They demanded a uniform requirement. Thus, in 1894, the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirement in English met and decided a uniform list. In 1901, the first joint college entrance examination was held.

The Committee of Ten

In 1892, the National Council of Education of the National Education Association called for the Committee of Ten to arrange a series of subject-area conferences to deal with secondary school studies. The Committee called for conferences in nine fields: 1. Latin; 2. Greek; 3. English; 4. Other Modern Languages; 5. Mathematics.

For the conference on English, the focus of English studies was: Communication and Appreciation. In its final report: Report of the Committee of Ten in 1894, English was the only subject recommended for definite inclusion in the program of study for every high school student. A full five-period every week of English study was recommended for the third year in high school. This report, together with the Uniform Entrance Requirement in English in the same year, helped English studies gain a firm foothold in the secondary school curriculum.

The focus of English studies recommended by the committee report was: Communication and Appreciation. The essence of Communication is easy to understand: writing, whereas the focus of Appreciation is Literature.

The Emergence of Literature

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4 In Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1900-1901, 50.6% of public day school students in any of the four high school years were enrolled in Latin courses, whereas 38.5% were enrolled in English. This shows the long struggle for English to become an accepted subject in secondary schools.
In 1883, the Modern Language Association (MLA) was founded. The establishment of MLA was to help secure English studies in the curriculum of new universities. Yale University first started English literature course in 1892, as an elective for freshman. Many other universities followed the Yale model and listed English literature as a formal subject. This focus on literature was naturally embodied in the list for college entrance examination.

As literature was widely accepted by both the college curriculum and the college entrance examination list, there was a great need of annotated literature works. At that time, there were very few trained English teachers, nor were there many published analysis of literature works. The people responsible for the first annotated texts were scholars trained in classics of Rhetoric; in addition, works of prestigious authors like Milton and the Augustans had already been used for Rhetoric and grammar texts for analysis. The prestige of the classics as well as the methodology that had been associated with it made classics an easy and convenient choice.

Thus the essence of English studies at this time, be it the Communication or the Appreciation, was not different from the traditional practices of Rhetoric: close analysis of texts and careful construction of sentences. Literature courses, at this time, were simply an attempt to draw attention to English study. In reality, literature was just a means for close reading and discussion. As Berlin (1987) puts it:

Thus, at the turn of the century, American academic’s dominant approach to literary scholarship and their dominant method of writing instruction shared a common epistemology (p. 27).

From the beginning, the struggle to establish English departments as a separate subject fulfilled the need of a young nation searching for her identity. English departments inherited much of its discipline from Rhetoric—scholars, materials, and methodology, so they also inherited Rhetoric scholars’ aversion of teaching writing. They strived to delegate the burden to Rhetoric in colleges and to secondary school language education. However, English departments
were not just a passive critic, through the college entrance examination lists, they voiced their demands and inserted their influences. This set a perpetual tone for English departments.

The narrow epistemic perspective as well as strict instructional methods of Rhetoric of the time must not escape blame for this development.

III. The Beginning of the Twentieth Century

The Separation of Literature and Rhetoric

As English study strived to establish itself as a formal discipline, literature was, in essence, the primary means to distinguish English study from traditional Rhetoric courses. The key to this distinction is for literature to focus more on the aspect of aesthetic.

Epistemic Origins

James Berlin (1987) makes a distinction between Rhetoric and Poetic: Rhetoric is a “symbolic action in the material world, with practical consequences as an end;” whereas Poetic is a “symbolic action for itself, with contemplation of the text for its own sake (p. 26)5. This is the path through which literature at the turn of the twentieth century took to distinguish itself.

The traditional Rhetoric practiced at the late nineteenth century was based on the Newtonian Inductive scheme6, which viewed nature as an orderly mechanism and truth was always external to the individual. The key to unlocking the meaning of nature was to start with sense impression and work through a process of induction so that each individual could draw his/her own conclusion. Therefore, each individual could arrive at his/her own idea of truth.

5 Berlin points out in his book, he relied on Kenneth Burke’s “Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy” as well as on Todorov for this definition of Rhetoric and Poetic.
6 From middle to late nineteenth century, science was viewed as the method and course that will brighten human’s future. Not surprisingly, university was the champion of scientific method and science courses. The study of Philology mentioned in last chapter was a natural product of that time. Naturally, Rhetoric in late nineteenth century was molded in this fashion.
From the perspective of Rhetoric, the writer’s task is to reproduce through language his/her particular experience in the minds of readers. In this regard, language functions as a sign system that transcribes as close as possible sense experience. The task of the writing teacher is to teach the correct process of transcription. The emphasis is on: (A) arrangement—the order of experience is correctly recorded; (B) style—clarity is achieved and class affiliation is established. In other words, the function of writing is to present a “logical discourse” (Crane, 1952, p. 34). This mode of writing is still followed closely till this day.

Literature, of course, had no intention to be confined as a language of logic only. In order to distinguish itself, it had to broaden its scope by dealing with all aspects of language. Specifically, literature must show what Rhetoric is not. As Crane puts it: “the ‘symbolic language’ of poetry must necessarily posses the contraries of all qualities commonly asserted of ‘logical discourse’” (Crane, p. 34).

In 1910, Joel Spingarn at Columbia proposed the “New Criticism.” This proposal provided literature the theoretical basis to distinguish itself from Rhetoric firmly. Not coincidentally, in 1920, Modern Language Association (MLA) decided that its main interest was to be scholarship and scholarship only. It publicly acknowledged that teaching was no longer to be its concern. It relegated teaching as the primary concern of National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), established in 1911.

**Conflicting Visions about Universities**

Conflicting Views about Universities

Since late nineteenth century, three different types of universities had emerged in America: those emphasizing utility, those emphasizing liberal
culture, and those emphasizing research and graduate study (Veysey, 1965).  

From the perspective of teaching writing (at this stage writing instruction and freshman English courses were still not clearly distinguishable), two types of university represent two distinctively different curriculum design: Meritocracy vs. Liberal Education. Harvard and Columbia represented the Meritocracy model whereas Yale and Princeton represented the Liberal Education model.  

Meritocracy Education

In the Meritocracy model, university education was regarded as a means to educate “middleclass professionalism” (Berlin, p. 37). Reflected on the undergraduate curriculum, scientific method was closely observed, because “validation for the social and political arrangement that contributed to the welfare of the new meritocracy was thought to be rationally and empirically derived through an objective examination” (Berlin, p. 37). This philosophy was reflected in the structure of curriculum, the discipline of individual course, and the presentation of findings.

Under this philosophy, writing was regarded as a means for clear presentation. Thus, writing instruction was to focus primarily on: arrangements (forms of discourse: description, narration, exposition, and argument) and style (superficial correctness: barbarism, solecisms, improprieties). This obviously is a utilitarian view that advocates writing instruction ought to be offered to everyone and emphasizes practical competence. This model of writing instruction became the dominant form of writing instruction ever since.

Liberal Education

At the opposing end is the liberal education view, which regarded college education as a means for cultivating individual sensitivity to culture. The aim

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7 Universities emphasizing research and graduate study generally view writing instruction or English courses as the realm of undergraduate curriculum. In addition, the method and practice of writing instruction is not much different from universities emphasizing utility. Therefore, not much discussion in this paper involves this type of university.
of the liberal education was to inspire students to appreciate the spiritual qualities hidden behind material world. Thereby, students were able to achieve the goal of self-actualization and self-fulfillment (Berlin, 1987; Heyda, 1979).

The essence of this liberal education was to focus on the aesthetic as well as ethical aspects. Therefore, reading literature is important: First, to learn to appreciate the aesthetic and ethical challenges dealt with in the classics, thereby “making young men more sensitive, more observant, more just, more consistent, more spiritual” (Osgood, 1915, p. 234); Second, in the course of reading and discussing literature, students were able to find a subject about which he can start writing.

The purpose of this model of literary study was to attain a “spiritual vision” (Berlin, p. 45), from which the student could define the true significance of the material world. The study of language, art, and philosophy was regarded as best suited for attaining at ideals hidden beyond the material reality. This was a sharp contrast to the scientific method and professional competence advocated by universities like Harvard as well as the scientific philological study prevailing English departments in late nineteenth century.

For liberal education, the first step of literary study, of course, was to study the predecessors who had attained their spiritual vision. Therefore, students were expected to have immersed themselves in close reading of classic works before they could start writing about the aesthetical and ethical issues. Writing, for liberal education, was viewed as “the embodiment of spiritual vision” (Berlin, p. 45). As Osgood (1915) saw it, writing instruction was withheld until the last year of college and reserved only for those few who truly showed a good grasp of “the intellectual and spiritual health” (p. 234).

Obviously, such an education is not for average students. It equates creative writing as true writing that distinguishes the truly gifted and learned. The creative writing needs to be unique in expression and has an individual voice and organic form. Of course, in the context of the aristocratic environment of the time, originality and uniqueness still had to work within
certain social norms. Therefore, only gifted and learned few can attempt creative writing.

There is one irony, though. Liberal education denied the necessity of writing instruction, assuming students of liberal education were well-equipped for the task. In addition, the university’s literature curriculum should have taken care of the need. The reality is that the university always offered writing instruction courses to its freshman students.

IV. Conclusion: A Clear Goal amid Entangled Relationships

There were two factors at work that contributed to the struggle by English departments to establish English study an independent discipline:

1. To establish English the official language in university education.
2. To avert the fate of Rhetoric scholars: highly educated scholars doing laborious work of correcting and grading student papers.

The path the universities took to vitalize English study was to focus on the study of literature and language. At the fledging stage, English departments had to follow the course design of Rhetoric, though. From hiring scholars, materials, to course methodology, English departments were in essence following the model of Rhetoric, without following the footsteps of Rhetoric.

Because of its centuries old tradition of focusing on classics as well as studying Latin the “dead” language, Rhetoric had reduced itself largely to practicing rules and formats. English departments, though a close follower of Rhetoric model, clearly averted this path by emphasizing the Germanic idea of graduate study. From 1876—the time Johns Hopkins University established its graduate-oriented English departments and its unsuccessful pursuit of a Harvard professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, Johns Hopkins and Harvard had laid down a new path for English departments: concentrate on graduate study.

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8 The gap between ideal and reality is the essence of this irony. In practice, liberal education always had to offer writing course for beginning students for remedial purpose.
and relegate writing instruction downward as much as possible.

In terms of instruction, writing was still (and is always) an essential part of university education, from the college entrance examination, freshmen English, to literature courses, from Meritocracy-oriented Harvard and Columbia to Liberal education-oriented Yale and Princeton. The ability to write a clear, well-focused paper is always required. Of course, university English departments would like either Rhetoric or secondary schools to teach composition or writing instruction as much as possible.

**The Trend Was Set**

By early twentieth century, English departments had distinctively set themselves apart from Rhetoric. They had focused on graduate study and embraced new literary theories. Though still sharing quite some resemblance with Rhetoric, English departments had successfully washed their hands off the task of teaching composition or entry level writing, albeit not completely yet.
References