

PEDAGOGY OF DISEASE:  
RE-ENVISIONING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY FOR ECONOMICALLY-PRIVILEGED  
STUDENTS IN THE FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

By

MIKE MUHLHAUSER

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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Mike Muhlhauser

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Drawing from my experiences as a graduate instructor at the University of Florida, I argue in this thesis that existing models of Freirean-inspired critical pedagogies, such as *liberatory* and *emancipatory*, are inappropriate for application in those U.S. composition classrooms where students already enjoy a high degree of socioeconomic privilege. These models fail to address the gratifying relationship between such students and the uncritical reproduction of oppressive systems supporting their dominant hierarchical positions. As a result, these models fail to account for many students' resistance to critical, ideological engagement based upon the perception that to do so would be to work against their own best interests. As a means of negotiating such resistance consistent with the democratizing aims of critical pedagogies, I propose an alternative model: *disease*. Rather than attempting to free students from their realities, a pedagogy of disease would instead attempt to dialogically introduce into student consciousness a part

of their realities that affectively disrupts students' uncritical, ideological relationships with the status quo and, thereby, encourages greater critical engagement.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Getting an education was a bit like a communicable sexual disease. It made you unsuitable for a lot of jobs and then you had the urge to pass it on.

*Terry Pratchett*

The introduction of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* into the U.S. academic scene several decades ago made a significant impact on composition scholarship—even if some departments and scholars remain unaware of that influence. In an attempt to promote greater democratization in the classroom and, thereby, in the culture in general, Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, Victor Villanueva, and many others have written extensively about applying Freire's revolutionary insights and methods in the U.S. context, and all have made important contributions to how compositionists attempting to fight against oppressive pedagogical practices here are able to theorize and operate within the classroom. In conjunction with the work of these Freiristas, and at least in part because of broadening demographics in all aspects of higher education, the political content of classrooms has come under increasing and much-needed scrutiny. The implicit and otherwise unseen ideological forces that have always influenced classrooms may now increasingly be brought into full view in those spaces and become material for new fields of inquiry and, ultimately, new classrooms. Classrooms can now function as important areas for self-reflective inquiry and, in some cases, action. Because of this awareness of and commitment to the classroom as a location of political activity, critical pedagogies attempt not only to theorize those spaces but also to exploit them as means of cultural and ideological production. Thus critical classrooms provide an

opportunity for instructors and students alike to work against certain productions or to work toward an awareness of those means themselves, making the process more transparent and available to further and continued critical analysis. Critical pedagogies represent an important move forward for composition studies as well as for the academy at large.

Yet as classrooms in U.S. colleges become more diverse and at least potentially more self-reflective, students enroll at those institutions increasingly in hopes of readying themselves for corporate careers. Even those departments traditionally least concerned with vocational preparation, like English, are increasingly asked to accommodate “students whose main purpose for attending the university is to gain specific and directly applicable training for employment” (Strickland 77-78). Instructors who attempt to introduce critical pedagogies into the First Year Composition (FYC) classroom—which tends to draw students from a wide range of majors and socioeconomic backgrounds—encounter a difficult paradox: as postsecondary education becomes more accessible to those who might have the most to gain from critical engagement within a hierarchical culture, those who attend postsecondary institutions do so increasingly in hopes of reinserting themselves back into that hierarchy. Composition instructors who make the same attempt at academically-competitive state schools that use students’ high school performance and standardized test scores as the primary criteria for matriculation must negotiate the further difficulty of making critical pedagogy applicable for vocationally-oriented students who, because of the relationship between socioeconomic status and high school academic achievement, tend to come from more homogenous, relatively privileged backgrounds and have no self-apparent interest in challenging a system that offers a continuation of their economic and cultural authority. These instructors are

often working as untenured graduate students or adjunct employees at government-controlled institutions that operate increasingly under the influence of corporations and corporatizing interests and, thus, may face administrative and political obstacles at the same time. Resistance to the introduction of critical pedagogies comes not only from within the classroom, from students economically and emotionally invested in a personally-rewarding ideological status quo, but from without as well, from administrators and politicians invested in a vision of public postsecondary institutions as a means of producing an eager corporate workforce and compliant electorate. Resistance can also come from the instructors themselves, who may be concerned with how introducing critical pedagogies will affect their own careers or may be motivated by their own commitments to privileged identities. In fact, many graduate instructors only a few years earlier may have been in the same situations as the students they are working with.

The literature surrounding student resistance to critical pedagogy lacks a discussion of the possibility that in the case of privileged students such resistance may in many instances result from their perception that critical engagement with the status quo would not be in their economic best interest. Many of these students may be emotionally and ideologically invested in a system that in turn invests in them a disproportionate share of the total wealth and power of society. In the absence of a motivating reason for students to become engaged, they will continue to remain disinterested, if not antagonistic. Instructors who wish to encourage economically-privileged college students to become engaged in the critical classroom, then, must find a way to do so that will address the counter-productivity of these students' ideological hardening to the central, democratizing goal of a Freirean-based critical pedagogy, while at the same time respecting and affirming student resistance to it. Likewise, these instructors may wish to

develop an application of Freire's theories and methods that would be suitable for those privileged students for whom frequently-employed emancipatory and liberatory models would be inappropriate, yet who are as subject to "false consciousness" as those who occupy less-privileged positions in the hierarchy.

As a graduate instructor at the University of Florida (UF), working with students who in general come from a high degree of affluence, I have had some success encouraging engagement in a critical FYC classroom by modifying Freire's problem posing method. Rather than depending upon students' lived experiences to help them recognize problems within the culture, I first attempt to disease (dis-ease) their affective, uncritical relationship to the privileged lifestyles they typically enjoy so they may be in a better position to see the consequences of that privilege. I first became familiar with the difficulty of facilitating critical engagement within privileged student populations shortly after finishing my own undergraduate education while working as a mentor for a group of incoming freshman at Penn State University (PSU). Like those at UF, the students at PSU tend to come from affluent backgrounds and seem similarly unwilling to question the conditions underlying their privilege. It was with that group I began developing what I would now like to call a *pedagogy of disease*. As I moved on to study at the graduate level, and my interest in college classrooms began to change from general concern to professional investment as a teacher and scholar, the need to develop and support democratizing, critical pedagogies became even clearer to me. I became aware that unless challenged, the current political status quo (at both local and national levels) will continue to advance a view of higher education hostile not only to students' opportunities to develop as critical thinkers and responsible democratic agents, but to the continued professional survival of those academics who would encourage such engagement.

## CHAPTER 2 PEDAGOGY OF DISEASE

The observation that classrooms are political arenas is now commonplace. They are spaces in which personal, cultural, and institutional power differentials come to bear through the acts of ideological transmission and establishment of standards of knowing performed there. Especially in the case of public high schools and colleges, they are also spaces in which the interests of government and, increasingly, corporations come into contact with the interests of students and teachers. In *Theory and Resistance in Education*, Henry Giroux argues that during the Reagan years these public educational institutions instead of advancing democratic ideals were too often uncritically promoting the dominant political ideology:

Right wing versions of schooling at the time were heavily indebted either to teaching curricula that mirrored narrow, dominant assumptions about the world, making schools adjuncts of the workplace, or to imposing forms of technocratic rationality upon schools that turned them into testing and sorting models of assessment that reproduced the wide range of inequalities that characterized a larger social order. (xx)

Although the political mood of the country and its educational institutions do change, Giroux argues that the tendency for those institutions to uncritically promote the dominant ideology did not diminish during the Clinton administration and, thus, in 2001 revised and re-released his book. In his later assessment:

Teachers are under siege like they never have been in the past, and schools are assaulted relentlessly by the powerful forces of neoliberalism, which want to turn them into sources of profit. What is good for Disney and Microsoft is now the protocol for how we define schooling, learning, and the goals of education.... The breathless rhetoric of the global victory of free market rationality spewed forth by the mass media, right-wing intellectuals and governments alike, has found its material expression in

an all-out attack on democratic values and on the very notion of the public.  
(xxii)

The situation in 2005 may be even worse. The relatively democracy-friendly neoliberalism of the Clinton era has been supplanted by an increasingly-popular regressive, conservative fundamentalism. Likewise, the intrusion of market values and corporate interests into public schools is now accompanied by a reinforcing legislative intolerance for critical engagement with those ideologies supporting the new moral/political/economic establishment. Conditions in Florida are particularly troubling and emphasize both some of the difficulty of introducing more progressive pedagogies in the current political reality as well as the urgent need to do so.

On June 6, 2001, Governor Jeb Bush signed into law Senate Bill 1162,<sup>1</sup> thereby disbanding the Board of Regents, which until that time had been responsible for overseeing the entire state university system, and placing control over each university separately in its own Board of Trustees. This move seems to have been an attempt by Bush and other Conservatives in Tallahassee to gain greater political influence over public higher education in the state, at least in part to clear a path for the creation of a chiropractic school at Florida State University that the Regents would not authorize. Through a ballot initiative on November 5, 2002, however, those opposed to placing power solely in the Trustees won the approval of State Constitutional Amendment 11, which created a Board of Governors that would take over the role of central authority formerly occupied by the Regents. Yet the amendment did little or nothing to diminish the Governor's influence, as it codified that office's authority to appoint, either directly or indirectly, a significant majority of the Boards of Governors and Trustees.

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<sup>1</sup> Passed by the State Senate on April 4, 2001.

Predictably, with control of Florida's public colleges and universities presently in the hands of corporate-friendly Conservatives, postsecondary education in the state increasingly favors the corporations' need for a suitable workforce over the students' need to develop as democratic agents who might have an interest in being critical of corporate motives and practices. Such an arrangement may better position students to obtain and perform well at high paying jobs, but it prepares them little (and motivates them even less) to interrogate the social and political realities that make those jobs available to them. Consequently, a rhetoric of economic benefit now prevails in the absence of serious consideration of the state's implied educational mandate to prepare its citizens to be critical and responsible participants within a democracy rather than merely workers for the corporations.

On March 24, 2005, the Board of Governors' Strategic Planning Committee met to discuss the future of public higher education in the state. On the agenda were presentations concerning geographic access to public postsecondary institutions as well as a proposed mandate that by fiscal year 2012-13 public universities must "award 50% of all degrees in nine targeted programs identified by BOG [Board of Governors] and other groups as critical for development of the state's economy" (Balogh 2). Alarming, presenting on this later topic was a representative of MGT of America, a for-profit, Florida-based corporation whose "high-quality products" include "finding solutions to the problems that governments face" (MGT). The state is, apparently, outsourcing the future of its publicly-funded postsecondary institutions to those that stand the most to gain from their corporatization. Even included in the geographic access presentation was support for the board's corporatizing mandate. Embedded in his graphics-oriented summary of the state's geographical needs for degree-granting institutions, Dr. Grant

Thrall, a professor of Business Geography at U.F., informs that: “Higher education is the key to sustained economic growth. Florida’s economic future is tied to its higher education, especially emerging technology areas—Engineering, Physical Science, and Biology” (14).

The redefinition of higher education as a means to a predetermined political/corporate end at the same time undermines the intellectual independency of the academy<sup>2</sup> as it diminishes the capacity of students to exercise democratic agency within their own education and beyond. According to Giroux:

Missing from much of the corporate discourse on schooling is any analysis of how power works in shaping knowledge, how the teaching of broader social values provides safeguards against turning citizen skills into simply training skills for the work place, or how schooling can help students reconcile the seemingly opposing needs of freedom and solidarity in order to forge a new conception of civic courage and democratic public life. (“Vocationalizing” 36)

Not only will the Board of Governors’ mandate take from students the ability to choose what degrees and/or careers they will pursue, but it will also begin to diminish the size and alter the traditional role of those unprofitable fields—like English and Philosophy—that tend to be concerned more with cultural and ideological criticism than with technical or vocational training.<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey J. Williams observes that:

Universities [especially public] are now being conscripted directly as training grounds for the corporate workforce, obviously in the growth of business departments but impacting the humanities too, in the proliferation of more ‘practical’ degrees in technical writing and the like. In fact, university work has been more directly construed to serve not only

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<sup>2</sup> Growing corporate control over the reporting of results from university-based clinical testing of prescription drugs is already a well-recognized problem.

<sup>3</sup> Instructors in the humanities are not the only ones able to work towards critical engagement, although they are, perhaps, best situated to do so because of their disciplines’ traditional emphasis on intellectual development as an end in itself (at least at the undergraduate level) rather than as a means of obtaining a specific career-oriented end. In some cases, students’ only experience with humanities courses comes from fulfilling *general education* or *core curriculum* obligations, which may include a FYC or other composition requirement.

corporate-profit agendas via its grant-suppliant status, but universities have become franchises in their own right, reconfiguring according to corporate management, labor, and consumer models and delivering a name-brand product. (18)

Such a disempowering of students and those academics critical of the new status quo may, in fact, be one of the goals of much of the recent political activity surrounding higher education in Florida.

Two years ago at the University of Florida, control over basic composition courses (including its version of the FYC course) transferred from the English Department to a newly-created administrative entity: the University Writing Program (UWP).<sup>4</sup> To justify this significant change, the initiators and subsequent administrators of the UWP claimed that potential employers were dissatisfied with the preparedness of UF undergraduates to write in the workplace. The UWP made its justification public on its website.

For the past decade, employers, educators, and researchers have all agreed on one thing: writing is one of the most important skills students must master to succeed both in college and at virtually any job. These same groups all agreed on one further item: entering and graduating college students seldom know how to write proficiently. Despite required courses in composition at universities and colleges nationwide, few students entering the workplace write well enough to satisfy their employers. For example, according to the most recent Florida Employer Opinion Survey (FEOS), most employers ranked writing abilities among the most important skills new employees needed in the workplace. In the same survey, however, Florida employers also ranked written and oral communication skills among new employees' greatest deficiencies. These deficiencies, some studies suggest, may stem both from the limited quantity of writing currently required of students in most universities and from the ways in which writing has been taught.

There is cause, however, to question the veracity of the claim that UF was not training its students sufficiently well to write for the contemporary business environment—to say

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<sup>4</sup> Other than the materials published on the UWP's website, much of the information about this change is no longer publicly available.

nothing of its relevance to the aims of either higher-education or composition as a discipline. UWP administrators offered no evidence to suggest that employers were any more dissatisfied with UF undergraduates than with those from other institutions. In fact, evidence supporting the claim that UF students were deficient in the eyes of the business community was never more than anecdotal. It could very well have been the case that UF undergrads were actually quite well prepared compared to other undergraduates nationally and employers generally well pleased with their performance. Nor was there reason to believe that UWP administrators and instructors, who had little to no background or training in composition, were, in fact, the ones most suitable to accomplish their own stated goals.

A more likely explanation for this change (importantly, at Florida's premier state university) is that influential conservative and corporate state interests were unhappy with the political content of the composition courses while housed in the English Department. Under its supervision, the graduate students who taught most of the courses determined much of the content and drew from their own academic areas, including feminist, post-colonial, queer and Marxist studies. Regardless of undergraduates' abilities to conform to contemporary standard business writing practices, the critical exposure students were gaining in these composition classrooms would most certainly be disruptive of business as usual at most corporations—disruptive as well of an uncritical constituency. If nothing else, and however speciously, the UWP promised a more docile, more corporate-suitable product. Rather than encouraging a view of writing as a complicated and potentially critical form of social and political engagement, the UWP intended merely to train students so they would “write well enough to satisfy their employers” (UWP Website). At the same time, control over hundreds of composition courses at the university would

transfer from those who were most expert in the field and most interested in promoting composition's disciplinary aims independently of the needs of other departments and external interests to those who were most interested in subverting its academic and intellectual autonomy in favor of external, corporate concerns. In the new arrangement, the English department at UF was even denied an advisory role.<sup>5</sup>

The manner in which the UWP conducted its courses had significant implications both for the undergraduates required to take those courses and for those of us required to teach them. At the beginning of each week, students individually would watch, via the internet, a pre-recorded lecture given by one of the faculty. Later in the week, students would meet twice in classes of approximately twenty with a graduate instructor, who was required to quiz the students on the material contained in the internet lecture, further explain that material, and assign and grade student papers. In addition to the weekly lectures and basic format, the UWP standardized the textbooks and syllabi, so we could have little control over the content of the classes. As is typical of other situations in which graduates are teaching early in their academic careers, our supervisors periodically conducted observations, ideally in order to help us develop as teachers and give guidance and direction to emerging professionals. In the case of the UWP observations, however, many of us perceived these interactions to serve much more of a policing function. Where once there was an atmosphere of respect and appreciate for graduate labor, there was now one of intimidation. We were not, however, concerned only with our own working conditions. Many of us had significant pedagogical concerns as well.

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<sup>5</sup> Needless to say, those who had formerly been in control of the composition program at UF were not happy with these changes. Nor did they surrender without a fight. Two years later, the UWP exists as a separate entity, but the English department once again has a significant role in its administration. The UWP is continuing to evolve in that direction.

The weekly lectures were exemplary of an uncritical and retrogressive adherence to prescriptive writing practices, a blatant and unwarrantable return to a conservative *back to basics* ideology that strategically ignores the connection between education and ideology that it is a reaction to in the first place. In such an understanding, the composition classroom can be imagined only as a place to drill and train rather than a location valuable in itself for what it can contribute to students' understanding of the relationships between language, their perceptions of reality, and the political and social conditions in which they live. The UWP, courting conservative and corporate friends, advertised its modest assessment of the composition classroom on its homepage, while assuring its friends of a favorable change in disciplinary politics.

As the University Writing Program courses are based on the premise that writing is a transferable skill necessary for success in all academic and professional fields, courses are strongly grounded in the study of writing in many disciplines, not just the study of traditional English literature texts. In this way, we aim to broaden students' understanding of the purpose, value, and scope of writing.

Particularly egregious is the claim that an understanding of writing as a “transferable skill” could help to “broaden students’ understanding of the purpose, value, and scope of writing.” Many contemporary compositionists, including Joe Marshal Hardin,<sup>6</sup> instead argue that structuralist and post-structuralist theorists have shown that we can begin to understand rhetorical production, including writing, only within the political and social contexts in which it occurs and is received. The UWP’s limited vision of writing, in fact, consistently undervalued it as an intellectual and political activity at the same time it ignored if not undermined decades of composition scholarship. In so doing, the UWP attempted to relegate the field to a service discipline and the role of those who work in it

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<sup>6</sup> See chapter 3 of *Opening Spaces: Critical Pedagogy and Resistance Theory in Composition*.

to the rank of second-class academics, even while their own justification for doing so was uninformed.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the UWP lectures and informational materials (available publicly because on-line) were the source of much anger and anxiety among the composition professionals who viewed them and discussed what became known as the “Florida Situation” in an ongoing national conversation.

As Angela Crow and Peggy O’Neill suggest in their introduction to *A Field of Dreams*, the growing trend for Composition programs to “divorce” from their former pairings with English departments combined with the complicated interdepartmental political maneuvering that will follow means “many in independent writing departments would like to be creating the department of the future” (4). Underlying at least some of compositionists’ concerns regarding the situation at UF was the realization that if such a takeover were successful there, their programs could be next. To passively surrender control of a writing program to administrators who have virtually no understanding of current composition scholarship—who, in fact, openly and eagerly espoused pedagogical practices long-ago discredited—would be to contribute to the false perceptions not only that contemporary composition scholarship is intellectually defunct but also that the field is primarily a service discipline best managed by others. Many of us required to teach within this framework and who as graduate students had a stake in the future of the academy were also upset. At least one took action.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For a more thorough discussion of the compromised role of Composition in the contemporary academy, see Sharon Crowley’s *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays* and *Rhetoric and Composition as Intellectual Work*, edited by Gary Olson.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Berube and Cary Nelson, among others, have written at great length about the need for a vigorous response on the part of academics, including graduate instructors, to deteriorating working conditions at institutions of higher education as a result of increasing corporatization.

This instructor recognized that the new program's pedagogy represented a regression back to what Paulo Freire's critically termed the *Banking Method*,<sup>9</sup> so when his day came to be observed, he dialogically engaged the students on that very topic, hoping to help raise critical consciousness in connection to the UWP in one of its own classes. This instructor was having a bit of gently-malicious fun with his supervisor (who, consequently, was not amused), but he was also presenting a significant and clever argument. At the same time he was introducing Freire's pedagogy as an ideological counterpoint to UWP practices, he was demonstrating that it was pertinent to the situation at hand and could be an effective means of resisting it. According to that instructor, the students made the critical connections between Freire and their classroom, and they did so in front of the representative the UWP had sent to discourage such unauthorized activity. The students were beginning to tap into a consciousness necessary to become critically-aware thinkers, writers, and voters—they were finding a political voice. At the same time, the instructor was announcing through the lesson that he had a degree of control over the situation that he would not surrender, a degree of control that he would use to express his objections and resist. Thus at least one of the classrooms the UWP claimed to depoliticize had been reinvigorated. This instructor had transformed it from a place of hidden political content into one of open political activity, a space in which the unconscious and uncritical reinscription of ideological value could no longer occur without disruption. This graduate instructor did not see the composition classroom as a place where instructors (even graduate instructors) should be compelled to prepare students to conform to corporate requirements. Instead, he was trying to help the students

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<sup>9</sup> The Banking method assumes students are passive receptacles for the teacher-as-authority to deposit knowledge into. I offer a further discussion below.

understand more critically the ideological context in which they were studying so they could have more control over their situations. Rather than contributing to the production of student identities for corporate consumption, he was helping students to engage the world in such a way that they would be better able to express themselves as democratic agents in it.

Unfortunately, however, not all attempts at encouraging student critical engagement are so successful. This instructor succeeded that day because the class was willing for a limited time to share in his enthusiasm for challenging a figure of authority. For the students, it was an isolated act of semi-sanctioned rebelliousness, an opportunity to express some of the frustrations of being students and younger people. Without question, many of them would be more likely to recognize the use of the banking method in future classes, and even understand how such a method demands of them only passive compliance. Yet few if any would be likely to see such temporary disempowerment as anything other than the price to pay for an opportunity to have the high-powered careers they hope to gain as a result. In general, the students at UF *want* the university to prepare them for corporate needs. For those of us at UF attempting to help students find their way towards critical consciousness in the classroom—including the one who conducted the successful Freire discussion—this commitment to a vocationalized view of education on the part of students is the source of ongoing frustration. Of course, more progressive instructors in Florida face equally substantial resistance from outside the academy as well.

Using student empowerment as a smokescreen, conservative legislators in Florida (and elsewhere across the country) have recently attempted to pass legislation that would most likely give students legal cause to sue instructors who take strong political positions

in the classroom.<sup>10</sup> Many of these bills, including the now-defeated Florida House Bill 837 (HB837) “Student and Faculty Academic Freedom in Postsecondary Education,” are based upon an inappropriately-named *Academic Bill of Rights*, drafted by David Horowitz, who is a leader of the conservative group Students for Academic Freedom. While the bill’s supporters promoted it as necessary to protect marginalized student voices in an ostensibly increasingly-liberal academy, its adoption would only have reinforced and advanced the already dominant conservative agenda of the culture at large. HB837 would have legislated the following conditions (among others):

Students have a right to expect a learning environment in which they will have access to a broad range of serious scholarly opinion pertaining to the subjects they study. In the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts, the fostering of a plurality of serious scholarly methodologies and perspectives should be a significant institutional purpose.

Students have a right to expect that their academic freedom and the quality of their education will not be infringed upon by instructors who persistently introduce controversial matter into the classroom or coursework that has no relation to the subject of study and serves no legitimate pedagogical purpose.

Conservatives support such a bill because it would function as a tactical response to the so-called liberal bias in the academy by providing a legal mechanism both for chilling progressive discourse—coded as a persistent introduction of “controversial matter into the classroom”—and for compelling recognition of hegemonic ideology—coded unironically as “access to a broad range of serious scholarly opinion” and the “fostering of a plurality of serious scholarly methodologies and perspectives.”<sup>11</sup> What is disturbing is not that conservatives and/or fundamentalists would want a space for curricular

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<sup>10</sup> The Floridian version, House Bill 837, has been defeated, but efforts to adopt such legislation nationwide are still underway.

<sup>11</sup> A parallel effort on the part of several school boards across the country to reintroduce creationism into public school curriculums as a *competing theory* for the existence of life has already been underway for several years.

expression and legitimization of their views. A well-functioning democracy should welcome strong voices from the fringes as well as the mainstream. Instead, what is so troubling is the success with which the politically and economically powerful are at present able to redefine the role of higher education to serve only the limited goals of those already in power (including the corporations) rather than to foster the democratic potential and rights of students and instructors. Adding to this injury, these interests are attempting to eliminate the academy's traditional role as a source of robust and will-informed critical voices at a time when dissent is as necessary as it ever was.

Rather than attending classes, tens of thousands of college-aged men and women (far too many from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds) are at this moment fighting a war that benefits the citizens of none of the countries involved. The national media, control over which is increasingly collapsing into the hands of a few corporations, appears unable or unwilling to be appropriately critical of recent U.S. actions, or even to allow sufficient airtime for a rigorous examination of the situation. In fact, the current administration took advantage of the media's lack of vigilance in the months preceding the war, using it to generate support through the dissemination of incorrect and, in some cases, contradictory information. In the current environment, classrooms that do not ask for critical engagement from students—that instead require passive acceptance of hegemonic assumptions—contribute to the indoctrination of students into a culture of corporate dominance and compromise an opportunity for students to develop as critical democratic agents at a time when their contemporaries' lives are immanently and needlessly in danger.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> According to a CNN exit poll, 41% of voters in Florida between the ages of 18-29 voted for George W. Bush in the 2004 election. Although not a majority, CNN reports that votes for Bush in that age group rose 1% over the last presidential election (CNN.com). If these numbers are close to accurate, they suggest that

Despite the present need for democratizing, consciousness-building education, however, those of us attempting to introduce critical pedagogies may too frequently discover that a surprising number of the students we hope to reach are ideologically and emotionally committed to an economic and political status quo that identifies the role of postsecondary institutions as manufacturing identities suitable for corporate and political consumption rather than encouraging critical and responsible democratic engagement. In far too many cases, perhaps, students would rather perform simple tasks for grades than do the type of ideological soul-searching otherwise required. Thirty-five years ago, the political situation on university campuses was somewhat different. A conspicuous number of students had the opposite reaction to a similar war: they got angry, began interrogating a culture that could support such a use of military power, and became critically involved in their democracy (at least in the short term). Yet we should not believe that students thirty-five years ago were any less motivated by career interests before the Vietnam War became such a concern in their daily lives, or that students today are any less concerned with their lives and their futures than their parents' generation. Quite to the contrary, contemporary students' resistance to critical engagement in the classroom may be that generation's way of acting in what they generally perceive to be their best interest.

During the Vietnam War, college-aged males could be drafted, and images of U.S. casualties were broadcast almost nightly on the major TV networks. Today's "All-Volunteer" Army and tightly-controlled, *infotainment*-oriented media distance most contemporary students from the consequences of the enfranchisement the previous

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a significant if not growing number of college-aged voters in this state continue to support an administration that placed their generation's futures in jeopardy by leading the country into a politically-dubious and protracted war with no clearly-defined exit strategy.

generation earned for them—especially those who come from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds, who have few or no personal connections with those in the military and for whom joining the military was never an attractive option. Thirty-five years ago, students helped move the nation towards critical consciousness because they could not help but recognize that what was at stake in becoming critically engaged was their lives and their futures. In the absence of a compelling reason to question a status quo that promises *Bright Futures*, however, students today may believe that it is in their best interests not to look too deeply.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the already well-documented correlation between educational attainment and income is steadily increasing (“The Big Payoff”), and students are well aware that the degrees they seek will make entrance into adult lives of consumer-culture relevancy and material prosperity much easier. Those who graduate with in-demand degrees and good GPAs from academically-competitive schools have not only better initial job prospects to look forward to than those with less or less prestigious education, but also greater access to graduate and professional schools, from which they will graduate with even greater earning potential. Other than the debt many may incur,<sup>13</sup> perhaps they can see little or no reason to question either the political, economic, and cultural conditions that support such desirable lifestyles or the pedagogical practices that get them there, even when those practices deny them an active role in their own education. Students who keep their heads down and do what is asked of them are rewarded with the good life.

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<sup>13</sup> Even the growing burden of college debt seems only to motivate students that much more towards obtaining high-paying, corporate careers, so that they can pay back the money they owe, in many instances, to corporate-owned banks. In this company-store-like arrangement, the corporations cannot lose. They get a well-prepared and motivated workforce that is compelled to return some of its wages.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire is critical of what he calls the Banking Method—in which the authoritative teacher deposits truth and knowledge into passive students, as if receptacles—because it situates students as unable to respond to the form or content of their education. Yet such a method is acceptable or even desirable to many students in the U.S. whose primary educational aim is to make themselves marketable to employers. The technical and professional knowledge with which they allow themselves to be filled becomes valuable capital from which they can draw a profit in the form of well-compensated careers. In Florida, the state’s investment in some of its students is more literal. Higher-achieving instate high school students who attend Floridian public postsecondary institutions are awarded Bright Future Grants, which fully cover tuition and are paid for through funds raised in the state’s lottery.<sup>14</sup>

The state’s motivation for funding its best students’ higher education at state-controlled institutions is, of course, not disinterested. In doing so, it is able to ensure for its powerful corporate constituents a continuing supply of ready, able, and willing white-collar workers who have had minimal exposure to views critical of the growing corporate hegemony. The state is also able to produce for itself a population of critically-disengaged voters, thankful for their *free* educations. As a result, students’ need for democratizing education is subverted in favor of the state’s economic and political needs, which are internalized and normalized by the students. In spite of the fact that students who accept this free education must enter into an arrangement in which self-serving corporate and political interests will be in a position to dictate the terms of their education, which increasingly de-emphasize the need for helping students develop the

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<sup>14</sup> Florida’s arrangement is not unique. Georgia as well has a college scholarship program funded by lottery revenue.

critical tools necessary to negotiate on a more equal footing with those interests, many students remain eager to complete the process and get to the careers waiting for them at the end. Nor does the state have to spend any of its own revenue to accomplish this feat. Florida is able to buy the futures of its brightest students with money from those who play the lottery. Thus while the state seems unconcerned with the capacity for its young hopefuls to develop as critical, democratic agents, it is more than willing to redistribute quasi-public wealth and economic opportunity in their direction—upwards.

Other than the requirement that recipients must be Florida residents, Bright Futures is an exclusively *merit*-based<sup>15</sup> program that makes no meaningful provisions for minority status or socioeconomic background. The state awards scholarships to National Merit or Achievement Scholars and Finalists, National Hispanic Scholars, and those who receive a score of at least 1270 SAT /or 28 ACT and graduate from a college-preparatory or equivalent curriculum with a GPA of at least 3.5 (Florida Department of Education, “Eligibility”). A significant body of research conducted over the last forty-plus years indicates that minorities, other than Asian, as well as those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to score lower on the SAT and other standardized tests than those from the dominant culture and the wealthy (Crouse and Trusheim; Owen and Doerr; Sacks; Weiss, Beckwith, and Schaeffer; Zwick). Barbara Zwick adds that privileged students earn higher high school GPAs as well. Thus because the distribution of Bright Futures as well as admission into Florida’s most academically-competitive state university, UF, are based upon criteria that discriminate along economic lines, one would expect that

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<sup>15</sup> I emphasize the word merit because it (mis)represents the ostensibly fair and objective criteria upon which the state awards Bright Futures scholarships. Such “merit”-based programs are the result of conservative ideologies based upon the dubious belief that quantifiable academic achievement represents effort and inclination independently from socioeconomic factors. Florida depends heavily on standardized testing also to measure the performance of primary and secondary public schools and students throughout the state.

students enrolled there and receiving full scholarships tend to come from privileged backgrounds. In an email responding to a request for information about students' family income, Karen Fooks, the Director of Student Financial Affairs at UF, asserts that although the university is not certain of the precise economic demographics of its student population, the best available evidence suggests that they do, in fact, come from affluence.<sup>16</sup>

To the best of my knowledge there is no true income information about the UF student body. The Office for Student Financial Affairs does survey all freshmen families every few years, however, response to the survey is purely voluntary so would probably not meet the test of reliability or validity. We use it monitor trends rather than to say specifically what the average income is. The last survey was undertaken in Fall 2002 and the results were that the median parental income for freshmen students was \$85,000-\$89,999. Only 13.45% of the families reported incomes below \$30,000. We do not know the maximum incomes because our survey (check box of ranges) tops out at \$100,000. We had a 30% response rate to the survey.

Approximately 95% of our in-state freshmen receive a Bright Futures Scholarship and the last time we checked (several years ago) 60% of the recipients did not apply for aid or had no need.

It is reasonable to say that our undergraduate students are generally from affluent upper-middle income families or better and that Bright Futures is going to many students who could certainly afford to come here even without the scholarship.<sup>17</sup>

As a comparison, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the median income for all Floridian families in 2002 was between \$45,950 and \$47,604—approximately \$46,777 (“Selected Income Characteristics”). The median income for families that send their children to UF and who rarely pay tuition, then, is likely close to double that of all

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<sup>16</sup> The tone of this email, which anticipates a question I did not ask, concerning whether or not students at UF could afford to attend without Bright Futures, seems to suggest that I am not the only one who has been making inquiries about students' financial backgrounds in connection with the appropriateness of their receiving such scholarships.

<sup>17</sup> Karen Fooks has granted her permission to reprint this email.  
Fooks, Karen. “Re: Request for Info.” Email to Mike Muhlhauser. 20 June 2005.

families in the state. Thus the over \$202 million that the Florida Department of Education estimates it distributed in 2002-2003 to Bright Futures recipients went disproportionately to those who needed it least. What is worse is that the money for these scholarships comes disproportionately from those who need it most.

While researchers do not all agree that those from lower socioeconomic positions play the lottery more often, a significant number do note that those from the lower positions play at least as frequently and that for them the price of a ticket represents a proportionately higher outlay. Citing this regressive tax on the less-affluent as well as the tendency for Bright Futures scholarship money to flow towards the more-privileged, two Professors of Economics at the University of North Florida have concluded that:

Essentially, the [Bright Futures] Scholarship Program and other lottery-funded merit scholarship programs like it, are tantamount to an income redistribution program from non-white, low-income, uneducated households to white, rich, well-educated households. (Borg and Stranahan)

The majority of UF students come from privilege; that privilege is compensated with free attendance at the state's most prestigious public university at the expense of those less fortunate; and their attendance is rewarded with reentry back into the economically-privileged environments from which they originally came.

Nor are the lifestyles of those privileged in the U.S. supported by domestic exploitation alone. The U.S. enjoys as high a standard of living as it does only at the expense of others in less-wealthy, less-powerful nations. Thus it is in many UF students' perceived best interest not to care too much about the spread of democratic values because, in short, they often benefit from a system of domestic and international oppression. Instructors who hope to bring a Freirean-inspired pedagogy into the classroom at privileged institution in the U.S., then, should take into consideration that

they are teaching not the oppressed but, in some significant ways, the oppressors. Also, while the material conditions an oppressed peasantry experience daily strongly motivate towards developing critical consciousness, the extreme privilege some U.S. college students enjoy motivates equally strongly against recognizing even the most obvious contradictions to human freedom. This insight raises the complicated and related questions of how instructors can successfully encourage these students to look beyond their own self-motivating, perceived best interests (i.e., toward critical consciousness) and if doing so is an unacceptable infringement upon student agency within a critical pedagogy context? Composition instructors should not forget, either, that students often already enter into the FYC classroom prepared to disregard its importance because they do not see how it will help move them further towards their professional goals.<sup>18</sup>

Nor are students not the only ones who risk losing access to ideologically comfortable bourgeois lives thorough participation in critical classrooms. Just as many students want to take classes that will help them begin lucrative careers, many of those who teach would prefer not to offer classes that will jeopardize their professional positions—especially non-tenured adjunct and graduate instructors, who occupy a significant number of composition positions. The apparent material conditions of students', teachers' and student-teachers' lives in many cases at U.S. colleges quite simply do not in-themselves warrant inviting the danger implicit in challenging the authority and security of the status quo. Students may not be invested in developing critical consciousness for the simple reason that it is not in their perceived best interest to do so. Nor are teachers generally willing to risk their professional careers—or, perhaps,

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<sup>18</sup> Sharon Crowley has made clear an unwillingness on the part of many university administrations and faculties to improve the status of FYC in the academy, frequently relegating it to the status of a service-learning course.

students' academic/economic futures—to engage in a truly revolutionary pedagogy. In fact, graduate students and other instructors in many cases come from privileged backgrounds similar to the students and may be equally resistant to abandoning such lifestyles because of their own ideological commitments. Students' and teachers' lives alike may be quite comfortable so long as neither causes too much trouble in the classroom. In one of his “dialogue-books,” Ira Shor addresses teachers' concerns about introducing unconventional pedagogies in a discussion with Freire.

When I speak with teachers, fear is like a damp presence hovering in the room. I suspect that more people feel this fear than speak openly about it. It's embarrassing to admit publicly that what stands in the way is not only the difficulty of experimenting with students, but also the professional or political risks accompanying opposition. There is also, Paulo, something I referred to earlier [in the dialogue], a fear of the students' rejection of liberatory pedagogy. (*A Pedagogy for Liberation* 54)

Even for teachers who overcome their own fears and economic motivations, there is still the task of finding a way to address privileged students' resistance in the critical classroom in such a way to both respect its impulse and encourage productive engagement. At present, the literature surrounding Freirean-based pedagogies cannot offer a solution. In fact, not all theorists are convinced that Freire has a place in the U.S. classroom. According to Andrea Greenbaum:

There are critics, however, who have questioned the legitimacy of incorporating Freire's liberatory agenda into American universities and who have argued that Freirean pedagogy is neither applicable nor even desirable for American students. Critics such as Victor Villaneuva [sic] and Henry Giroux have denounced the appropriation of Freirean pedagogy within academic environments, arguing that American Freiristas (Villaneuva's [sic] term) not only dilute and often misconstrue Freire's work, but have also commodified radical pedagogy for their own purposes. (86)

Giroux does not, however, entirely dismiss Freire's relevance in the U.S. context.

Instead, he argues:

Freire's work must be read as a postcolonial text and that North Americans, in particular, must engage in a radical form of border crossing in order to reconstruct Freire's work in the specificity of its historical and political construction. Specifically, this means making problematic a politics of location situated in the privilege and power of the West and how engaging the question of the ideological weight of such a position constructs one's specific reading of Freire's work. At the same time, becoming a border crosser engaged in a productive dialogue with others means producing a space in which those dominant social relations, ideologies, and practices that erase the specificity of the voice of the other must be challenged and overcome. (*Paulo Freire*)

In other words, western intellectuals and teachers must disrupt their own cultural positions and economic privilege or risk reading Freire from the same colonizing perspective that Giroux argues thinkers like Freire attempt to work against.

Although U.S. instructors face some significant personal and theoretical difficulties regarding the way in which they can approach (rather than appropriate) Freire for application in U.S. classrooms, these difficulties are not insurmountable. Giroux is but one example of a scholar who is able to locate the importance of Freire's work while simultaneously allowing its relevance in the U.S. context to remain as complicated as it is. At the same time, however, frequently-used models associated with critical pedagogy like *emancipatory* and *liberatory*—models Giroux uses throughout his writings—may be misapplied when used in connection with the privileged students with whom some instructors in this country work. Even the least-advantaged college students in the U.S. enjoy a degree of privilege far in excess of what was available to those Freire initially identifies as the oppressed, if for no other reason than because they have access to U.S. colleges. A new model is necessary to account for U.S. students' different realities, especially for those who are the most privileged among the privileged.

Likewise, Freire's problem-posing method (which affirms student agency through their recognizing social problems and discovering solutions) remains useful, but

instructors should remember that many of the problems inherent in the current power structure are advantageous to privileged students in the U.S. and, therefore, may not represent something they will hope to resolve—if seen as problems at all. Again, even the relatively underprivileged within the U.S. context may not have sufficient motivation to risk what they do have. Thus posing such problems will not always provide the personal challenge that Freire claims will motivate a commitment to developing critical consciousness. In fact, that such problems do not yet already trouble more U.S. students anticipates their resistance to critical engagement in the first place. Underprivileged students may come into the classroom already primed with at least a latent sense, encoded in their experiences, of the consequences of oppression and, thus, of what is at stake in becoming critically engaged. More-privileged students, however, may not yet have had any significant exposure at all. Quite to the contrary, the positions these students enjoy within the hierarchy likely have protected them from experiencing or even coming into contact with the less-desirable consequences of their privilege. While in Freire's theorizing of problem posing an exploration of the problem precedes the challenge, perhaps to be relevant to privileged students in the U.S., because of their inverted relationship to the problems of oppression, the challenge must precede the problem. In other words, before students may be able to recognize problems within a system that works to their advantage, perhaps the instructor must first create an environment in which students will likely find the affective motivation to look beyond the privilege that system protects.

In *Bootstraps*, Villanueva illustrates how one teacher is able to employ a Freirean-based pedagogy with limited success while working with economically unprivileged, primarily African-American youths. Villanueva makes clear that this teacher's efforts

were not ideologically unproblematic, yet there can be no question that the move to employ such a pedagogy was warranted. Importantly, however, Villanueva observes that even though these students and the teacher were among those who least benefited from a myth situating America as a place of democratic and economic opportunity, they had internalized it to such a degree that they were unable to critically move beyond it. If those who have the most, potentially, to gain from critical engagement with the status quo were predisposed to resist, those who have the most to gain from resisting may prove an even harder group to reach.

Ira Shor argues that students offer resistance in both more traditional classrooms as well as in more experimental, critical ones, but for somewhat different reasons. In the case of the former, he attributes it, often in the form of poor performance, to bad feelings associated with a competitive and authoritarian environment.

The difference between empowering and traditional pedagogy has to do with the positive or negative feelings students can develop for the learning process. In traditional classrooms, negative emotions are provoked in students by teacher-centered politics. Unilateral teacher authority in a passive curriculum arouses in many students a variety of negative emotions: self-doubt, hostility, resentment, boredom, indignation, cynicism, disrespect, frustration, the desire to escape. These student affects are commonly generated when an official culture and language are imposed from the top down ignoring the students' themes, languages, conditions, and diverse cultures. Their consequent negative feelings interfere with learning and lead to strong anti-intellectualism in countless students as well as alienation from civic life.... In contrast, an empowering educator seeks a positive relationship between feeling and thought. (*Empowering Education* 23-24)

In this understanding the traditional, teacher-centered classroom does not take into proper consideration the affective and specific cultural needs of the students. Shor finds an alternative to this problem in a pedagogy more empowering for students, an alternative in which students are more involved in the conduct of the class. Yet students will resist in

this environment as well. Shor asserts that some students will reject the progressive politics of such a class, while others will likewise resist the increased or changed expectations placed on them.

Students might want to ask out loud, What the hell do you want? Why don't you just fill the hour with teacher-talk and let me copy down the answers silently, staring at you with glassy eyes, making believe I am listening to your words flying through the air while in fact I am dreaming about beer or dope or sex or Florida or the big football game or the party this weekend. Students are long-habituated to passive schooling, which made them feel I had no right to make critical demands on them. (*A Pedagogy for Liberation* 24-25)

Accustomed to traditional arrangements, students may not feel comfortable in a new one. This problem becomes compounded when teachers expect privileged students to become invested in critical consciousness, which is neither familiar nor seemingly desirable.

Like Shor, Giroux and Roger I. Simon recognize the significant role that student affectivity plays in developing and implementing a critical pedagogy. They make the important observation that classrooms are not merely spaces in which hegemonic meaning is inscribed or resisted, but, rather, locations in which cultures meet and struggle against one another for dominance. Students have their own cultures, among them popular culture. Giroux and Simon argue that critical pedagogy would be well-served to develop a more sophisticated understanding of that culture in order to better account for student experience. The two suggest incorporating popular culture into the critical classroom would validate these experiences and empower the students. Included in that understanding should be an awareness of the role that pleasure plays in the formation of students' identities.

while the production of meaning provides one important element in the production of subjectivity, it is not enough. The production of meaning is also tied to emotional investments and the production of pleasure. In our view, the production of meaning and the production of pleasure are

mutually constitutive of who students are, the view they have of themselves, and how they construct a particular version of their future. (“Decolonizing the Body” 182)

Giroux and Simon are correct that students’ subjectivities need more and more careful attention than traditional classrooms allow and that teachers should never invalidate or disempower student identities. But liberatory and emancipatory models of critical education when applied to privileged students mistakenly ignore their economic and cultural power and the pleasure that power implies, consequently placing undue emphasis on the immediate circumstances of the traditional classroom. As discussed above, such students often see either no relevance or no benefit to engaging critical consciousness and, thus, will not become emotionally invested in the critical elements of a classroom even if they are invested in other aspects. Also, while students as such are traditionally in subordinate positions relative to the teacher within the classroom environment, in the culture at large and upon graduating those who attend academically-competitive universities are already and will increasingly be among the most powerful.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps, then, just as Giroux argues instructors must disrupt their own privileged identity as northerner intellectuals in order to read Freire, those instructors should at the same time encourage a disruption of the pleasure that reinforces privileged students’ identities so that they too are better positioned to read the world more critically and more openly. While instructors should respect student subjectivities and identities in the classroom, they should not forget they also bear the responsibility to engage and direct students—

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<sup>19</sup> One way in which students increasingly do feel empowered in the classroom is through the specious perception, growing more common as colleges migrate further towards corporate identification, that their taxes and/or tuition position them as paying customers for their instructors to serve. Such an arrangement would most certainly disrupt the traditional, hierarchical teacher-student relationship, but in so doing, it would only further erode the independency of the academy from undemocratic market values and diminish the capacity of instructors to substantively challenge students’ uncritical acceptance of preexisting ideologies.

otherwise the relationship between the two is invalid, and instructors have nothing to offer.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues that the struggle for human liberation must be cooperative. Regardless of relative positioning, none who are engaged in a system of oppression are free, while all must work towards their own emancipation. To remain true to the spirit of a Freirean-inspired pedagogy, then, instructors should retain a dialogical format in the classroom and engage students as subjects in and for themselves. Otherwise instructors run the risk of reinscribing the oppressive condition they aim to work against. Importantly, however, Freire at the same time allows for the necessity (at least philosophically) of the oppressors engaging in a process of critical consciousness building through which they relinquish privilege for their own good, ultimately allowing the former oppressors to participate in a fuller humanity. One could make a similar argument in more practical terms regarding UF students. However much material/cultural privilege UF graduates may have or have to look forward to, if they are unable to critically engage the ideologies that support such lifestyles, they risk not only unwittingly isolating themselves from those who suffer as a result, but also losing the capacity to determine their own subjectivities. Respecting student agency in the classroom does not mean protecting students' assumptions about themselves and their roles in the world from critical engagement. Rather, it may mean encouraging greater engagement. While manipulating students to move towards critical consciousness may be inconsistent within the context of a critical pedagogy framework, instructors should be free to attempt a dialogical disruption of students' uncritical, ideological/affective commitment to its antithesis. Nor is the performance of such a disruption inappropriate in the composition classroom. Joe Marshall Hardin and Gary Olson both argue that

because of composition's inherent disciplinary concern with the rhetorical reinscription of ideological value, the composition classroom should be a place to expose and examine that process. Both also assert the importance of critical pedagogies to the development of student subjectivities within an academic and political environment that otherwise disempowers them.

Compositionists would be interested in a critical examination of cultural and ideological production for at least two reasons. First, they are themselves involved in a cultural and ideological reality in which they have traditionally not enjoyed the same privileges as their colleagues who work in literature and other fields.<sup>20</sup> Second, rhetoric (all types of text), as the constructed medium through which ideological production occurs, is the object of this discipline, and an organic relationship already exists between the two. Hardin argues:

Scholars of critical literacy have come a long way in helping to promote the idea that the national project of higher education is unquestionably political, and that composition, because it is concerned with how ideological values are articulated through rhetoric, is ideally situated to lead a discussion of the ways in which language and power intersect in the discourses of both the academy and of culture. (98)

Similarly, Olson identifies composition studies as being well-positioned to promote resistance to uncritical ideological reinscription because of its concern with textual ideological production.

It seems to me that such struggle [“struggles over the right and power to represent through language”] is exactly what all of us in rhetoric and composition are concerned with—that in one way or another we all are united in our work with representations, in the production and reception of meaning. (82)

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<sup>20</sup> Although the status of compositionists in the academy is in some cases improving and PhDs in the field are generally having more success in the current, very difficult academic job market than those with other Liberal Arts specializations, many compositionists feel they still must fight for equal intellectual recognition.

For students to share control in the power of signification, they must first critically understand how that power is constructed.

Although Hardin and Olson may not fully account for some students' privileged position within a broader cultural/economic hierarchy, and thus the development of a critical pedagogy appropriate for the U.S. context could not in all cases share such an emphasis on empowerment outside of a broader consideration of these student identities, the two offer a useful contribution by identifying the composition classroom as an important and necessary location for critically disrupting the uncritical and otherwise largely-uncriticizable process of ideological reinscription. Instructors can also exploit the composition classroom as a place in which to disrupt the affective conditions supporting privileged students' resistance to that process.

As suggested earlier, a number of economically and socially-privileged students in the Vietnam era were willing to risk deviating from their bourgeois trajectories because they could not avoid the realization that at stake in becoming critically conscious were their lives and futures. Similarly-privileged students today resist critical consciousness for the same reason. The later are too comfortable within the status quo—personally and politically—in many cases to see any reason to question it or their relationship to it. They resist critical consciousness not because they fear freedom and would rather remain in servitude, as Freire argued was the case for those with whom he was working, but because they fear losing the power they do have: the power to live comfortable and fulfilling lives within the dominant culture. Thus before instructors can hope to be successful in an attempt to disrupt uncritical ideological reinscription in many contemporary classrooms, they might find it helpful first to disrupt the affective

conditions that support it—to disrupt the ease with which some students operate in an otherwise troubling world. To do so, instructors may want to introduce a pedagogy of disease.

In no way am I suggesting that instructors should punish students for their resistance to critical engagement or for their privilege—that the teacher as Old Testament God cast plague down upon those who would not otherwise repent. Rather, I submit that instructors can employ disease as a metaphor for a type of personal, affective disruption that would respect student agency at the same time it initiates a self-motivating movement towards critical engagement. In fact, disease is an appropriate metaphor within a critical pedagogy context precisely because it anticipates and encourages resistance—because the sickness we feel when diseased *is* resistance, a struggle between the contaminant that is attempting to become a part of who we are and our bodies fighting to maintain their previous states. In such an understanding, the role of the instructor is to infect rather than *instruct*—to introduce a potentially self-replicating disorder rather than a self-affirming order (structure).<sup>21</sup> Rather than preparing students to live comfortably within the status quo, the instructor instead attempts to trouble the students' relationship with that reality by exposing them to some part of it that they cannot initially accept yet cannot ultimately disregard. The intent is to bring privileged students into contact with at least some measure of the disturbing consequences of the hierarchical system upon which their status depends and from which they are too often insulated. In so doing, instructors are able to reintroduce the potential for contradiction essential to a Freirean problem solving methodology. In the case of privileged students, the initial contradiction would

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<sup>21</sup> I do not pursue an opportunity here to discuss the possibilities of identifying ideologies or ideas in a pedagogic context as contagious. Although a pedagogy of disease implies such an identification, and an exhaustive exploration of the implications of such a pedagogy must contain such a discussion, I am attempting in these pages only to introduce the concept rather than explore all of the consequences.

be a struggle between students' emotional investments in the desirability and *rightness* of such lifestyles and the distress they feel when exposed to how that privilege affects others less fortunate. Once students have a reason to begin engaging these contradictions—in the case of privileged students, once they are diseased with their worlds—Freire argues that the development of critical consciousness should become self-motivating as a result of students' new proximity to the problems and solutions discovered.

Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed. (81)

Diseased students would also be self-motivated to critically engage their realities because, as Leon Festinger argues in *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, they would seek to ameliorate the discomfort associated with such psychological dissonance. They would seek to become well.

According to Festinger, inconsistencies in relevant cognitions (beliefs or feelings about oneself, one's actions, or one's environment) will cause psychological discomfort in proportion to the significance of those cognitions to the one who holds them. Such discomfort motivates us to regain consonance among our cognitions, similarly to the way hunger motivates us to eat. To regain consonance, Festinger argues, we may abandon or alter a cognition that does not fit with another, employing from among three basic strategies determined by the circumstances surrounding the dissonance. First, if a cognition about a behavior is dissonant with one about the environment, we may change that behavior and, thereby, change the cognition that corresponds to it. As an example,

Festinger offers those who stop smoking because they become aware of the harmful effects.<sup>22</sup> Second, we may change the environment to become consonant with our behavior, a feat Festinger identifies as much easier to accomplish socially than physically. Third, in those cases where eliminating the dissonance proves too difficult, we may add new cogitations that reduce the degree or significance of the inconsistency between the dissonant cognitions. The smoker may become familiar with information critical of research showing smoking to be harmful, while avoiding information supporting that research, or compare the risks of smoking with a more dangerous yet tolerable activity like driving. Made clear in Festinger's example of the smoker is that not all cognitions are abandoned or altered with equal ease. Some cognitions, particularly those that are satisfying if preserved or painful if lost, will be more resistant to change. The degree to which a cognition is supported socially is also a factor in its resistance to change: the more widely accepted, the stronger the resistance.

Importantly, Festinger argues we are driven not only to eliminate or decrease dissonance once it occurs but also to avoid it altogether, especially when we have experienced dissonance in the past. Thus the committed smoker would attempt to avoid or, if confronted involuntarily, approach more critically that which would put her or his entrenched behavior in doubt.

Let us consider what the reaction of a person would be if he is forced to read or listen to information or a persuasive communication which, in the ordinary course of events, would produce elements of cognition dissonant with existing cognitions. Once these dissonances are introduced one would, of course, expect the same attempts to reduce dissonance which

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<sup>22</sup> Of course, this example assumes that the smoker does not want to engage in a behavior s/he knows to be dangerous or harmful but at the same time does want to continue smoking—otherwise there would be no inconsistency. Festinger, perhaps, has a tendency to oversimplify at times by presenting dissonant cognitions as discrete pairs, even though elsewhere he does make clear the presence of other assumed cognitions and their embeddedness in “clusters.”

have already been discussed [in the paragraph above]. One might also expect, however, that at the initial moment of impact of the new dissonant cognition, effective processes could be initiated which would prevent the dissonant elements from ever being firmly established cognitively. One might expect to observe such things as attempts to escape or avoid further exposure, erroneous interpretation or perception of the material, or any other technique or maneuver which will help to abolish the newly introduced dissonance and to prevent the further introduction of dissonance. (134)

In Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, then, we find another potential source of privileged (as well as other) students' resistance to critical pedagogy. They are disinclined to interrogate or abandon their commitments to a personally-satisfying status quo not only because of the material losses they would incur as a result, but also because the very act of doing so would cause the added pain of losing a similarly-rewarding psychological consistency that is informed by a powerful hegemonic ideology. Students are motivated to pursue well-compensated corporate careers and bourgeois dominant-culture lifestyles, after all, not just by their desires for individual material gain, but also by their desires to conform to internalized social pressures identifying such behaviors as economically and socially, if not morally, responsible and laudable. At the same time, however, we may also find in Festinger's theory a means to introduce disease and encourage student critical engagement by reemploying the same drive for cognitive consonance that underlies resistance to critical engagement in the first place.

If an instructor can generate dissonance by exposing students to a sufficiently-persuasive and disturbing part of their realities that is inconsistent with the remainder (or consistent with some parts but inconsistent with other), students should be motivated to escape that condition and regain consonance by abandoning or altering the cognitions sustaining those realities. To encourage student motivation towards engagement rather

than avoidance, the instructor should introduce something that they will likely be unable to easily reject or ignore. Thus this exposure must at the same time cause an emotional response significant enough to the students that they will be motivated to take action, yet not seem so intimidating to students that they will shy away from engagement with it. The instructor must use some skill in creating a diseasing experience that will constitute a compelling challenge to which the students must respond rather than an easily-dismissed annoyance or a threat severe enough to invite disengagement. As with all disease, the most successful will be the one that becomes a part of a population rather than destroys it: the one that neither fails to take hold nor proves so fatal it destroys all potential hosts.<sup>23</sup>

While instructors who wish to remain consistent with the aims and practices of critical pedagogies will reject any attempt to *force* student engagement, they should have no reservations about *exposing* students to that which students would otherwise avoid, so long as instructors then allow students to respond to that exposure as they will. The instructor's task should be to introduce the possibility of disease rather than to impose the cure. Also, while the dissonance introduced should be significant and persistent enough that students will seek to eliminate rather than reduce it, and thus change their behavior or environment rather than become further alienated from it (certainly a goal fitting within the context of a pedagogy intended to increase democratic participation), instructors should resist simply introducing new cognitions for students to uncritically adopt. Rather, instructors should introduce dissonance only in order to disrupt the certainty with which students may already subscribe uncritically to the ideologies they bring with them into the classroom and, thus, open the possibilities for further critical engagement.

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<sup>23</sup> The metaphor of disease offers an opportunity for pedagogic application.

Perhaps an example of a successful experience I have had introducing disease might help illustrate what I am proposing.

During my time mentoring at Penn State I arranged an event at which the students were able to speak for an evening with two men on death row via conference call. The university was only a few miles from the site where prisoners in that state were executed, and the students were generally aware of when and how often those executions took place. The day of the presentation, I initiated a heated discussion in class about the death penalty, focusing on the identities of those sentenced to die. The students—the vast majority strongly in support of the death penalty—were by the end of the day interested and eager to participate. They were not, however, prepared for what they experienced that evening. At some point during their conversation with the prisoners the students realized that the monsters for whom they anticipated feeling nothing but antipathy were instead similarly-aged young men who, like them, hated institutional food and missed their parents. It was painful for the students to realize that these two people, with whom they were able to talk and relate so easily, were soon going to die at the hand of state authority that until that night they were willing to support but not question. Before that night, capital punishment was a simple matter of good and evil, and there could be no question how to feel about a murderer. The students believed they were moral and, as such, supported the most extreme punishment imaginable for those who were the most immoral. Now the students' feelings were less certain. They still believed they were moral, but for that very same reason were now uneasy about their complicity in these young men's impending deaths. Many for the first time, perhaps, realized that what they had come to believe about the world was not always what they would experience when confronted with those parts hidden from them. They were diseased. Their experiences

that evening disrupted their ability to stand at a comfortable affective distance from the fate of these two men, which for many resulted in a desire to begin questioning other once-unassailable assumptions and perceptions. If possible, they did not want to experience such discomfort again. At least for the remainder of that summer session, the world seemed much more complicated and troubling to them, and they wanted to talk about it. They wanted to critically engage that world and reexamine their own lives in it.<sup>24</sup>

Of course I had a political and personal interest in how the event that evening would influence those who attended—those, importantly, whom I could compel to attend. I strongly oppose capital punishment and want others to feel the same way. Likewise, I could not present the world as it *really* is to the students but, instead, only honestly as it is to me. My world, however, is a troubled one—I am diseased—and they saw me troubled in it. They could see I had no sufficient answers, nor did I ask them to provide any. They were free to work through their own struggles: to locate their own problems and discover their own solutions. To feel good about themselves in the world again, they had to. The goal that night could never have been simply to convince students of the rightness of my views. Rather, the goal of a pedagogy of disease has to be to disturb the very possibility of students accepting any position uncritically, to provide an opportunity for students to struggle with their worlds at least once in a way that will show them they

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<sup>24</sup> I offer this experience merely as one example of a successful attempt at affective disruption. Another potentially useful area to explore would be visual images—especially from the commercial media, which already seems to have perfected the art of interrupting our lives. The possibilities for such disruptions are limited only by the creativity and resources of the instructor. Nor would such interruption necessarily have to occur all at once. More recently, I have had some success encouraging critical engagement through a continuous introduction of many small moments that by the end of a semester have a substantial cumulative effect.

have too much at stake to innocently accept what others would have them believe about it however much they think they might gain.

While a pedagogy of disease should have no punitive element, instructors, nevertheless, do need to pose challenges that not only relate to privileged students but at the same time make that relationship painful. Otherwise, such students may not perceive they have anything at stake in being critically engaged with a world that offers them so much. Asking students to become diseased with their worlds is to invite them into a painful, self-reflective struggle from which they cannot emerge, if successful, at ease with the identities and worlds in which they were once comfortable. Frederick Douglass relates in his *Narrative* the profound effect such a struggle had on him when he first learned to read.

I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own. Any thing, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me. There was no getting rid of it. It was pressed upon me by every object within sight or hearing, animate or inanimate. The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness. Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in every thing. It was ever present to torment me with a sense of my wretched condition. I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling. It looked from every star, it smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every storm. (33)

Like those with whom Freire initially worked, Douglass was already suffering, and his motivation to seek a new reality was great. Obviously this is not the case with many U.S. college students, nor should one hope it ever would be. Nevertheless, Douglass' experience illustrates both the compulsion towards critical engagement once the world

begins to disease those who have the motivation and means to *read* it as well as the transformative power implicit in that engagement. In the case of privileged U.S. students, what is gained is not emancipation from slavery and slave-consciousness but, instead, an awareness of their unconscious and ideologically-coerced participation in an unjust system of exploitation.

In Douglass' world, slaves were legally forbidden and popularly discouraged from learning to read, and his learning to do so was both a public and a personal disruption. Publicly, he confounded those who believed that those of African descent were incapable of such intellectual activity as well as challenged those who wished to disallow an articulate voice to a group who would of necessity speak out against their condition. As a result, Douglass became a powerful speaker and an influential abolitionist. Personally, he was alienated from others in his condition, while his relationship with both his world and his own identity changed forever. Because of his newfound ability to read it, the world became more intimate and, thus, more troubling. His learning to read made him diseased with his world, and that disease compelled him to read further. Yet although Douglass' critical engagement caused him to suffer more so than he was already, that experience also eventually became the source of his greatest joy. His new way of relating to the world brought him to the realization that he had to escape his former condition regardless of the risks.

Likewise, a pedagogy of disease should never aim to make students so troubled with their worlds that they have no hope of becoming well again. That said, their disease must and will transcend the physical and temporal boundaries of the classroom—if such boundaries have any reality at all. Rather than making students incurably sick, the goal of such a pedagogy should instead be to disease them so they may ultimately experience

the perspective and convalescence that follows all non-terminal illness, so that they may live more joyously and more consciously. Under no circumstances should students' disease compel them to reinscribe new boundaries behind which they can hide in newfound cynicism and despair.

In his "Second Preface to the *Gay Science*," Nietzsche offers a poetic articulation of both the necessity of becoming diseased with the world in order to know it as well as the joy of convalescing when one is able to redefine her or his relation to it.

In the end, lest what is most important remain unsaid: from such an abysses, from such severe sickness, also from the sickness of severe suspicion, one returns *new-born*, having shed one's skin, more ticklish and malicious, with a more delicate taste for joy, with a tenderer tongue for all good things, with merrier senses, with a second dangerous innocence in joy, more childlike and yet a hundred times subtler than one has ever been before. (37)

Although Nietzsche was gravely ill most of his adult life, and although he wrote of sickness, he did not write from sickness, as he claims so many had done before.

Nietzsche was a radical optimist. He saw in his disease the same potential for intellectual growth that a pedagogy of disease would attempt to introduce through affective disruption. As was the case with Douglass, instructors should never wish upon students the degree of suffering endured by Nietzsche. Yet before students or teachers are able to overcome ideological commitments and identities that once gave so much comfort and security, they may first need to struggle.

Only great pain, the long, slow pain that takes its time—on which we are burned, as it were, with green wood—compels us philosophers to descend into our ultimate depths and to put aside all trust, everything good-natured, everything that would interpose a veil, that is mild, that is medium—things in which formerly we have found our humanity. I doubt that such pain makes us "better"; but I know that it makes us more *profound*. (36)

For a new economic and political reality and new ways of relating to that reality to emerge, those who hope to work in the classroom for change might first attempt disrupting the affective and ideological commitments supporting the old status quo. This process is going to be painful—painful for students and teachers, and painful also for the corporations and institutions that will lose control over the means of producing students as obedient workers and citizens. Without such disruption, however, political and corporate interests will increasingly be able to reproduce through institutions of public higher education identities and consciousness suitable for their needs while ensuring student (and in some cases instructor) complicity by reinscribing privileged status into those identities. As a re-envisioning of Freirean-based critical pedagogy, a pedagogy of disease would attempt to reinvest democratic consciousness in privileged U.S. students while taking into account their hierarchical relationship to the oppressed for whom Freire was fighting. Instructors working with privileged students in the U.S., then, should not lose sight of the fact that the borders across which those in the U.S. read Freire are the same boundaries that separate the world's wealthiest and most powerful from its poorest and weakest. While working towards critical engagement in the U.S., instructors should be conscious of the local and global context in which their efforts take place. Democracy for many in the world is the only means of dignified survival, but for those in the U.S. it is a duty not only to themselves but also to those in other countries who live and die according to the actions of the U.S. government and U.S.-based corporations.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mike Muhlhauser has B.A.s in English and philosophy from Penn State University.