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Writing Majors: Eighteen Program Profiles, by Greg Giberson, Jim Nugent, and Lori Ostergaard

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Giberson, Greg, Jim Nugent, and Lori Ostergaard, ed. *Writing Majors: Eighteen Program Profiles*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2015.

What does a writing major look like? In *Writing Majors: Eighteen Program Profiles*, Greg Giberson et al. have compiled a diverse and detailed collection of answers to that question. The book's plural title, *Writing Majors*, is apt, for this is not a description of the writing major; instead, we find little consensus among the many programs outlined here. The notion of a writing major, it turns out, is amorphous. Sometimes a writing major is housed in its own department, as are the first ten programs profiled in this collection. Sometimes a writing major is housed within an existing English department, as are the final eight programs profiled. The many distinctions expand from there into a fruitful understanding of what disparate writing majors look like across the U.S. The great diversity is a great advantage, allowing for curricular flexibility and institutional fit.

To keep the diversity from becoming a distraction, each of the eighteen profiles follows a roughly similar structure. Each begins with an introduction to the program, followed by an overview and program rationale. What elements compose the program, and why was the program created? Next comes a narrative account of how the program was implemented, complete, at times, with the institutional wrangling over such details as the name of the program, the students targeted, the courses available, and the core requirements. Reflection and prospection follow as contributors consider ways individual programs have evolved and might continue to evolve. Following the conclusion is an outline of the “Major Requirements”—the number of credit hours, the core courses, the required courses, and the electives.

Such a structure provides multiple opportunities for contributors to address the issues at the heart of a writing major. They discuss the challenges of determining the requirements and course sequence. Should the program focus on a general foundation for writing, or should it offer opportunities for students to specialize in professional or creative or pedagogical areas? Contributors discuss the challenge of balancing a theoretical, liberal arts emphasis with a more practical, professional education emphasis. And, of course, the timeworn debate between literature and composition surfaces.

A more objective element within each profile is a “Table of Institutional Data” that allows the reader to compare one’s own situation to that of the program being profiled. What type of institution houses this program—private? Research? Master’s? How large is the institution—1,800 students? 18,000 students? When did the program begin—1983? 2012? How many fulltime comp/rhet faculty teach within the program—1? 12?

Finally, Giberson’s afterword, “Finding the Bigger Picture: What Have We Learned?” offers an especially useful heuristic comprising six questions “designed to provide a starting point for those considering proposing a new major” (243). I would argue that the heuristic—along with the eighteen profiles—provides more than a starting point for those looking to create a new major. This book will also be useful for those wanting to revisit an existing writing major in light of what peers have implemented across the country. Department chairs, writing program administrators, comp/rhet faculty, and curriculum committee members alike will find much within *Writing Majors: Eighteen Program Profiles* to inform the key decisions they face

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