Dr. Sarah Robbins

Narrative About Faculty Work the "Narrative."

In over twenty years as an educator, my commitment to building productive communities within and beyond the classroom has been the guiding force for all my work. Given that commitment, my teaching, scholarship and service at Kennesaw State are well aligned with the goals of the university. Consistent with KSU's mission, I consider "teaching and learning" to be the "central … priorities" of my professional life, and I emphasize "service and research that strengthen teaching and address the public's interests." A graduate of state university systems in North Carolina and Michigan, I am personally dedicated to providing outstanding learning opportunities to the citizens of our state, both through formal courses in our classrooms and through diverse public educational programs. Informing my teaching, scholarship and service, this community-oriented goal has helped me maintain a clear focus for my wide-ranging endeavors at Kennesaw. Meanwhile, I have also benefited from numerous opportunities to grow professionally here, to the extent that I am ready to request promotion to full professor in recognition of the scope and depth of my ongoing contributions to the university and the larger community.

My **teaching** at KSU has been situated within formal academic programs in English and English Education, but also in such interdisciplinary contexts as the Honors program, team-taught classes, and numerous grant-funded projects. For the past several years, many of my assigned classes have been in graduate programs in professional writing and English Education, where I have made significant contributions to curriculum

development by designing new courses and participating in program planning (e.g., 1.117ff.; 1.157ff.). I have also been able to develop several undergraduate and graduate offerings in another major area of expertise, American literature (1.137, 1.163, 1.166).

My list of KSU classes taught for any particular semester would provide just a hint of the range of my teaching, however. Summer seminars and school-year continuity projects for teachers have taken up an increasing percentage of my teaching time, both at KSU and at various venues around the country. As director of the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project (KMWP) and other grant-funded programs, I have provided multiple, sustained learning opportunities to public school teachers, students, and other community members. The challenging teaching involved in proposal-writing, program development, and project evaluation have allowed me the chance to do innovative educational work that leaves a lasting mark in multiple community cultures. The impact of this teaching may be more difficult to quantify than traditional university course assignments, but its effect is, I believe, at least as far-reaching. (See, for example, KCAC, GHC, and KMWP pages in the teaching section of my portfolio).

Building educational bridges to the community beyond our campus has also made it possible for me to provide many KSU students with collaborative, applied and service learning opportunities of the highest caliber. Seeing the benefits such community involvement brings to our students has, in turn, shaped the instructional approaches I use in one-on-one and small-group supervision responsibilities. I've become a far more attentive listener, looking for ways that KSU can nurture the interests, abilities, and resources brought to our university by students and community members. This shift in stance, to seeing teaching as fostering interactions more than delivering knowledge, is

proving particularly effective as more of my work involves supervising graduate students and schoolteachers involved in grant-funded projects. I have learned, in other words, how reciprocal mentoring can be—an awareness that is carrying over into connections with other faculty and colleagues around the country. (See "Mentoring" pages of my portfolio's teaching section for examples, such as 1.262 ff. and 1.248 ff.).

My contributions to the **scholarship and creative activity** component of faculty life have been diverse in content and method, yet unified by a commitment to the public welfare. Many of my publications and presentations have been grounded in action research on teaching and its role in community life. Similarly, much of my scholarship has been collaborative—created both with faculty colleagues and with K–12 educators from around Georgia and the nation. Even the most traditional examples of my research—e.g., award-winning print pieces in peer-reviewed journals, invited essays for anthologies in English and English Studies—have placed issues about learning, literacy, and literature's place in public culture at the center of scholarly investigation. That I am constantly being invited to speak to a wide range of audiences—from school faculties and professional development organizations to community interest groups—indicates I have learned how to "translate" the more esoteric language and concepts of academic inquiry into accessible and practical form. Indeed, I remain committed to a community-oriented brand of scholarship that reaches multiple audiences in diverse ways.

At the same time, I have devoted considerable energy to developing expertise in several recognized areas of disciplinary and interdisciplinary inquiry, as I publish regularly in demanding academic venues consistent with the responsibilities of KSU graduate faculty. While a good deal of my recent writing allies itself with the scholarship

of teaching (e.g., 2.19 ff. and "Promoting a Relevant Classroom Literacy" on vita), I also publish essays in Women's Studies, American Studies and American literature, as well as composition and literacy studies. (See "Gender and the History," "Gendering Gilded Age," "Afterword" and "Gendering the Debate" on vita for examples.) The fact that I am receiving requests to review others' scholarship in all the fields just outlined affirms the high esteem in which my own work is already being held nationally. While I give considerable time and energy to professional service, the breadth, depth, and nationally recognized quality of my scholarship are well in accord with my joining other graduate faculty in officially designating "scholarship and creative activity" as my second area of professional emphasis.

While my teaching and scholarship have remained productively complementary, my **service** to the university and the community has been so consistently integrated into the whole of my work that describing this category of activity is impossible to do without reference to the other two. English Department, PTEU, and university committees have, of course, been a major element of my service, and I have been especially fortunate to take on diverse committee responsibilities with equally wide-ranging learning opportunities. Meanwhile, the demanding role of National Writing Project site director, which has certainly included many fulfilling teaching and scholarship responsibilities, has also required enormous time and dedication to administrative service. Since KSU supplies limited support for grant program administration (particularly in Business Services-oriented procedures) as compared with other institutions, a very significant part of my university-level service has involved such mundane, time-consuming, but essential tasks as clerical transactions (e.g., contracts, invoices, procurement data), budget

monitoring, and completing both internal and external financial reports. On a more exciting front, grant-funded programs can make the strengths of our institution more accessible to (and thus appreciated by) the larger community—if the work of our programs is effectively communicated to broad audiences. Thus, for me, another major element of the service of grants administration has been to "make visible" the work we do in such projects as we do it (e.g., through special events, speeches, workshops, and the publicity needed to help such efforts succeed). Finally, the extensive evaluation requirements for grant-funded projects also command a significant service commitment.

As with teaching and scholarship, the quality of service I can offer locally is enhanced tremendously by interactions with colleagues from other institutions who have similar interests and commitments. Thus, particularly over the past several years, I have taken on increasing responsibilities for service to the larger profession—e.g., in the National Writing Project, the National Council of Teachers of English, the American Studies Association, the Modern Language Association, and the American Literature Association. This level of service allows me to learn from talented mentors' leadership while also making significant contributions to the profession and public life.

In the sections below, readers of my portfolio will find a more detailed outline of the three areas of my professional work (teaching, scholarship, and service), organized to mirror both the overarching philosophy presented above and the documentation available in binder #2. Taken together, these materials demonstrate that my contributions to the university and the community certainly meet the expectations for promotion to full professor.

Teaching

My teaching philosophy combines several closely related commitments, all of which place active learning at the heart of instruction, while also affirming that a key measure of our success as teachers is our students' ability to be productive members of the communities where they live. With those goals in mind, my teaching seeks to address the following primary aims:

- To promote a strong sense of community within the classroom (whether a traditional, nontraditional [e.g., online] or "blended" classroom environment);
- To provide students with opportunities for building new knowledge rather than only to study information created by others;
- To use writing for a variety of learning purposes, and to link reading with writing;
- To develop a strong disciplinary content base while also encouraging interdisciplinary learning methods;
- To promote interaction with communities "outside" the university setting;
- To support students' metacognitive analysis, especially through self-assessment;
- To take advantage of new technologies to promote discussion, exploration, content-based research, and rhetorical sophistication.

The teaching section of my documentation binder demonstrates a match between my philosophy and my teaching practices at KSU and in the community. The first set of materials there comes from courses taught since my last review. As one example of a highly successful class, I have included material from my fall 2000 Honors Seminar, which I linked to the grant-funded Keeping and Creating American Communities program. (See 1.6 ff.). A number of students from that class have maintained connections to the KCAC program as interns, contributing to such important efforts as the project newsletter and website. This course was one of the highlights of my recent teaching because of its sustained use of technology as an interactive teaching tool, its interdisciplinary learning methods, and its commitment to collaborative inquiry. A visit to the website student Marty Lamers and I have prepared as an archive of the course

(1.16) would provide a fuller portrait of the class, including sample student projects, but I hope that portfolio readers will get a taste of the class's energy and enthusiasm for learning from the sample web pages in the binder. Signs that students found the course exciting included the remarkable quality of individual and group projects, as well as the eagerness class members have shown to share their work with various public audiences (e.g., at workshops for teachers).

To complement my documentation from the one-time honors seminar, my binder #2 includes another set of materials from undergraduate teaching, the chronological record of my teaching of women's literature in several different courses, beginning in 1995. (See 1.37 ff.). The sequence of syllabi from this course reflects the profound influence that collaboration with my colleague from the History Department, Ann Pullen, has had on my teaching. From my first 1995 American women's literature course, with its traditional coverage model, to the plans for an offering coming up in the fall of 2001, my sense of what students might gain by studying literature in the context of gender has expanded radically and productively. With the help of Dr. Pullen and students in two past team-taught offerings, I can now take advantage of interdisciplinary scholarship, use multiple technologies to contribute to study of women's culture, allow class members multiple opportunities for writing-to-learn, and open up our field of study to include an array of texts (e.g., photographs, illustrations) besides print literature. Dr. Pullen and I have had countless two-way discussions about our shared course, but we have also sought out other connections through collaborative scholarship on teaching, as with our participation in the Crossroads Teaching with Technology Project, our partnership with Dr. Nancy White of Armstrong Atlantic for one offering of the course, and the more

recent benefits of having esteemed teachers from other institutions (Emory and the University of Maine) evaluate draft syllabi. Even when I teach "alone" now, I actively seek ways to evaluate my classes collaboratively (e.g., with students), I reflect critically on every lesson, and I welcome opportunities for radical revision of my course syllabi.

At the graduate level, I've had fewer opportunities to revise "old" courses than in undergraduate teaching—primarily because I've taught only one course more than once since my last professional review. That course, which I have offered three times for the MAPW program, has undergone productive reconfigurations similar to what Dr. Pullen and I have done together with our team-taught class. I have included two of the three syllabi from that Literacy Studies MAPW course mainly because they illustrate this commitment to revision. Specifically, even though I received absolutely glowing reviews for the 1998 offering (1.95 ff.), I still made major changes for the 2000 version of the course, including both updating the reading list substantially (especially for the course pack of essays) and re-thinking the organizational categories driving discussion and project work in the course (1.105). I made these adjustments partly because the program framework in which the class is now offered has shifted substantially: when the requirement for a basic research course was deleted from the MAPW curriculum, I knew I would no longer be able to assume students' familiarity with research techniques, so I re-directed the course to allow students to experiment in a hands-on way with research methods of their choice. The revised course plan for 2000 met those goals, injecting increased rigor into the class while maintaining a collaborative spirit.

The other MAPW course outlined in my teaching section is the required introductory course, which I taught once last year. As the sole class that brings together

students from all three program strands (applied, creative, and composition/rhetoric), the core course is exciting to teach. In this case, I was able to discuss the course with a number of colleagues who had already taught it (including Drs. Hunter, Barrier, Bradham, Dabundo, and Bocchi), so I could blend together some of their favorite elements from prior offerings. Besides leading me to some productive writing and reading assignments, these rich conversations with my colleagues also helped me identify program alumni who could come to the class on various occasions as facilitators/presenters. While I had enjoyed teaching the literacy course, closely tied to my own research, the core course stretched me and built a sense of connection with other faculty, students, and alumni of the program (1.153). My teaching resulted in one student's having a class paper published in a peer-reviewed journal and several others having a roundtable proposal accepted for the national CCCC conference, the preeminent gathering of writing scholars in the U.S. (1.155–6).

Even more than for the MAPW program, my work for the M.Ed. has given me the chance to develop a wide variety of offerings, ranging from a 1996 class on "The Times of Twain" mounted in conjunction with the KSU library's major exhibit of Twain texts and artifacts (1.157), to a 1998 course on gender and young girls' literacy (1.163), and one on multicultural literatures written in English (1.166). As for the MAPW, I have taught the required core course for M.Ed. students who have English/Language Arts as a concentration (1.159–62). To give a sense of the rich diversity of content in these numerous courses, I have included a few key excerpts from several syllabi and one complete syllabus (for my most recent M.Ed. class). In revisiting this material, I noted that I am still in close touch with a number of students from every one of these classes.

Some have become active affiliates of the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project, some have gone on to do Ph.D.-level work at other institutions, some have moved to new teaching assignments—but in every case I am always hearing of ways that learning from my classes continues to shape their teaching. With that in mind, I've appended one representative student voice from each class, with all except the two from the "Girlbooks" course having come to me unsolicited. (These examples appear within each set of course materials and also on pages 1.178 ff.). A second striking pattern that emerged from re-reading these course materials was the degree to which the classes successfully connected with other community members in addition to schoolteachers—or, said another way, with my having modeled for teachers some ways that schools can draw upon community resources beyond the building where classes are taught. In the Twain class, for instance, we benefited not only from the exhibit itself, but also from talks by visiting scholars. Similarly, in the "Girlbooks" course, our readings inspired us to sponsor a community education event at Barnes and Noble—a well attended public discussion of new readings for (pre)adolescent girls.

Consistent with my increasing responsibilities to graduate programs, I have taken on numerous interns, graduate research assistants, directed study students, and capstone supervisions in the past few years (1.182 ff.). The list at the beginning of this section documents the growing number of students I have served and the breadth of content they have studied. One full set of supervision evaluations from the most term captures some of the enthusiasm I have seen in these fine students (1.187 ff.). In every case, I have been excited by the ways KSU students eagerly embrace the opportunity to make new knowledge, to interact with the larger community, to collaborate with each other, and to

take the lead in their own learning. Along those lines, Adam Russell, Pete DiFazio and Amy Meadows all contributed substantially to the Keeping and Creating American Communities program—Adam by writing an historical drama and associated teaching materials for schoolteachers, Amy by helping coordinate the project's K–12 student writing contest, and Pete by leading his own students at Sprayberry High to edit an anthology of the best entries (1.195, 2.72). Meanwhile, perhaps because so many KSU undergraduates fit the so-called "un-traditional" profile, I have found them to be very enthusiastic about service-oriented, individualized learning experiences, such as the SALT program and internships. Two of my recent honors students fit this category quite well: Stacie Janecki went from the fall KCAC seminar to writing a newsletter for the grant program, and Marty Lamers is still contributing to the website (1.198–01).

Among the many graduate capstone projects that I've had the pleasure to mentor in the past few years, several stand out in ways that are impossible to document in a binder. Melissa Phillips' M.Ed. thesis on teaching literature about grief and Leslie Walker's MAPW portfolio (a model of polish, depth, and subtlety) come to mind. Most important for my own teaching, the KSU graduate programs' commitment to individualized instruction has helped me learn from supporting students' intellectual growth, and from hearing them reflect on that developmental process. I affirm KSU's approaches for such rigorous "exit" experiences in graduate work.

One other cluster of materials in the teaching section of my documentation comes from my work as a grants project director. Each of the grant-funded programs I have led has involved extensive teaching—including National Writing Project multi-week summer institutes, staggered school-year training programs for faculty teaching in a summer

seminar for secondary students, and multi-year programs such as Making American Literatures or Keeping and Creating American Communities. Always, the instructional planning is intensive. Demanding as this teaching has been, it has also been incomparably rewarding, because it has often included collaborations with outstanding educators and scholars from around Georgia and the nation, and also because it has invariably led to visible, substantial growth in project participants. Whether teachers find themselves published authors in peer-review journals after taking part in a KMWP "advanced" institute (1.224–6) or return to be a part of the instructional team for a "basic" program after participating earlier themselves (1.247), grant-funded projects like the NWP have often allowed me to "teach teachers," then watch them teach others. The bonds formed in those kinds of reciprocal teaching/learning experiences are strong indeed, as suggested in the unsolicited notes I regularly receive from project participants. Binder #2 presents a few examples (1.248 ff.), along with signs of how these connections have helped me learn to mentor faculty colleagues at KSU and elsewhere, including one correspondent from India (1.259–68).

Scholarship

The connections I have built between my classroom and the community through teaching are increasingly being mirrored in my scholarship, which has become more publicly attuned in several of its dimensions, as documented in binder #2. (Please do see my curriculum vitae for a far more detailed list of publications than I include in the binder, where I focus on work most directly connected to my teaching and service at KSU). My work has gained notable recognition in several disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields, bringing me into a "community of scholars" that is now allowing me to help shape the

very fields I study. For example, I was thrilled to have an essay on American literary history accepted by *American Quarterly*, the premier journal in American Studies, which publishes fewer than 5% of its submissions. I was even more gratified to share first prize for best published piece in that year. Later, I was able to build upon the relationship of trust I had established with the editorial board of *AQ* by asking that they consider publishing a collaborative essay written with schoolteachers and faculty colleagues who had participated in one of our grant-funded projects—a decision by the editors that literally expanded their venue publicly to value university-schools partnerships as an activity worthy of scholarly inquiry. (See 2.1–7 of binder 2.)

Similarly, because my own reputation as a scholar has grown substantially over the past few years, I am finding it easier than in the past to shepherd the work of my students and KMWP colleagues to publication, as in the case of the new *Making American Literatures* anthology, which has more submissions from our NWP site than from any other involved in that program (2.16–18). Along similar lines, as I have more opportunities to serve as a reviewer for university presses and journals, I am able to see (and influence) the directions for scholarship related to my own work as a teacher and grants program developer, as well as a researcher. By reviewing both for grants programs (such as the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Writing Project) and for more traditional forms of research (journals like *American Studies*, *American Quarterly*; book publishers like Teachers College Press), I am bringing together two strands of scholarship which often remain separate in the humanities, thereby enriching both my own wide-ranging work and the vision for the humanities that other scholars around the country are developing through such emerging connections (2.32–46). Along

those lines, the chance Ann Pullen and I had to participate in the "Crossroads Teaching with Technology" cross-institutional study improved our own courses and linked us to others committed to the scholarship of teaching (2.19 ff.). The website we are currently constructing on women's work in the nineteenth century is a direct outgrowth of those earlier collaborations (2.25 ff.). As such collaborative research ventures grow, those of us involved in community partnerships can help expand the reach of the humanities nation-wide to include both traditional scholarship and new community-building approaches for which our work at Kennesaw State can serve as a model. (See, for instance, the Keeping and Creating American Communities proposal, website, and example of a "creative activity" project associated with the program, the "Bridges" student writing contest, anthology, and celebration 2.47 ff.).

Service

My professional service has been grounded primarily in my work with schoolteachers through the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project, the Professional Teacher Education Unit, and projects with area educators. Many of the programs I have led have been supported by grants I have written, so that one major dimension of my service to the university has been to secure funds for this crucial aspect of KSU's mission. (See 3.1). While proposals for funding must generally be situated within a strong research tradition that renders such work scholarship, the management of such projects, once funding has been secured, entails countless hours of service, both for program delivery and for evaluation. In my case, "program delivery" often entails organizing day-long (or even month-long) conferences for schoolteachers, facilitating project committee meetings, gathering human and material resources, and documenting the process. Since this type of

activity has represented the majority of my service commitment—including far too many projects to report on fully—I have included two sample project reports, on the current Keeping and Creating American Communities initiative (3.2 ff.) and the basic programs of the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project (3.25 ff.). I have also provided artifacts from some of the KMWP's typical activities (3.52 ff.). It would be easy to fill several 3-inch binders with the service activities from such programs over the past few years, without even taking into account the budgetary/clerical pieces. The true impact of such service, however, is not measurable in quantifiable stacks of paperwork, but in the degree to which our institution's reputation for community service is enhanced through every program.

Leading KSU-based programs is both challenging and fulfilling, but I believe university faculty also give significant service when participating in initiatives organized by community partners. In that vein, I frequently do community service through such work as speaking to local interest groups, assisting with community task forces, and supporting school reform committees. (See 3.66–73 for a few examples.)

However important our service to the larger community, committee work in our departments and for the university remains at the center of any faculty member's professional service. As I have taken on increased responsibilities for national-level professional organizations in the past few years, I have had to trim back the number of committee assignments I can take on at KSU in any given year. But I have continued to make major commitments of time and energy where I can be most useful, especially in such areas as curriculum development and teacher education. My documentation includes some representative samples of my committee activities since my last review, along with

examples of other, informal and short-term service I have provided to the university (e.g., facilitating workshops for M.Ed. students preparing for comprehensive exams, presenting to faculty colleagues—3.80–89).

At the same time, consistent with preparing to assume full professor rank, I have shifted the focus for much of my professional service to a national and international level. Building on leadership skills I acquired through committee work at KSU, I have served as an officer for national organizations (e.g., the Harriet Beecher Stowe Society), worked on advisory boards (e.g., for the National Writing Project) and chaired committees for national and international organizations. (See 3.90 ff.).

In all three areas of professional activity, I believe I am performing at the level of a full professor, according to the guidelines provided by my department and the university.