

## EDITOR'S NOTE

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Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. — Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*

In this issue of *WR*, we focus on students' efforts to enter into the scholarly conversations experienced at Boston University. Discovering, participating in, and even enhancing, an academic conversation remains a primary goal of university education. This task is not always easy, whether we are teachers, researchers, or students; on the contrary, immersion into any ongoing discussion can be daunting. Not only do we need to find our place in these discussions, we must also establish a common ground and develop the skills and confidence to participate so our ideas are heard and our claims can emerge. Literary theorist Kenneth Burke illustrated this point precisely when he compared the academic conversation to a crowded, intense, and vigorously involved conversation in a parlor. In doing so, he created a metaphor that illustrates not only the milieu of academic

argument, but also its method: the contribution of others' intellectual oppositions and qualifications to the refinement of one's views.

The ability to engage in and contribute to an academic conversation is essential not only for academic success, but also in professional and personal life. Thus, the practice of engaging in creative academic conversation becomes a craft: we listen and discuss issues with our peers, colleagues, and mentors, digging into subtext, hoping our claims are absorbed and considered, and above all, presenting our ideas in written form.

This year the Writing Program continues to explore ways of enabling student writing at Boston University; it is a movement inspired by the metaphor of the academic conversation. Our program assists student writers as they attempt to enter this conversation so they may express their claims, their ideas, and more importantly, develop confidence in making their contributions. By engaging in this process, students gain the ability to craft substantive, motivated, and balanced academic arguments. They engage with texts, reading with comprehension and critical discernment. Just as Burke imagined the stimulating conversation in his metaphorical parlor, our students enter the conversation by responding productively to the writing of others while expressing their own complex ideas. And beyond their writing and research on topics, they also reflect, through the use of portfolios, on their own development as writers.

The essays in this collection epitomize the ongoing development of the Writing Program, as students explore the range of topics, from literature to the social and natural sciences. In selecting the twelve essays for this issue of *WR*, the committee selected essays (from 375 submissions) with varied styles and themes from within different disciplines. What is presented here truly showcases the range of the Writing Program: we present the prize-winning essays first, followed by essays that reflect students' growing engagement with the academic conversation as they follow the assignment sequence from the beginning of WR 100 to the capstone essays of WR 150. Thus, the selected essays illustrate how students' writing grows along with the intellectual challenges of the assignment trajectory.

Indeed, what this issue of *WR* demonstrates is that our students are learning to become communicators, thinkers, planners, and innovators who truly own a place in the academic conversation. The twelve students, whose work represents the undergraduate community of the Arts & Sciences

Writing Program, have entered that room of great thinkers, philosophers, poets, and debaters; they have found their place in the conversation, and in doing so, show us that the stimulating intellectual discussion that is critical to university education and civic life is—as Kenneth Burke reminds us—“still vigorously in progress.”

— Kimberly Gomez,  
Assistant Editor