

## Making (Collective) Memory Public: WPA Histories in Dialogue

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### ABSTRACT

*This article calls for WPAs to undertake a dialogic archiving of their various individual and program histories. While periodic aggregated information about WPA local practices has been included in our field scholarship—from Warner Taylor’s 1929 survey to the 2015 National Census of Writing—where writing program work has been recorded and subsequently analyzed as a data set, there has yet to be a deeper engagement with the sometimes opposing concepts of memory and history. Examining the implications of distinguishing between those two concepts as has been articulated in recent rhetorical theory, I make the case for a renewed attention to capturing and embracing collective memory in our ongoing archives of practice in writing program administration.*

*While we sit solemnly in smoke-filled hotel rooms in St. Louis and quibble about the relative merits of composition and communication programs or the latest developments in the upper stratosphere of linguistics research, many of our students are waging a desperate fight against early academic death . . . Most of us, I am sure, come to these meetings to find out how we can best help these students. These meetings are really worthwhile only insofar as they enable us to return to our desks and face that pile of themes with greater equanimity and confidence that we handle them properly. All else is sound and fury signifying nothing.*

—Charles Roberts,  
“A Course for Training Rhetoric Teachers at the  
University of Illinois”(193)

Thanks to twenty-first century technologies, writing program administrators now have the means to dialogue in venues that transcend the conditions of the 1954 CCCC meeting described above. WPAs are furthermore acutely aware of the importance of understanding and mirroring practices and policies on a cross-institutional basis, so as to effectively respond to—or combat—national educational initiatives that threaten local expertise in the teaching of writing, and to share best practices that will advance the livelihoods of writing faculty and students. Yet, our ability to locate these many conversations, remembrances, and cross-articulations of theory into practice in a singular, dynamic place that is not dependent upon our ongoing presence, or an incomplete archive, remains unrealized, despite significant attempts to make the work of WPAs visible to both internal and external publics.

Historically, the “conversations” had by WPAs have been conducted with best intentions, but often lacking the context and conditions allowing us to react to and act upon them. Budgets permitting, we meet at conferences for a few precious days per year. Many of us participate in open electronic conversations such as the WPA listserv, others in more selective chats on social media or in regional groups or affiliated networks. But in many of these conversations—particularly those happening online—we are still talking past and through each other, with an unreliable or unevenly archived record of what was said, let alone a record of how utterances altered or incited responsive practices. In contrast, we robustly *individually* articulate, and sometimes also archive, our practices in micro, local contexts: in department meetings, staff training, campus-wide presentations, and program policy statements, and even in our field publications, on a wider scale. Yet these articulations are rarely put into real-time conversation with other happenings on other campuses; they are ultimately siloed archives that neither intersect nor interact. When we record our remembrances and conversations in scholarship—in annals of disciplinary history—it is too often fragmented across both venue and time, especially given digital aggregators and search engines that allow articles to stand apart from their original context of publication and the orbiting conversations represented therein.

In order to fully articulate the personal and professional decisions which have affected a WPA’s own local writing program as well as to archive the institutional *responses* to those decisions and the larger conversation(s) that informed them, WPAs need to build and robustly contribute to a site for cross-institutional dialogues of theory and practice, one including remembrances that showcase our professional ethics as well as our personal biases. We as a WPA community need to engage in *collective memory*, in the rhetorical sense, in conceptualizing such a project, so as to effectively integrate

our grand narratives, local histories, and individual portraits. In doing so, we can draw upon theories of memory that both illuminate how we might approach memorializing our conversations and how basic historical recovery does not itself constitute a collective remembrance. We must aggregate our histories both for the posterity of that aggregation, and for the opportunity to see them together, and grow them dynamically over time. We must not be satisfied with just occasions for lament and complaint that immediately erase themselves, such as those at the 1954 convention; we instead must be willing to challenge and add to one another's local practices as memorialized and historicized in a more public, global sense.

I thus argue here for a reconceptualization of the recording, remembering, and re-animating of our WPA practices, histories, and stories. First, I discuss relevant theories of memory—including distinctions between individual and collective—that come from rhetorical theory and that inform a more holistic aggregation of and dialogue about WPA practices. I then briefly discuss three notable instantiations of WPA practice as aggregated and disseminated to the field, appearing across the last eighty years, as examples of archiving that approaches but falls short (to varying degrees) of a fully dialogic experience about the history and practice of WPA work. Finally, I offer suggestions for how a more robust, dialogic presence of WPA programmatic interactions might be enacted as a large-scale project, and why that enactment is both difficult under present conceptions of what constitutes scholarship for those evaluating the work of WPAs, and yet critical to WPAs' ongoing professional work.

#### RHETORICAL MEMORY: AFFORDANCES FOR WPA HISTORIES OF PRACTICE

There are many ways to theoretically ground an argument such as the one I am making. Wrapped in it are issues of how and what we remember as WPAs; how we record, track, and learn from those memories; and how, as a field, we value the practice of remembering and historicizing our practices in order to allow the local archive to enter a national conversation. While I recognize that one of the acute obstacles to a mass kind of practice-centered remembrance for WPAs is the labor and motivations that are sometimes absent—issues I return to in my conclusion—I believe that the strongest theoretical basis for understanding and subsequently moving forward with a site for WPA collective memory is found in theories of individual versus collective remembering, which come in their most germane form from scholars in rhetorical theory.

To first ground the problem in what we *have* done as a field toward remembering our histories, I would point to many archival studies of indi-

vidual WPAs and programs, of which readers are likely aware. These have been growing in number over the last twenty-five years, starting arguably with Brereton's *The Origins of Composition* and moving more recently toward collections such as L'Eplattenier and Mastrangelo's *Historical Studies of Writing Program Administration*, Ramsey et. al's *Working in the Archives*, Gold and Hobbs' *Educating the New Southern Woman*, and Ostergaard and Wood's *In the Archives of Composition* (which highlights an archive even less fully recovered, that of normal schools). There is no question that WPA histories are ripe for historicizing, nor that WPAs of earlier generations deserve to have their voices recovered. In response to this, alongside compendiums of WPA histories, we have also seen monographs focusing more narrowly on a particular WPA or program (see for example Henze, Selzer, and Sharer; Gold, *Rhetoric at the Margins*; Lamos; Ritter, *Before Shaughnessy and To Know Her Own History*; Skinnell; and Soliday). In this research, keen attention has been paid to the recovery of local practices as they inform our present activities, on a scale, and our conceptions of how writing, as a subject, has been drawn and delivered in US colleges and universities. And for this attention, we have been rewarded: archival studies of writing programs have in recent years dominated the CCCC best book award, and have also been well represented in conferences and settings outside the CCCC and the annual CWPA conference.

Yet, despite our significant interest in local recovery projects, we have been unable to gather these histories of practice in any kind of comprehensive or dialogic way. Indeed, one of the first pieces of scholarship that lays claim to being a "history" of writing program administration—Edward P.J. Corbett's 1993 collection honoring Winifred Bryan Horner—is not really a history at all in the comprehensive sense of practice. Corbett—who of course famously asserted that there was no such thing as a WPA prior to around World War II—postulates that the "closest thing we have" to a WPA history is Susan Miller's 1991 *Textual Carnivals*—a book that, arguably, neither deeply archives WPA work nor engages in primarily historiographic methods to make its arguments (61). Corbett offers a professional-personal history of writing program administration that is actually a wide (if not sweeping) history of *writing* as taught and received at US colleges and universities from the late nineteenth century onward, including a brief discussion of the CCCC and a naming of twenty to thirty big players in this history. But this in no way could be construed as a true history of writing program *administration*, even as we, as scholars, often blur the subject and the supervision versus structure of its curricular delivery. There are no wide-scale, *intersecting* stories of WPAs, no discussion of how or why programs have come to be designed, no interrogation of the political position(s)

of WPAs among faculty. And importantly, there is no attention paid to *how* or *why* we remember and archive our practices; that is neither his goal nor his project.

Certainly, Corbett's history is indicative of how, in the early 1990s, we longed for histories of this kind, even on this scale, to be made public as an interpretation of grand narratives—as evidence proving our field *was* a field. The desire for rhetoric and composition to exist as a legitimate discipline is strongly tied to how that presence will be sustained, and later retold. But Corbett's narrative is also indicative of the struggle to gather our individual histories into a meaningful dialogue that does not rely on the valorization or emphasis of particular actors, or the in-depth study of particular programs. We contextualize our histories, but we do not allow them to talk with (or even about) one another. We *record* our practices through various instruments of large-scale aggregation—as I will discuss later—but we do not personalize or annotate those for future readers, or for the WPAs who will inherit our programs, through considerations of practices of memorialization or the effect memory has on what we aim to build or dismantle in our programmatic work. We have memories, but they are not collective ones. We are public, but we are not *a* public.

Our lacking collective memory can be partly blamed on the fact that many WPAs today work in relative isolation within their institutions, unable to discuss their practices and compare their memories (and recover what they have forgotten) with colleagues, let alone theorize how these practices might be archived in a larger context for a variety of field uses. We WPAs have varied resources at our disposal, and as such, have differing stakes and roles in the national “conversation” governing and guiding administrative work in writing programs. Yet thinking about a theoretical foundation for how such archiving might be approached is necessary in considering such an archive at all. For this purpose, I turn to rhetorical studies, specifically scholarship focusing on memory and publics, to illustrate how both the ongoing work of WPAs and the methods by which that work might be collectively archived is deeply responsive to theories of collective *memory*.

In “Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies,” Barbie Zelizer provides a useful definition of collective memory that, in its emphasis on interactivity, conflicted accounting, and identity formation, is germane to an archived WPA history of practice, and to the importance that individual WPAs have in archiving the work of the field through aggregation of experienced-based memories. Zelizer, in distinguishing between individual and collective remembrances, contends that

Unlike personal memory, which refers to an individual's ability to conserve information, the collective memory comprises recollections of the past that are determined and shaped by the group. By definition, collective memory thereby presumes activities of sharing, discussion, negotiation, and often, contestation. Remembering becomes implicated in a range of other activities having as much to do with identity formation, power and authority, cultural norms, and social interaction as with the simple act of recall. (214)

Noting that while history, and historiography, "at times has assumed a chameleon-like role, taking on some of memory's characteristics" as a privileged (i.e., more trusted) means of recounting the past, Zelizer argues that scholars of memory studies believe "collective memory is both more mobile and mutable than history," especially as new voices are added and narratives modified by additional perspectives, including those motivated by other interests (216). Importantly, Zelizer points out that "Memory studies presume multiple conflicting accounts of the past" (217) in arguing against history as a static narrative. Taking stock of Zelizer's argument allows us to distinguish between simply archiving WPA remembered practices in static, individualized form and archiving these collectively, with opportunity for response, revision, and re-appropriation owing to historical, political, and economic contexts. Understanding Zelizer's theories can help WPAs see that we are more powerful together, in sharing and comparing our recovered histories, and our memorializing of our own programs.

Such a view of memory versus history coincides with a variety of theorists of historiography, as well rhetorical scholars considering the shape and tenor of field histories, such as those in the "Octalog" and "Octalog II" discussions at the 1988 and 1997 CCCC meetings. The concept of history as dynamic and conflicting, and dependent upon multiple voices, is also the core argument for local histories in writing studies being equal to—or perhaps more important than—grand or master field narratives. The surge of "microhistories" in a variety of disciplines, including most recently rhetoric and composition (McComiskey), is also testament to the overlap between Zelizer's arguments and those already embraced within field circles, if not wholly so in those discussing writing program administration. Whereas, for example, the Octalogs go to the very heart of what rhetoric *is* (and how we forward a definition that considers rhetoric's role in historical formations of the discipline, both inside and outside the university as an institution), Zelizer's notion of collective memory even further privileges that process of contesting the *what* toward shaping continued practices, or the *how*.

Further still, Zelizer outlines through extended examples how collective memory may be taxonomized as possessing a number of characteris-

tics. It is processual, unpredictable, partial, atemporal (in that collective memory requires that time becomes a “recreation” reliant upon “nonsequential temporal patterning” [222]), independent of space (even as spaces can validate or represent a particular collective memory), usable, material, and “both particular and universal”—a quality that, of those articulated, is perhaps the most salient in anchoring a discussion of WPA histories and practices as one type of collective memory in need of interactive archiving. This taxonomy maps onto Bruce Gronbeck’s distinctions between history and memory, which are contemporary with Zelizer’s. For example, Gronbeck reminds us that “History is a bivocal discursive practice, one that is both narrative and argumentative in voice and social understanding” leading to the reality that “multiple rhetorics of the past have been practiced by various groups of advocates. The past can be endlessly argued-over and argued-with. It can itself be a battleground or it can be raided, rebuilt, and perverted for any number of human purposes” (2). This leads Gronbeck to later conclude that “the rhetoric of history is a constructionist activity in the strong sense of that word,” wherein revisiting and studying historical acts serves to act as “guidance for present-day problems or concerns” (5). For Gronbeck, the rhetoric of collective memory is “a discourse of absolute identification—an interpretation of then and now wherein the hermeneutic circle spins in exceedingly small rotations” (8).

In both Zelizer and Gronbeck’s notations of where history and collective memory diverge from, complement, or fracture our relationship with what we believe to be the past and what could have or did “happen” in that past, we can see relevance to how we might archive WPA historical practice in dialogue with this theoretical paradigm in mind. Both Zelizer and Gronbeck emphasize the polyvocal nature of collective memory—its inability to exist without continual additions, interruptions, and contestations—as well as the limitations of history as a *concept* that is dependent upon staid narratives that are unwilling or unable to conceive of the past as having multiple, competing interpretations. WPA histories are no different in this regard; moreover, they are uniquely dependent upon the ability of those past actors to *speak for themselves* in the telling, as WPAs have long since had their programs’ goals and outcomes constructed for them, by administrators and other (for right or wrong) invested faculty or broader publics. To first note that collective memory is *processual* also speaks directly to WPA histories and the need for a robust and dialogic archive of them. Our programs and our decisions are not individual actions, nor are we individual actors. Like the prominent theory of writing instruction itself, we WPAs are dependent upon and defined by *process* as much or more than we are the events that occur throughout that temporal process.

Even more recently, Kendall Phillips has put forward the concept of collective and public memory in practice through work that further illustrates theories by Zelizer and Gronbeck, among others. Phillips outlines the critical importance that collective memory plays in understanding our current rhetorical practices, and even our discipline (here constructed as rhetoric). Such importance is easily translatable to a discussion of collectively archiving writing program administration history, even as this small leap has not yet been made. In his introduction to *Framing Public Memory*, Phillips organizes the collection's entries into two main categories: *the memory of publics* and *the publicness of memory*. In doing so, he aims to distinguish between “the way that memories affect and are effected by various publics” (3) and memories that have “been visible to many, that have appeared in view of others” (6). Each of these categories is rhetorical, as

the study of memory is largely one of the rhetoric of memories. The ways memories attain meaning, compel others to accept them, and are themselves contested, subverted, and supplanted by other memories are essentially rhetorical. As an art interested in the way symbols are employed to induce cooperation, achieve understanding, contest understanding, and offer dissent, rhetoric is deeply steeped in a concern for public memories. (2–3)

In this excerpt, in arguing that “memories are essentially rhetorical,” there is a clear connection to the importance of not just recording what *happens or has happened* in our individual writing programs, but also reckoning with *who* gets to record these happenings, and *how* they are described. This distinction is important, as readers also know, to archival studies; who creates (and maintains) the archive is perhaps the single most important factor in what stories that archive is able to tell. We WPAs are logical curators of our practices, but also susceptible to our own biases. So when we record in isolation—or when we read the recordings and remembrances of others, archived as *practices*—we are frequently ignoring the real issue of bias.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing first that memories are *rhetorical* and second that collective memory is not without bias but is at least a dialogue that allows biases to be challenged and reframed, is critical to seeing WPA work archived *as* a kind of dynamically constructed collective memory, representing a diverse and significant public within our field.<sup>2</sup>

Zelizer's work can serve as a primary theoretical paradigm for constructing a site for WPA collective memory, further refined by Phillips' emphasis on the *public*—an important concept when trying to craft a thousand local histories of WPA work into some larger and cohesive space accessible to not just those WPA contributors themselves, but also to others in rhetoric, com-



position, and writing studies who want to use such a site to *understand* what is important in that memorialization. But as we think more pragmatically about how a site for WPA collective memory would operate—and quickly ascertain that such a site would need to be born digital, which I will discuss again later—we should also briefly consider how memory can operate in this type of interactive online space.

Ekaterina Haskins' "Between Archive and Participation: Public Memory in a Digital Age" serves as one example of interrogation of the power and validity of memory within a digital archive in order to highlight the affordances and limitations of archiving. Her study allows us to further connect theories of memory with the practical implementation of a large-scale archive of WPA history and practice that would require a dynamic interface and dialogic capabilities in order to enable ongoing conversation, sharing, and response. While the *National Census of Writing* is one such existing digital site—as I examine below—it has limited capabilities for dialogue, contestation, and revision. But it can be a starting point for thinking about the scope of a more comprehensive WPA archive of collective memory and practice.<sup>3</sup> We might, for example, heed Haskins' concerns about digital archives possessing qualities of "storage and order" but also "presence and interactivity"—which seem, on the surface, to be complementary. However, as Haskins explains, the unique capabilities of a digital archive puts these two impulses into competition, especially when considering the power of multivocal construction of collective memory within such an archive. Noting that until recently, "public memory was constructed and disseminated for the people, not by the people" (403), Haskins points out that scholars of memory agree that "archival" memory is no longer about "idealized representations and dogmatic iconography," particularly in sites considered commemorative in some way (404). She raises a concern that eventually, "all stories and images will be equally fit to represent and comment on the past" through the egalitarian nature of digital archiving as organized by public memory (405). Haskins' points are noteworthy; for memorials and other sites of commemoration, the need for a historical center that speaks to some kind of "truth" of the event and its participants is valid. When the central purpose of an archive, digital or otherwise, is to gather around a *common* type of remembrance, certainly the notion of "becoming one's own historian" can be problematic (408).

In Haskins' central example, the *September 11 Digital Archive*, this tension is clearly on display. However, that tension—between an "official" narrative and a narrative that is composed of individual actors and smaller remembrances—may in fact be a very productive one for WPA work as archived through principles of collective memory. As Haskins observes, "If

in its role as a database of historical materials the Archive seeks to respect the authorial agency of contributors, in the role of a tour guide it strives to educate its audience while respecting its autonomy” (416). Such a balance between agency and pedagogy—in the case of a WPA archive, allowing for individual WPA voices to speak while also making space for other actors reading the archive to *learn*, and make their own judgments about competing narratives—is critical for the kind of dynamic site that I advocate here. We might recall Janine Solberg’s argument that “digital tools mediate our discovery and interpretation of historical research subjects and thereby shape the histories that researchers find themselves more or less inclined (or able) to write” as search engines, among other technologies, allow for discoveries and connections that more static archival analysis cannot (Solberg 55). We seem to be in an opportune position to harness the power of archiving technologies in order to not only bring to light individual stories of long-forgotten (or silenced) WPAs and their work, but also to animate a conversation among and between those WPAs, importantly *within* their own lifetimes. I offer that employing the concept of public collective memory gives WPAs a basis for conceptualizing this conversation that heretofore has been relatively untheorized and, perhaps as a result, only partially acted upon, as I will illustrate next.

#### REMEMBERING PRACTICE: NECESSARY LIMITATIONS

In order to understand why even the best archives of practice assembled across the last eighty or so years are valuable *as* archives, but ultimately inadequate in recreating the collective memory I argue for here, we must distinguish between *institutional* archiving as memory, and the *individual* memory-keeping of the WPA. We must understand *institutional* archiving as what is lodged in official records and university files, often by individuals who are not program stakeholders, and *individual* memory-keeping of the WPA as a situated history, a curation of his or her own memories possibly in conflict with institutional representations. WPAs acting as memory-keepers, despite obvious complications—including those surfaced by Haskins, above—can be the most reliable archivists of the *how* and *why* of program changes, influenced by interactive memories that stem from affective takes on strictures characterizing the program itself. But these keepers must do so collectively in order to paint a full picture of ongoing administrative remembered practice on a national scale.

Public memory-keeping gives WPAs the opportunity to change their programs’ historical discourse, rather than simply track it (or have it institutionally tracked *for* them, as in the extant compendiums in circu-

lation, compiled as survey responses), and to contribute to the complicated, affective memories that augment the archive, thus further revealing the intricacies of practice. Better still, when such memory-keeping is cross-institutional, scholars of writing programs can gain a truer notion of inter-institutional relationships, one that understands in-the-moment best practices as responses to ethical representations in dialogue with other local geographies and politics outside that WPA's personal reach. Reviewing studies of the WPA as archivist, we can see that the WPA as memory-keeper is powerful in how institutional and non-institutional readers "remember" and regard the ongoing evolution of writing programs and the teaching of writing. As Shirley Rose and Irwin Weiser have argued, WPAs need to be not only researchers, but also careful archivists of their own programs. Citing Clark A. Elliott, Rose and Weiser note that certain archival "understandings" are relevant to WPAs as they strive to represent their current and past practices: that "a document can have different functions at a different time for different audiences" and that "the form of a text is determined by the conversant's need to express something *within a particular situation*" (280). To work with an archivist is an initial step; to *become* an archivist is the ideal, as doing so gives one "intellectual control" over the archival representation of one's program (280). As that archival work happens, however, it must be put into conversation with theory, as theorizing about writing program administration allows us to "understand the positions and actions of others as motivated by their particular perspectives" and in turn, articulate our own positions in relation to those others (192).

Further exploration of theoretical paradigms for archival work as pertaining to the operations and motivations of groups and organizations indicates that voices in isolation are always beholden to larger institutional interpretations, and counter-memories, that cloud how clearly that voice is ultimately heard, or understood. Organizational theorists such as Charlotte Linde illustrate how an *institution*—which she classifies broadly as "both formal and informal groupings of people and established and recognizable practices" (7) or "any social group that has a continued existence over time, whatever its degree of reification or formal status may be" (8)—both remembers and is the site of multiple, dynamic remembrances. In posing the question, "Do institutions remember?" (10), Linde explains how institutional memory can be represented through two main sources: written documents (databases, archives) and individual stories, or narratives (that are both told and repurposed by others for re-telling). Linde argues that written records are "not produced and preserved only as records of a putatively existent and stable past, but rather are representations of the past which project a probable future use for these records" (12). Importantly,

Linde further observes that “institutions and people within institutions do not mechanically record the past” (14), since every re-presentation of a document, record, or remembrance has as its goal a desired future outcome shaped *by* that record of the past.

Linde’s contentions are critical to a theoretical understanding of archiving collective memory for WPAs, as such a significant aspect of writing program administration itself is made up of first, articulating the field’s practices *as* a legitimate and second, using those articulations to sustain best practices and create a larger, informed remembrance of the *why* and *how* of writing program administration itself—for both campus and non-campus audiences with a stake in the teaching of writing in postsecondary settings, and with literacy acquisition in higher education more generally. But in our attempts to make these collective, archived articulations thus far, such memories have been necessarily documented with varying success. Part of this may be due to the twin concepts of *integration* and *fragmentation* that field historian David Gold notes are on display in composition’s histories writ large, warring with the concomitant need to recognize a “complex, multivocal past” (“Remapping” 17). As Gold asserts, this conflict is usually enacted in one of two paradigms used to construct a history, each of which privileges competing voices differently, in that “Under an epistemological model, contradiction appears schizophrenic; under a values model, it appears inevitable, even necessary” (21).

In the compendiums of practice I will discuss in more detail—Warner Taylor’s 1929 article-length survey, a 1993 booklet from the Alliance for Undergraduate Education (Working Group), and the 2015 web-based, interactive *National Census of Writing* (Gladstein and Fralix), also known informally as the WPA census—we have recording but little remembering, speaking but little conversation, and archiving of the present with minimal future intent, at least as explicitly stated or arranged. We can also see the problem of representation in equal form and emphasis—the problem of integrating voices and, by extension, memories while also seeking out a more comprehensive remembrance, à la Gold’s epistemological model, above. In these compendiums, we have *production* and *preservation*, but toward a repository of individual memories and histories rather than a more fully realized space for conversation and *reproduction* (or change) as stemming from a collective archive.

#### ARCHIVING PRACTICE: AND THE SURVEY SAYS . . .

Certainly, large-scale acts of cross-institutional program remembrances have been a visible part of our field’s literature, especially if we open up that

category to include English departments writ large. However, these remembrances use notably divergent methods, and individually prioritize different kinds of remembering, secondarily employing a range of actors with varying levels of knowledge of and engagement with the histories and practices themselves. The first such extant archive is William Morton Payne's *English in American Universities, by Professors in the English Departments of Twenty Representative Institutions*, from 1895. One might note, of course, that this is an *English* department survey of practice—owing in large part to the lack of recognition of writing programs as distinct from or even existing within English departments at this time in history. Even Harvard University and its famous “English A” that dominates master narratives of our field was not regarded as part of a “program” so much as a series of courses which, of course, were literary in nature, directed by a series of literature faculty. *English in American Universities* is a collection of short articles written by twenty professors at large state and elite private institutions (including Yale, University of California, Indiana University, Amherst, and Wellesley), as originally published in 1894 in *The Dial*, the prominent nineteenth-century magazine which Payne edited. So in this compendium, we have an artificially constructed “dialogue” of individual perspectives on the present fate and practices of English (literature) departments, rather than a conversation between sites of writing/literature that would re-enact past practice.

The second most comprehensive record of practices, chronologically speaking, belongs to John Wozniak's *English Composition in Eastern Colleges, 1850–1940*, which examines in part the same time period as Payne's surveys, but does so through data review and analysis rather than professor-driven narratives of their own departments, and which was published in 1978. Wozniak's study, while more fully recognizing the position of writing instruction within English departments as signaled by its title (at least on a curricular level), is limited to *only* a study of Eastern colleges—privileging this institutional geography as containing the most significant models for nationwide practices. Wozniak's work, rather than a collection of local narratives, is a summary of secondary findings and conclusions from program documents and artifacts that paints a portrait of how writing was taught, by whom, and within what structures at these colleges and universities between the mid-nineteenth century and the middle of World War II. Wozniak's book is frequently used as a historical guide for scholars investigating early writing “program” practices; however, it may be not entirely accurate, especially given Wozniak's outsider status, and his lack of access to the faculty staffing and directing those programs.

In order to find the first true compendium of something that more closely resembles WPA archived practices, we need to go to an article-

length study published between the larger works of Payne and Wozniak. This is Warner Taylor's 1929 "A National Survey of Conditions in Freshman English." Large static scale surveys rely not on local statements of value—which are always affected by ethical concerns for the archive—but instead a representation of *practice* over articulations of identity, or choices. Taylor's 1929 study, first published in the *University of Wisconsin Bureau of Educational Research Bulletin*, is notable in this regard. It would be followed in subsequent decades by multivocalized symposia articulating local practices published in *English Journal*, *College English*, and *College Composition and Communication*. Yet Warner's is also an aggregation of "present conditions" in numerous programs by one voice, in one moment in time. Situating Taylor's work in this context allows us to see an overall aim for multivocal campus representation via singular curation and aggregation, which in turn blunts voices and data and lacks counter-questioning and interactive response.

Available now as a document circulating mainly to general readerships through John Brereton's inclusion in *Origin of Composition Studies*, "A National Survey" examined the content and staffing of over 300 first-year composition programs across the US. These were public and private, small and large institutions that included single-sex and liberal arts colleges, and elite Eastern seaboard universities. Taylor focused on a variety of metrics, including the prevalence of handbooks, commonalities across other reading assignments, number of students taught per instructor, number of men versus women teaching, frequency of individual conferences, and attention to special populations, such as "subfreshmen," i.e., basic writing students. Taylor provided extensive annotation, while also presenting factual tables charting category responses. Taylor comes to many conclusions that look familiar today: the handbook is "not going anywhere" any time soon; teachers have more pupils than they can reasonably respond to (even with theme-readers present to assist); newer teachers are assigned to the teaching of writing while older, more experienced teachers eschew it; and teaching writing is an inexact science. Taylor uses these program data to make larger generalizations about the state of writing programs, rather than call attention to local or best practices in smaller-grained detail.

As such, typically historians look at the Taylor survey to argue for the decades-long persistence of workload problems in the teaching of writing and to examine the local conditions represented in aggregate in the document itself. Given that his work was published in 1929, it is also an important benchmark in a time when little widespread archival evidence of the work of WPAs existed. But to step back and look at the Taylor survey from the perspective of rhetorical memory, I see different issues in play. Specifi-

cally, if Taylor's work emphasizes various problems (and successes) in teaching writing on college campuses, it does so through prescribed questions that themselves assume a set of conditions that are shared by many, and that attempt to categorize the work of WPAs and writing teachers through larger taxonomic logic rather than individual, contextual concerns or subsequent dialogic opportunities.

Taylor received a very high response rate on his survey—over 70%, as compared with, for example, the *National Census of Writing* and its response rate of 42% for four-year colleges and 24% for two-year colleges—but he also created the questions, interpreted the data, and controlled the ensuing dissemination of results; Taylor, like Payne before him, was an ethnographic archivist, if you will. His data hold static in the absence of responses to it, or multivocal augmentations, save the 1930 response from Stith Thompson, published, in *College English*, which largely functions as a summary and celebration of Taylor's work and findings, notably arguing that Taylor's findings are timely, as "Devices already in successful operation elsewhere have been independently invented and the painful process of trial and error needlessly repeated" (78). For Thompson, writing programs (*née* freshmen writing courses) can only succeed if there is a "continual alertness of directors and teachers in the improvement of instruction and a clear understanding of what others are doing" (80).<sup>4</sup> Thompson's call for knowledge sharing echoes yet today, but only insofar as we *isolate* practice from experience, and further still, from programmatic memories. Taylor's survey allowed other directors to see into the programs they could otherwise never see, but it did not give them similar insight into their counterparts' reasoning or experiences. Taylor's survey is thus a portrait of the *teaching of composition*, but not the *people* behind it; it is disembodied memories of practice that have no human element to allow us to engage them further, or understand their relative nuances.

Similarly, the 1993 Alliance for Undergraduate Education *Profiles of Writing Programs* compendium, a 74-page bound publication produced by a subcommittee on writing programs and assessment, features seventeen, 2–4 page responses from research institutions in the Alliance to a set of boilerplate categories regarding program resources and practices (Working Group). These categories are curriculum, administrative structure, student support, staff, staff development and support, reforms in progress, and "highlight," a category designed to leave room for program administrators to spotlight the hallmark features or accomplishments of their individual programs. Following the program profiles is a narrative interpretation of the program data by the committee itself, in the style of Warner Taylor's previous work.<sup>5</sup>

The goal of collecting these profiles during the 1989–90 academic year, according to the document’s preface, was to “enable members of the Alliance as well as other educators to understand in detail the mechanisms for writing instruction that prevail on Alliance campuses” as well as “offer overviews of how Alliance institutions approach specific matters of curriculum, staffing, and support.” A further goal was to “obtain reliable and comprehensive information about how writing is taught at the large, research-oriented, public—and influential—universities that compose the Alliance.” These were the University of Arizona; University of California, Berkeley; University of California, Los Angeles; University of Florida; University of Illinois at Chicago, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign; Indiana University; University of Maryland; University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, University North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Ohio State University, Penn State University, Rutgers University, University of Texas at Austin, University of Washington, and University of Wisconsin–Madison. As is clear from this list of institutions, the Alliance’s document—by virtue of its membership—profiled only a particular *kind* of program, and administrative practice therein—and therefore presented for readers only a limited or partial sense of what a university writing program might look like, or concern itself with, in the late twentieth century.

While the Alliance profiles were constructed in consultation with the committee, and were subject to review and revision prior to publication, as noted in the preface to the document, these are individual portraits of individual institutions, eliciting as an archival record competing visions of what a writing program could or should be. These articulations make the document valuable for benchmarking, for example, current practices against past ones at a particular institution. Examining the response from my institution, the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign (UIUC), I can see the contraction since 1992 of both our first-year writing course options and our electives beyond the first year. I can also see that the now-defunct placement examination exempted 18% of all students from the composition requirement, whereas now external national measurements exempt closer to 50%. Finally, I can see the beginnings of our “Composition II” requirement, and a highlighting of the faculty development offerings for writing instructors that continues to be a hallmark of our program. But I do not see the *why* or even the *how*; all I can do is see the *when* versus the *now*, and put that against other program profiles in the booklet—for example, contrasting the in-house placement process at UIUC with the developing high school portfolio program at the University of Michigan. I can see practices memorialized, but not in meaningful relation to one another—and without



entry of possibly competing memories (from other program stakeholders, peer institutions, etc.).

The dissemination of non-dialogic yet comparative practices, policies, and philosophies is both a strengthening measure for the discipline's archives, as it tracks our writing programs in moments in time, yet also a cacophonous measure that opens WPAs up for comparative discord, if and when memories collide. In the case of the Alliance's study, no voices and memories *can* collide because they are segregated by location and by the individual WPA's responses in the document; instead, they are in fact *reconciled* in the interpretive section following the profiles, due to the limitations of data aggregation and narrative conclusions following. For example, when discussing basic writing courses and requirements, the conclusion notes that "Expectations in basic writing courses are usually equivalent to those in the regular course, with similar kinds and amounts of writing assigned . . . basic writing courses are also more likely to include some sort of exit review, perhaps a portfolio or in-class essay" (63). While this is technically an accurate description of the data, it tells the reader nothing about what role WPAs took in designing these courses or assessments, nor whether the WPAs themselves stand by these as best practices. The reader has no real direction as to how to read these conditions, or how to use them for local benchmarking.

Thus, while the Alliance document is invaluable for measuring the growth and change of these particular writing programs between 1990 and today, and for seeing many prominent writing programs in one historical moment, it is comparatively useless for understanding how these programs operated in consort—if indeed they did—and whether the answers were representative of the larger historical arc of the programs themselves. Rather, it is a report that stops short of making its data dialogic, or emphasizing which findings are most important to writing program administration in the early 1990s—thereby giving it also limited archival value when set against other individual archival documents bearing similar information that might be found on these individual campuses, ones that could be more fully in dialogue with the larger ecology of the program and institution at that moment in time.

In contrast, Gladstein and Fralix's *National Census of Writing*—an online project that gathers the results of more than two years of painstaking data collection from postsecondary writing programs across the country—provides an updated example of what survey aggregation might do on a more personalized and cross-institutional level, and with the affordances of digital technology. The *Census* offers a broad lens focusing again on the kind of local profiling work started with the Alliance's *Profiles*, yet on a

scale far beyond either it or Taylor's, as the web-based survey is designed to detail as well as summarize, aggregate as well as drill down, based on the interactive needs of the user. Despite the fact that the scope and time of the *Census*' research resembles in some ways Taylor's work, it aims to provide more than a singular snapshot of *how* writing programs are run and by whom. Indeed, it is searchable through many different possible filters, and purports to be dynamic, rather than static—a database to which items can be later added and revised. As a result, one might simply argue that to compare Gladstein and Fralix's work to Taylor's is to basically highlight digital archiving as an improvement over print, and to further highlight technology as a panacea to issues in recording collective memory. But to only see this difference is a limited view, recalling Linde's observation that it is “a technological dream that narrative knowledge can somehow be data-based” (12).

The *Census* is a massive and commendable collective of 680 four-year and 220 two-year institution program profiles, collected via local WPAs' responses to a series of questions about program structure, support, staffing, and enrollments. Pledged as a project that will be repeated for new responses/results every four years, starting in 2017, the *Census* is a robust, online, interactive database that allows for both a mass and an individual vocalization of WPA work, through user choices made when delving into the data. Yet because it focuses on the programs rather than the WPAs themselves—relying on WPA reporting as did the Alliance document, and aggregation of results as in both the Alliance and Taylor's surveys—the *Census* still cannot provide a *dialogic* approach that allows WPAs to collectively affect the *shared* discourse of writing programs. However, it is one model for where such a dialogic initiative might start.

The main page of the *Census* offers three links, in addition to an “About” section, a section for glossary of terms used in the census and notes, and a blog: links to two-year institutional data, four-year institutional data, and program profiles. The sorting of census material into these categories not only calls attention to the unique challenges and responses of community versus four-year colleges—something historically under- (or non-) represented thus far in any of the surveys previously discussed here—but also gives users the choice of going directly to program profiles of responding institutions, with access to specific responses from that particular institution for those who consented. When a user clicks on one of the answers, the larger data emerge to put that local answer in national context. Figure 1 is an example, using Eastern Michigan University.

# Eastern Michigan University

Does your institution have an official writing program or department? (n=671)

Yes

[View All Responses](#)

What is the institutional home of the writing program or department? (n=248)

English Department

[View All Responses](#)

Does your institution have first-year writing? (n=673)

Yes

[View All Responses](#)

Is first-year writing part of the writing program or department? (n=646)

Yes

[View All Responses](#)

Does your institution have writing across the curriculum (WAC)? (n=671)

Yes

[View All Responses](#)

Figure 1. A screenshot of *National Census on Writing* results for Eastern Michigan University.

Users can also start with a particular question, and see the statistics on aggregate responses. Figure 2 is an example of the results available for the question “Does your Institution have an official writing program or department?” There are a variety of other ways to burrow into this massive amount of data—for example, the question “does your institution have a first-writing requirement” prompts follow-up questions about what that might mean (regarding number of courses, when the courses must be completed, how they are designed). But going beyond the affordances of the technology—which are many—and the overall value and labor of the project itself, which is considerable and commendable, I want to emphasize the rhetorical import such local responses in national context might provide, if able to be put in more direct dialogue with one another, for WPAs wanting to represent their programs in this massive archive. I can point to any number of institutional archives that provide a partial view of how a composition program was structured, or how a particular WPA responded to a set of circumstances in his or her time. But aggregating WPA experiences across institutions, in a public, dialogic context, has additional advantages that we should consider if we are to move forward with seeing WPAs as not only leaders of the present, but conversational, situated voices in the archive directing their aggregated memories toward helping their successors—and stakeholders—who need perspective on the *why* as well as the *how*.

#### CONCLUSION: TOWARD A MULTIVOCAL ARCHIVE OF REMEMBERED PRACTICE

In “The Persistence of Institutional Memory: Genre Uptake and Reform,” Dylan Dryer contends that

WPAs should think carefully about the genres through which their administration is enacted and by which it is conditioned. For if genre conventions organize social relations among students, administrators, and faculty, changes in such conventions can be signals of, and possibly provocations for, changes in social relations. (34)

Dryer’s concerns focus on the precedents set through institutional policy-making and document creation, specifically the placement exam at University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee (UWM) and how it led readers to make “assumptions about our students’ needs” that did not necessarily bear out in practice (38). Dryer observes that in developing this exam process, and using it to determine characteristics and needs of UWM student writers, he and his colleagues “‘took up’ the genre of the standardized test as our means of institutional reform, but in doing so, we also took up ways of talking and writing about ends that effaced the whole question of students’ choice” (42).

# Does your institution have an official writing program or department? (n=671)

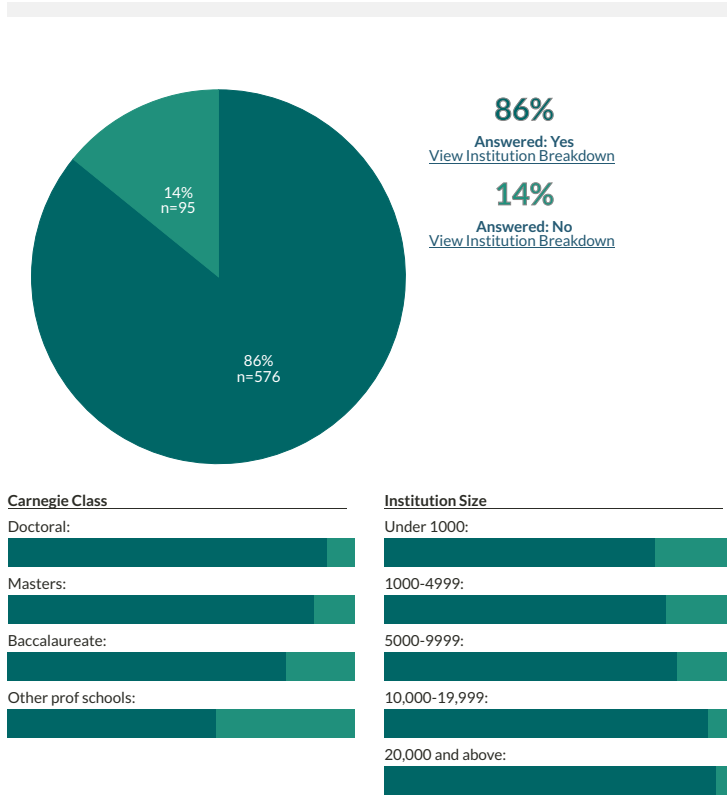


Figure 2. A screenshot of *National Census on Writing* results for the question, “Does your institution have an official writing program or department?”

Dryer’s study, while not primarily about archiving practice, is relevant to my own interests in ethically memorializing WPA work in dynamic, public dialogue in two ways. First, Dryer is unusually openly reflective about what he perceives to be a failed practice in WPA work, i.e., the creation and sustainment of a basic writing course that in the longer view

may not have fully accounted for students' own perspectives in its design and implementation. But it is Dryer's concern for the institutional memory surrounding this course—beyond the issues of curricular accuracy in the moment—that makes the study notable in a second way. That is, how a local practice will or *should* be remembered by future WPAs and, potentially—I would argue—historians of as well as public stakeholders in that program. Dryer's detailed accounting of his colleagues' practice in this article would seem to guard against misrepresentation of the curricular choices that were made; if anything, the article is far more apology than apologia. But his accounting also illustrates the complex nature of WPA *remembering*, and the stakes in play when memorializing programmatic practice on a local versus national level. For Dryer to argue for thoughtful genre uptake in WPA work, he must also fully account for the work his administrative team set out to do; he must archive this through the publication of the article itself. But in doing so, there are still many voices left unheard—including the WPAs who came before, and their comparative practices; the students who were most affected by the placement exam itself; and, most critically, the WPAs whose work would follow and build upon these findings—or not—at UWM. In addition, invoking the genre of the article *as* archive, as I am here, is ultimately problematic, due to the limitations on its audience, circulation, and productive future reference. We can all, theoretically, publish work *about* our work, but it must be found, read, and heard. And in doing so, it must work in conversation, not isolation.

I employ Dryer's article here neither to call out its articulation of any of its choices, nor to claim that publicizing such choices in this format is positive, negative, or indifferent to the greater WPA good. Rather, I highlight Dryer's local articulation of practice in order to illustrate the larger problem of our absent collective memory as a WPA community, which is notable alongside our privileging of individual memories and recovered individual archives. As a public, we are not as strong as we could be, as we cannot speak truly collectively in narrating our histories as they affect our present. It would be impossible to gather *all* our voices, *all* our memories and histories in one place—I do recognize the logistics of this undertaking, just as I understand the very real limitations of historical work, some of which I've noted here. But what would happen if we scaled up our goals of extra-institutional conversations and remembrances, feeding our memories—affecting and affected by our professional and sometimes personal decisions—into a larger, present conversation that could be dynamic and ongoing, more than just a record of current practices? And how would we do that?

One possible example of how this dialogic memory-keeping of WPA work is already operating on a local scale at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Connors Writing Center, as articulated by Patty Wilde, Molly Tetreault, and Sarah B. Franco in “Talking Back: Writing Assistants Renegotiate the Public Memory of Writing Centers.” At UNH, a desire to both memorialize the marginalization of their writing center and writing centers as a site of under-recognized pedagogical discourse, as well as document the influence of the late Robert Connors in dialogue with current practices stemming from that influence, resulted in an archival project in which

Assistants offered documents containing individual and collective insights, knowledge, and experiences they hope will promote writing center philosophy while also ensuring their voices are preserved in our Center’s past. Instead of a tale of marginalization, assistants’ contributions, in concordance with Boquet and Lerner, shift public memory toward the ways writing center work preserves “liberating pedagogies” for both assistants and students. (114)

A primary goal of this work was to have “the assistants crack open the discourses involved in writing center scholarship and enter as practitioners, researchers, and writers” with the hope that “their voices will impact future generations of students, writing center staff, and administrators” (114).

Wilde, Tetreault, and Franco’s focus on the voices and memories of assistants not only allowed their team to emphasize actors not typically privileged in the archive; it also gave the staff a greater sense of how memories and experiences intersect and collide, since the assistants also were adding their own experiences to the collective archive (106). Labeling their work a “public memory” and connecting it explicitly to Zelizer’s theories, assistants learned methods of archival collection, engaged with various administrative documents that are so often underprivileged *as* archival material outside program curation efforts (memos, emails, training materials). Further, their work allowed them to more fully appreciate and interpret *how* the archival documents worked in the past, and how they might be better employed as programmatic practice in the present; a primary example of this was their analysis of past assistants’ training, approaches to conferences, and academic backgrounds (109). As Wilde, Tetreault, and Franco state, “this project offered them the opportunity to consider the ways past, present, and future interact and to engage in cross-temporal conversations with both past and future assistants” (113).

The UNH project also responds to Jane Greer and Laurie Grobman’s caution about the *balance* of voices in the archive, which is an important

consideration in constructing any representation of a WPA *public* across multiple local and regional contexts. Greer and Grobman assert that “Public discussion creates a shared reality. Yet . . . public memory is imbricated with power relations; therefore, while public memory is ideally a shared enterprise, powerholding groups and individuals exert greater influence in production and maintenance” (13). The UNH writing center project is a robust example of local archival practices that not only keep the center and its historical and present actors in view, but also provides a dialogic experience for future faculty and students interacting with it, and considers the ways in which those voices with less power (peer tutors, for example) lose agency over time in even the most sincere attempts at collective memory.

The UNH project is still *local*, however, and its structure—though dialogic with archives and artifacts—is more time capsule in reality than dynamic dialogue. A digitized, truly public version of this archive would come even closer to the model site I am proposing that the WPA community undertake. Nonetheless, the spirit of this project is responsive to my concerns with keeping memory, history, theory and practice in some kind of continual orbit that makes evident how the WPA community is both public and—in terms of institutional mandates regarding testing, literacy, and nationwide standards—a situated *counterpublic* of many authoritative and valuable voices that act not in isolation, but in response to those who have come before, guiding those who will follow. Such a trajectory, documented in a national rather than global way, is critical, as even though WPA work can be for “life” or simply a transitory moment in a career, the archiving of that position, particularly when done so toward an aggregation of what writing “is” or what writing programs “are,” is fraught with positional complications rarely represented in singular, static utterances, or larger-scale, institution-centered repositories of policies and practices.

In creating a dialogic archive of WPA collective memory alongside existing data and historical “fact,” a critical question arises: Why has this kind of project not been undertaken before? Why, as the closest model to the one I am proposing, have the creators of the *National Census of Writing* had such difficulty mounting their project, significantly in terms of gathering survey data and ongoing contributors from programs across the country? One immediate answer would be that such work is inherently *not valued* in typical paradigms of institutional merit. While creating and maintaining a database such as the one I’m proposing would be immensely useful as a “service” project for the profession (and likely for smaller subgroups, such as regional WPA associations that wish to, perhaps, subarchive their own regional remembered histories for dialogic purposes), it would be likely unrewarded by tenure and promotion committees. I am reminded of



the conversation I had with a colleague about who might next oversee the *CompPile* database that Rich Haswell and others have so expertly steered and maintained in these past decades. I responded that it would need to be someone very senior who not only had the knowledge of the field and ability to find new information to include/update, but who also had the time, institutional space, and institutional rank—i.e., serving as a full professor who was free to pursue projects outside the spectre of tenure and promotion requirements—to devote to the project. And that is a difficult combination to find.

A site such as the one I am proposing would operate, potentially, as a kind of enhanced *CompPile*, one that is built to converse and question and remember rather than just digitize and share. But it falls into the same category in terms of value to one's institutional and professional profile and tenure/promotion case, theoretically. It could uncomfortably straddle the current sparkle and shine of projects in the often ill-defined “digital humanities” and the very unshiny, oft-maligned practical and theoretical world of university administration—an area already shunned and undervalued by our institutional colleagues, as *WPA* readers know. Certainly individual digital projects on pedagogy, history, and theory abound in recent years in the larger field of rhetoric and composition/writing studies, and are supported as research and scholarship by the participants' home institutions; one such recent example is the collection of theoretical perspectives and described projects in the November 2013 special issue of *College English* (guest edited by Jessica Enoch and David Gold). Yet when we think of *larger-scale* digital projects in rhetoric and composition/writing studies, such as the *Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives* (DALN) housed at the Ohio State University, the historical and archival projects surrounding NCTE's centennial in 2011 (both an online digital project and a print project in various forms), the *Digital Rhetoric Collaborative* at the University of Michigan, or even the more grassroots, digitally constructed *Writing Studies Tree* initiated at the City University of New York, we also see significant organizational or institutional backing, and a familiar connection to *scholarship-based* artifacts and conversations. In order to create a site for *WPA* collective and dialogic memory-keeping, we need both a technical apparatus and a communal buy-in—financially and ideologically speaking—to make the project visible, useful, and intellectual in its design and import. And we need to value archived *WPA* remembrances and their aggregation *as* scholarship—that which falls into the category of “Program Related Textual Production” according to the *CWPA*'s official statement on the intellectual work of *WPAs* (“Evaluating”).

Thus, on both a practical/materials scale and a conceptual/support scale, we as a WPA community would likely need each of the following in order to make a proposal such as mine a reality, and afford it the recognition of the other field-based projects mentioned above:

- A secure connection to a professional organization, such as CWPA, or another stable institutional site, in order to provide a lasting digital space for construction of this dialogue, as well as reliable access to various contributions, and ongoing maintenance. One model here is the wiki genre, though that format is fairly un-dialogic, allowing for annotation and replacement rather than give-and-take on a particular issue, figure, or fact. Other models are found in open access/digital-born publications or aggregations in our field, though we know that these sites are also highly dependent upon the financial good will of their hosts (see, for example, my previous discussion of *CompPile*). Finally, a partially archival foundation for such a dialogue might be the *Census*, as discussed previously, but further additions to and dialogue with this data would still require an attentive host. Certainly, finding the *place* for collective memory interactions to occur long-term is the first (and I acknowledge, most difficult) step in making it happen.
- A further commitment by WPAs—in a collective sense, if not as particular named curators—to design the space in such a way that it is able to capitalize on the various and often divergent forms of memory-keeping I've noted in this article: surveys, questionnaires, aggregate data analysis, archival analysis, storytelling/oral histories, and testimony. The best space would be able to draw upon *all* of these measures to provide a full picture of how practices of present and past were enabled and limited by particular conditions, voices, and institutional strictures. It would also be mindful of rhetorical memory as represented throughout these forms and genres, and the larger truths of personal and collective bias that inform any kind of memorialization beyond “facts.” Finally, it would give participants a variety of ways “in”—from those who want to only deposit artifacts to those who (also) want to annotate the artifacts and views of others—and an argument for undertaking program-related scholarship that can be articulated to institutions as meaningful, research-based work.
- A shared understanding within the WPA community at large that no story, or WPA telling a story, is without consequence, and that no documentation of program practice is unimportant to our larger landscape and public presence. This means striving for access for those who labor outside the known conference and institute circuits

where many of us gather to share our stories; we must encourage participation by those WPAs who are at present not beneficiaries of networking, or more established systems. In doing so, we should not rely solely on the so-called historians of our field (and here I broadly include rhetoric and composition/writing studies scholars as a group) to make meaning of the past as relevant to the various presents we experience on our campuses. We instead should be *actively* making meaning of the comings and goings of our accomplishments (and, importantly, failures, such as in Dryer's study) across campuses. This could dramatically change the way we, as a community, view our "history"—as something that is not static, but actively in dialogue with our present; a fluid time-space continuum, if you will.

Putting our memories and resulting histories into a useable collective space, and conversation, backed by thoughtful consideration of theories of rhetorical memory, is a tall order, but one which I have aimed to articulate and outline here as an initial call to action. The ethical presence of writing program administrators, and their valuation by those both inside and outside the field—especially those stakeholders who affect WPA work from sometimes great distances—is dependent upon our larger consideration of collective memory toward a stronger professional public.

## NOTES

1. To recall Arlette Farge,

the historian cannot be narrator alone; he must also explain and persuade, providing detailed explanations because he knows that contrary ones can always be advanced. The first illusion that must be cast aside is that of the definitive truthful narrative. A historical narrative is a construction, not one that can be verified on all of its points. (95)

2. For a fascinating complement to Phillips, and other scholars of rhetorical memory, see Bradford Vivian's *Public Forgetting*, in which he argues the following:

"public memory" is the result of a perpetual rhetorical process with which communities deliberate over how best to interpret the past as a resource for understanding and making decisions in the present. . . . Acts of public forgetting likewise culminate patterns of collective deliberation or contestation over the meaning of the past as it concerns immediate social or political interests. (13)

Vivian sees memory and forgetting as complementary acts, with forgetting having key benefits at times that supersede the value of remembering.

3. See also, for a guide to the considerations and pitfalls of born digital historical projects (which rely in broad strokes on the concept of contested memories), Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig's *Digital History*. For additional theoretical conceptions of public memory as related to histories of the nation-state, see John R. Gillis' collection *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*.

4. For a deeper look at Stith Thompson as a WPA, one which illuminates his own response to Taylor's survey, see Jill Terry Rudy's "Building a Career by Directing Composition: Harvard, Professionalism, and Stith Thompson at Indiana University."

5. The *Profiles* publication might be viewed as a smaller version of Haring-Smith et al.'s 1985 *A Guide to Writing Programs: Writing Centers, Peer Tutoring Programs, and Writing-Across-the-Curriculum*, which described programs beyond first-year writing, and with a wider institutional reach studied in greater detail.

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