

Reinventing the Spiel: The Context and Case for Interinstitutional Collaboration in an Era of Education Austerity

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Like so many writing program administrators, this article is multitasking. Its tasks are twofold. The first describes the process and outcomes of a short-term, grant-funded project that fostered writing-for-transfer conversations between the academic literacy center at my two-year college, area high schools, and predominant four-year transfer destinations. The second situates that narrative within current social and political contexts of writing studies and writing instructional professionals locally and nationally. Together, these tasks point to the especially provisional nature of the professional roles of those who administer systematic writing instruction and “academic support” in the majority of open-access colleges, where formal writing programs rarely exist, and where the work of WPAs is unnamed and undefined. Thus, this article offers a narrative about community and discovery and an argument about academic discourse and power. Ultimately, this article calls on us to view our roles within the context of our own institutions and in terms of our situational relationships with other kinds of institutions. It asks that we make more visible the overlapping missions of all literacy educators for the purpose of validating and sustaining more equitable educational practices.

At times, the two goals of this article seem to wrestle with one another. If I could, I would write this essay in *cesura*, with the project narrative introducing and echoing the metanarrative with lyrical echoes and clap backs. Instead, I invite you, the reader, to straddle shifts in roles—as grant reporter, curriculum designer, and auto-ethnographer—to insert your own experiences of role-shifting into the spaces created within this article as I navigate the wardrobe changes such role-shifting necessitate. As administrators of writing instructional curricula across institutions language our ways through this tumultuous era of education reform and contraction—of increased calls for student supports against gross reductions in funding (especially at two-year colleges), I hope that this article will help us ask how we can deconstruct professional barriers that limit our potential to collaboratively advocate for the best learning opportunities for our students. Taken as a whole, this article aims to illustrate how inter-institutional collaboration can reinforce disciplinary expertise and strengthen educational advocacy within districts, regions, or more. I argue that failures to create

and support such collaborations stem from mythologies about teachers at other institutions, and that these failures undermine the credibility of our colleagues and the discipline of writing studies. Finally, I call for deep reflection and engaged deconstruction of disciplinary boundaries that fail us, that impede our political potential and inhibit our abilities to teach and support our students as they navigate a seemingly diasporic and arbitrary education system.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT: TEACHING INITIATIVES IN OPEN-ACCESS HIGHER EDUCATION DURING AN ERA OF COMPLETION AND AUSTERITY

Writing studies scholars who work at other kinds of institutions may not realize how the distinct histories of two-year colleges have shaped the development of the multiple educational missions of public two-year colleges or how decreases in state and federal education funding have changed the access and resources available for fulfilling those missions. Over the last twenty years, funding for open-access, two-year colleges has decreased significantly (Desrochers and Kirshstein), leaving these colleges to rely increasingly on private funding contracts to continue offering educational opportunities for the myriad of students poorly served by other higher education institutions, due to geographic, economic, or academic limitations. These private contracts, which come in the forms of corporate sponsors of education and workforce initiatives—from the Lumina Foundation to the local Rotary Club—introduce new pressures and limitations on educational curricula and learning outcomes in an already freighted landscape of education initiatives and reforms. Knowledge of these contexts is essential for understanding the purposes and process of this project's development, specifically, and two-year college writing instruction and administration, broadly. Therefore, I will provide some of the background necessary to understand the context of the grant project here.

Following World War II, the President's Commission on Higher Education (The Truman Commission) called for the expansion of "community colleges" as a core strategy for mitigating economic inequities in the country and supporting long-term goal racial integration and equitable educational opportunity for social and economic advancement (Quigley and Bailey; Hutcheson, Gasman, and Sanders-McMurtry). Trends in enrollment in the intervening 73 years suggest that the public, indeed, turns to two-year colleges to support their goals for higher education—both academic and vocational. Enrollment patterns over those years also suggest that colleges succeed in fulfilling many of these roles (United States Census Bureau). In recent decades however, two-year colleges have faced increasing, often con-

tradicting, pressures to enroll and graduate more students to compensate for reductions in state and local spending on education alongside a simultaneous increase in rhetoric for accountability funding (Kahlenberg, Shireman, Quick, and Habash).

Three external pressures are essential for understanding these increasing, contradictory pressures: a per-student funding-spending paradox, the college completion agenda and college redesign movements in tandem, and a commensurate increase in the rhetoric of accountability funding. Serving the bulk of non-traditional and historically underrepresented minorities, two-year colleges have faced sharp criticism for the low completion rates of their students, with studies suggesting that only 13%–30% of students achieve their initial, self-described college goals within 150% time (Kahlenberg, Shireman, Quick, and Habash). At just over \$14,000, current per-student spending at two-year colleges is roughly a third of what it is at research universities (\$39,783). Thus, the imperative to better support students with diverse-ranging learning needs to graduate at higher rates is met with paradoxically low resources to meet those needs. Meanwhile, the impending promise of tying funding to student completion rates rises.

Taken together, “College Redesign Movement,” named for Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins’ provocative text *Redesigning America’s Community College* and informed by the larger national backdrop of the college completion agenda, has inspired a range of interventions intended to improve graduation and certificate completion rates of community college students and explicitly ties these goals to “accountability” (McPhail). Writing and math instruction are primary sites of instructional interventions at these colleges, with developmental courses in these disciplines comprising the top tier. These interventions include faculty-driven efforts to reform curriculum (e.g., the ALP movement), as well as top-down interventions in curriculum mapping and enrollment structures (such as Guided Pathways,¹ at least in some iterations) (Adams, Gearhardt, Miller, and Roberts; Jenkins and Cho; Van Noy, Trimble, Jenkins, Barnett, and Wachen). They range from changes to placement procedures and the implementation of co-requisite instructional strategies to the recommendation of delayed enrollment in courses traditionally identified as “prerequisites.”

But reform is expensive. Pressed on both sides, two-year colleges are regularly admonished not to raise tuition—the only source of funding over which they have control—because increases threaten affordability and access for students. Meanwhile, private funds offer opportunities to pilot new interventions intended to help them demonstrate accountability via the recognized measures (completion, persistence) and to showcase accountability to public funding agencies: state and local governments. But these

student outcomes measures are frequently decontextualized from the lived realities of students and from the pedagogies of faculty experts, leading to generalized resistance to such initiatives from English faculty members. As a result, institutional funding, educational quality, and learning resources occupy precarious positions vis-à-vis administrators and faculty who often see their work at cross purposes.

Writing studies faculty and scholars would be naïve to dismiss the work of the college redesign movement without attending to some of its critiques. Far from being a simplistic Machiavellian overreach by administrators—as we sometimes portray it in sidebar conversations among ourselves—attempts to implement interventions by administrators are tied to threats to long-term funding and what is—in most cases—a genuine concern about educational inequity. To wit: the problem of the college redesign movement is not that it calls out open-access two-year colleges for failing to deliver on the lofty, democratic—and likely unachievable—goal of college for all. The critique that educational institutions fail to “even the playing field,” and thereby reinforce and reproduce existing inequalities are substantial (e.g., Giroux), and most of our tribe of teacher-scholar-activists would (or should) readily agree.

The problem of college redesign is that it advocates for interventions in the areas of writing (and mathematics) instruction without attending to decades of existing pedagogical research on literacies instruction, language ideology, or learning theories. In this way, college redesign and its entourage of associated reforms is similar in kind and modality to reform efforts that have hamstrung literacy educators in K–12 since the explosive publication of *Why Johnny Can't Read* (Flesch) and the reform fallout that followed (e.g., Shor; Gold). The failure of reform initiatives to attend to existing research—and the social equity goals that underlie those research methods—renders invisible the robust knowledge writing teachers and scholars across all institutions have about literacy practices and how to teach them. It also positions the “redesign” movement in a role of “reinventing the wheel,” of instructional models that already exist or have been abandoned because leaders of the movement are outsiders—and thus unaware—of our disciplinary conversations. Meanwhile, divisions—and perceived limitations—on our institutional roles limit the potentials of teachers-scholar-activists-[administrators] to engage these reform efforts productively even when they unwittingly undermine learning and equity.

This context puts writing instructional administrators at two-year colleges—by the nature of their positions as go-betweens for instructors and administrators—in the role of perpetually “reinventing the spiel”—of “making the case” for previously existing (as well as new) instructional

approaches that respond to the social, cognitive, and linguistic diversity our students bring to our classrooms and writing centers. They are possibly best strategically positioned to facilitate an improved culture of visibility, trust, and collaboration between writing instructors within and across institutions. Sadly, with funding for such positions tenuous at best, and formalized recognition from within the area of writing studies virtually absent, they are poorly supported to do so.

Here, I offer my experiences as a case study of the precarious positioning administrators of writing supports at two-year colleges navigate when embarking on a pragmatic collaboration with instructors within and across institutions and the ways these constraints shaped and afforded greater visibility and professional autonomy to our high school colleagues.

THE PROJECT: FUNDING, LANGUAGE, AND COMMUNITY

In 2015, the Macomb Reading and Writing Studios opened with a generous—albeit provisional—two-year budget, and a set of guiding responsibilities. Chief among these responsibilities were (a) “Build an overarching program design and maintain assessment reports and metrics associated with the” studios and (b) “Assist in generating future funding for” the studios. The college president, provost, and our supervising dean were committed to the success of the new academic literacy center, which had resulted from sustained advocacy from faculty in writing, reading, business, and other areas. The charge was clear: demonstrate impact to the board of trustees within two years. Demonstrated ability to secure outside funding would contribute to our future existence. Securing permanent funding was among my chief responsibilities as founding (and provisional) director.

In the spring of 2016, a few months shy of completing the first fiscal year of the studios, our office of institutional support encouraged me to write a proposal for private grant funds intended to support high school writers. At first, I noted that high school ELA instruction was outside the purview of our work as a college writing center. After several conversations about the politics of funding—“money begets money”—and a reminder that we had spent nearly half of our contingent time, I agreed. Within the next week, the grants department, the foundations office, and I had composed and submitted a preliminary response to the call for grant proposals.

As members from our funding office and I rumbled through the proposal process, I recognized a need to exercise what Louise Wetherbee Phelps and John M. Ackerman have called being “rhetorical fluid”—a responsiveness to the exigence of the validating context, in this case, the granting body and the college, both of which were positioned to determine the

sustained funding of the academic literacy center (201). I saw this as an opportunity “make the case” for the studios—to foster the kind of boundary-folding professional responsibility Tara Fenwick has advocated for as a dynamic doing and undoing, one that co-constitutes responsibility between collaborators. In her chair’s address, Linda Adler Kassner has called on Fenwick’s scholarship to encourage writing instructional professionals to create “principled connections” with our interlocutors within our institutions—to advocate for grounded knowledge within a diverse and multidisciplinary practice (333). I prioritized disciplinary expertise and values from the field of writing studies, outlining a curriculum that highlighted genre analysis, knowledge transfer, and self-regulation (Reiff and Bawarshi; MacArthur, Philippakos, and Janetta); language rights and linguistic diversity (Smitherman; *Students’ Right*), and student-led teaching that emphasized individual writing processes. Students at our target high schools disproportionately represented historically marginalized racial experiences or hailed from forced immigration from the countries of Iraq, Yemen, and Syria; I wanted to advocate for non-assimilative language instruction. At the same time, I needed to cater to our audience. I knew our grantors were interested in short-term measurable demonstrations of improved writing ability, and I believed that for them—and for my colleagues in the funding office—“writing ability” meant habitual use of “standard American grammatical dialect.” Disrupting this misconception was as important (if not more) than obtaining the grant, and so I wrote the document to educate and include my colleagues in discussions about writing, access, dialect, and race. Still, the nature of my role at the college—both new and provisional—and the lack of structures to support such work made each conversation feel new, unvarnished, and risky.

THE LIMITATIONS: ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN CONTEXT

As the director of the Reading and Writing Studios, I define pedagogical philosophies for our practices, design tutoring curriculum for students and professional staff, consult with executive administrators on institutional literacy practices and policies, coordinate with faculty colleagues to design and implement writing across the curriculum in their courses, and now I collaborate with writing instructors at area high schools and four-year colleges to explore writing pedagogical conversations that span grades 9–16. Although the administrative and pedagogical work that I do is similar in kind to the work of WPAs around the country, the institutional structures and traditions in place at my two-year college, like most, has no schema for such a position. Like most two-year colleges, ours has no writ-

ing programs and no department chairs. Faculty who teach writing hold advanced degrees in English, but most do not generally hold degrees in writing. The department I direct and the writing-in-the-disciplines initiatives I co-develop are separate organizationally, politically, and physically from the department of English. Absence of structural nomenclature and communication between writing programs and writing supports makes the organizational and administrative work I do arguably more tenuous and invisible than the work of administrators at institutions with articulated writing programs.

The invisibility of administrators at two-year colleges undermines our efforts to coordinate within and across institutions to adapt and respond to copious top-down initiatives that directly impact writing by reinforcing political and economic competition for ever-dwindling budgetary funds within institutions and regions. Thus, like a town without a post office, colleagues and I administer myriad writing instructional content without programs. We are not, in the truest sense of the word, writing program administrators. We are writing instruction administrators (WIA). Our mercurial social and material infrastructures can facilitate or impede the work we do to connect and coordinate the work of writing instruction colleagues through political goodwill and social capital. But goodwill and social capital are slow catalysts for overcoming deeply ingrained faculty-administrative stalemate. At the start of this project, faculty colleagues explained to me that “the contract” did not allow faculty to work in or with the high school teachers. I was also reminded that as a non-faculty member, instructional development of any kind like the work involved in this project should be outside of my area. Eventually, three faculty members participated in some part of the conferences over the next three years, with one joining the planning committee as we began to expand the range and reach of the conference now that the grant has concluded. I recognized the overwhelming burden my teaching colleagues had due to high teaching and service loads, but I was also disappointed, as I recognized a lost opportunity for fostering sustained relationships across institutions and dispelling myths about how the professions at other institutions teach students to write.

The most significant limitation on this project, however, was my own lack of knowledge about high school writing instruction and my inexperience navigating the administrative responsibilities of a new position, the demands for accountability and funding, and a broader educational landscape with which I had little familiarity. Due to the precarious funding situation for the Reading and Writing Studios, my assigned responsibility to demonstrate an ability to procure funding, and the rapid turnaround on the project, I perceived no genuine affordance for the kind of gradual

relationship building I wanted to develop, for gaining a deeper sense of the high school landscape in our area, or for understanding deeply the unique institutional characteristics of our area high schools or the local economic pressures they, in turn, faced. I advocated to delay the initial funding date to afford the time necessary to develop deep and genuine personal and professional trust necessary to embark on such a collaboration. I was reassured such time would be incorporated into the grant project timeline after we had obtained the funding. However, upon obtaining funding, the two-year timeline began the same day. At a time when writing instructional professionals at all institutions face the undermining forces of state and national policies that disregard our knowledge of best practices, this reinforced existing barriers to the deep collaborative ethos I wanted to establish.

THE MACOMB COUNTY WRITING FOR TRANSFER
PROJECT: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF METHODS

The funded project had three elements:

1. Two summer bridge writing camps for students identified as college strivers who could benefit from additional preparedness in academic discourses (GPA 0.0–2.9)
2. Quarterly workshops for prospective college students and their parents in target high schools (these evolved into an embedded 10-workshop series through the Achievement via Individual Determination program at one high school)
3. Academic ideas exchange between writing instructors in area high schools and colleges

The Macomb Reading and Writing Studios worked with three teachers, two of them curriculum coordinators in their schools, and a fourth collaborator, the ELA coordinator for the Macomb Intermediate District to design and organize the three elements of the project. I also sought input from Linda Denstaedt, with the National Writing Project's college-ready writing program in our neighboring county, and from two-year colleagues engaged in similar work, including Joshua Stokdyk, Katie McWain, Jennifer Grandone, Rachel Wendler, and Nicole Green. All of these colleagues reinforced the importance of idea sharing and collaboration throughout the curriculum planning process. I remain grateful for their insights and generosity.

The grant made it possible to compensate organizing collaborators modestly for their work at all stages of the projects and allowed us to offer the conference for free, including lunch. We submitted the conference agenda

to the state for review in order to provide attending teachers with State Continuing Education Clock Hours (SCECHs) required for continued state certification. We paid attendees \$25 each to offset the cost of attending, such as the costs of child care, transportation, and leisure time. We recognized these stipends were symbolic. Nevertheless, we wanted to extrinsically validate time teachers spent learning with and from one another—for one another and for the state. Initially funded for two years, we were able to extend the conference component of the grant into a third year in response to demand. With additional private donations, the Reading and Writing Studios are now able to commit to ongoing support for the conference for the foreseeable future and extending the collaboration to our colleagues at Oakland Community College. Unfortunately, we canceled our first collaboratively planned conference, scheduled to take place in March 2020, due to COVID-19.

I anticipate writing about the first two elements of this grant elsewhere. Here, I will focus on the third element, now called the “Mapping Terrains and Navigating Bridges Ideas Exchange.” It was in these conversations that high school and college teachers had the opportunity to “process the process” of collaborating within our small group and to collaborate in discussions with an extended group of teachers about how we can work together to facilitate student writing transfer from high schools to colleges. Chief among the understandings to emerge from these conversations was the recognition from participants that we had an overall poor understanding of the teaching approaches our colleagues implemented when teaching at their home institutions. Striking in these conversations was the degree to which we (all) had been persuaded by public perceptions about “what teachers do” at other institutions, and that those perceptions were quite often wrong. The problem with these prevailing perceptions, is that they allowed us to perpetuate mythologies about teaching effectiveness of our colleagues and undermined the potential literacy instructors across K–16 have to advocate in unison for grounded, ethical, equitable writing instruction. Table 1 provides an overview of participants. In the next section, I describe in more detail these conversational themes.

Table 1: Mapping Terrains Ideas Exchange Participants

Year	Number of HS Attendees and Their Home Institutions	Number of College Attendees and Their Home Institutions
2017	20 Fitzgerald High School, Stevenson High School, Utica High School, Lincoln High School, Henry Ford II High School, Lake Shore High School, East Detroit High School, Clintondale High School	12 Eastern Michigan University, Macomb Community College, University of Michigan at Dearborn, Oakland University, Adrian College
2018	17 Utica High School, Flint Community Schools (unspecified), Fitzgerald High School, Henry Ford II High School, Detroit Community High School, Stevenson High School, Pioneer High School (Ann Arbor)	15 Macomb Community College, University of Michigan, Wayne State University, Eastern Michigan University, University of Utah, Henry Ford Community College
2019 ²	10 Utica High School, Stevenson High School, Henry Ford II High School, Hamtramck High School	6 Oakland Community College, Macomb Community College, Henry Ford Community College, Wayne State University

ANALYSIS: ACADEMIC LITERACY EXCHANGE CONVERSATIONS

Three main themes have emerged from our conversations. First, misperceptions and mythologies about our colleagues at other institutions contribute in perpetuating harmful stereotypes about writing instruction content and quality throughout education. Second, professional development by and for writing instructors across institutions is a prerequisite for meaningfully evolving and aligning literacy outcomes from high school through college. Third, small but meaningful curricular changes are possible even in large systems through collaborative community engagement and cross-institutional supports. Ultimately, we identified the need for expanded and sustained conversations between writing instructional professionals across our region. Through these conversations we have begun to name and demystify mythologies about writing instruction at other kinds of institutions. We have named common threads in our funding pressures and pedagogical

barriers. We have fostered teacher-research-policy collaborations. Finally, we have begun to articulate what multi-institutional policy advocacy might look like as we bring National Council of Teachers of English policy advocates into our discussions.

Identification of Misperceptions

First, writing instructors from across the various institutions confessed their lack of knowledge about the work being done by their colleagues at other institutions, including those of the same grade level. Once gathered in the same room, colleagues resisted tired stereotypes about the failures of teachers at other institutions—the very kinds of stereotypes that take up popular tropes about a failed American education system and its unqualified teachers. Instead, we named the mythologies we had accepted as truths, such as “high school writing teachers focus on the five-paragraph essays” and “college teachers expect all incoming students to know perfect MLA citation.” What surfaced in our breakout discussions and lunch workshops was an awareness that we had similar goals for our students—to be able to write for a variety of situations and in a wide range of genres—and for our teaching—to be able to offer multi-staged writing processes that supported and honored reflection and revision.

Panel discussions and facilitated conversations at lunch and during round tables highlighted that high school teachers in the area are eager to implement evidence-based pedagogies in their classrooms that will benefit students and better prepare them both for college and for their professional writing in the future. College writing instructors generally believed high school teachers relied too heavily on the five-paragraph essay. (Many said they no longer teach that model or never had.) High school teachers expressed concern that students needed to execute MLA format perfectly before entering their first-year writing courses. Four-year and two-year college writing instructors generally believed students at two-year colleges were more deficient than their peers at four-year colleges. However, stories about the writing support that their students needed did not seem to support that assumption. Through conversation and transparency, these conversations became less freighted with concerns about offending one another and more focused on ways teachers could collaborate to enact small changes within their teaching locations or in response to state conversations about education policy.

High school teachers described that education initiatives limited their abilities to deliver quality and varied instruction in multiple genres or multiple-draft writing processes. They explained that most of their instruc-

tional efforts focused on writing rhetorical analyses (not the five-paragraph essay) and was specifically focused on SAT preparation. They lamented a lack of administrative support for writing instruction in literary and creative genres. They cited budget reductions and elimination of funds for registration fees and professional development days from their contracts. Specifically, they described little to no funding for professional development within their discipline of writing instruction. As stereotypes about the teaching expectations at the others' institutions gave way to more grounded understanding, the refrain that began to arise from the table discussions became, "can I use your name when I talk to my principal? Do you have sources I can bring to back me up?"

Teacher to Teacher: Supporting Best Practices within and Across Institutions

We grounded the discussions of each ideas exchange in the position statements and other guidance publications from our professional organizations. In 2017, the plenary panel featured professors of first-year writing and one WPA. Presenters introduced participants to the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* as a resource for thinking through their own writing assignments and the ways they talked to their students about "writing in college" (CWPA, NCTE, and the National Writing Project). In 2018, we continued discussions that stemmed in an analysis of the *Framework* and incorporated the *WPA Outcomes* recommendations for first-year writing, taking our examination to alignment issues between high school and college and those between two-year colleges to four-year colleges. In 2019, we incorporated additional documents for rooting our discussion, including the National Council of Teachers of English's Position Statement on *Students' Right to Their Own Language* and *Essential Practices for Disciplinary Literacy Instruction in the Secondary Classroom*, a new publication from the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators General Education Leadership Network Disciplinary Literacy Task Force.

Using these documents to focus our discussions helped us to name explicit teaching goals and barriers to achieving them. They also helped us to disrupt unhelpful misconceptions about other teachers, thus focusing conversations on specific practices and strategies for implementing them, for gaining institutional support, and for supporting students with both recognized and invisible challenges in their learning (e.g., trauma).

Small, Sustainable Changes

A key outcome of these conversations—and one I had not expected—was that the conversations that occurred during the Mapping Terrains Con-

ferences continued through the year. Teachers from different institutions carried on their conversations in dyads and triads. These groups developed panel presentations from those conversations for our extended colleagues at regional conferences in the area, including the Michigan Council for Teachers of English, the Michigan Pre-College and Youth Outreach Conference, and the Michigan Student Success Summit. Two teachers reported they had brought information from those collaborations, including the *Framework* and *WPA Outcomes* to their principals and successfully argued for support to teach a curriculum with more varied writing genres than the SAT preparation in rhetorical analysis that had been the primary focus and assessment strategy of the schools. Two teachers shared information about best practices from a high school writing center in a neighboring county to argue and acquire resources for new writing centers in their high schools and the support to develop peer-tutoring curriculum in writing. Part of what seemed apparent from the small but meaningful changes teachers were able to implement in their schools was that high school teachers gained credibility with their administrators when they presented their curriculum modifications vis-à-vis their participation in Mapping Terrains and supported by existing resources and position papers from our discipline.

Making Sense of the Meta-Narrative

In the call for proposals for this special issue on writing program administration in two-year colleges, the editors encouraged writers to reflect on Phelps and Ackerman's definitions of disciplinary existence and stability. Phelps and Ackerman have suggested that academic disciplines come into existence when they demonstrate "sufficient mass, sufficient unity, and clear enough boundaries to function as a discipline distinct from other disciplines" (190). They argue the "variance and differentiation" (200) of a field presents evidence of its capacity to grow, depending on the criteria established by the external validators (e.g., registrars), thus that specialization is essential to sustaining a discipline. They conclude that the constitution of an externally-validated discipline depends on the "rhetorical fluidity" of the discipline as it responds to the exigence of the context. Herein lies the paradox. In our current context, such specialization exerts high costs: narrowed vision of loci and borders of our crafts, inappropriate arrogance and elitism about what we think we know, and ultimately, the political capital and professional autonomy of our disciplinary family (see, for example, Jensen and Ely). My own reluctance to expand my professional focus to include collaborations with my high school colleagues reflects such a cost.

To wit, a conversation I had with a colleague at the start of this project highlighted such costs. The colleague asserted—however sympathetically—that regional and state research universities struggle to see the value in the work of two-year college writing, much less in the collaborations with high school writing teachers. My colleague suggested that such work falls under “teacher education” rather than “rhetoric and composition” programs. In essence, the kind of work of this project was irrelevant to the way my colleague and their department defined the work of writing studies, even while programs at such universities seek to fill vacant spots for enrollments in their writing studies and composition and rhetoric programs. Of course, my colleague’s observation is accurate, and it is echoed by overwhelming lack of attention to two-year colleges in the graduate education and professionalization of our field (Jensen and Toth). Teacher education in writing is the primary site for the professional development and support for writing teachers in our K–12 schools. But such a boundary between the disciplines of “teacher education” and “writing studies” is artificial, created through our institutional histories and the economic and political structures in which we work. It is not substantive disciplinary knowledge or goals that divide us. When we reinforce such boundaries—or worse yet, attribute education failures to writing instructors downstream (or upstream)—we feed the public perception of education as failed and failing, we undermine the autonomy of our colleagues and ourselves, and we leave our colleagues—and the discipline writ large—even more vulnerable to top-down, short-term funding initiatives that aim to correct what they believe we get wrong. Put crudely, we are not unlike Saturn eating his own children, devouring and discrediting the field we serve and neglecting the students we aim to support.

Very much like the discipline’s own processes for establishing, assessing, and asserting its validity as a discipline, writing instructional professionals at two-year colleges must simultaneously anticipate the rhetorical expectations and goals of stakeholders and argue for the values within our field. The first task calls on us to make pragmatic, nearly mercenary partnerships with agents and agencies driven by market logistics. It asks us to prove we can bring more students in and get more students through the college process to satisfy the accountability measures for college completion and higher education reform. This is to say, the very emphasis of our field—habits of mind, metacognition, self-reflective learning, critical thinking (e.g., threshold concepts, Adler-Kassner and Wardle), become milestone banners decontextualized from the question of learning itself, linked instead to capitalist notions of workforce skills and employment variables. To secure funding to teach our students and administer capable, responsive writing

instruction, administrators without programs must perpetually sing for their supper. In the end, our most vulnerable students suffer.

The second aspect of our dance for disciplinary validity is the representation of and advocacy for the values and validity of our field from the provisionary precipices of unnamed programs. These are slow and weathered negotiations. While our field publicly asserts a commitment to collaborative, supportive, and process-based learning, teaching, and institutional leadership, we undermine our own commitments to those values when we reinforce arbitrary, self-strangling professional and institutional boundaries. Here, I have provided one case example of how writing instructors and writing instructional administrators can change how we think about the “we” of writing studies. To make meaningful contributions as administrators and partners under our current conditions will ask us to rethink our partnerships. It will require us to make visible the work of our undervalued colleagues and to insist on our own visibility. It will require us to see the unit of our labor as the knowledge and concepts that perpetuate the discipline, not the institution level, the geographical affiliation, registration coding, or the confines of our institutional roles as determined within labor contracts. We must begin to attend to the ways the boundaries we draw around our institutional identities silence or recognize, reinforce or undermine the professional expertise of our colleagues across all institutions. If we are to effectively and equitably respond to large-scale deprofessionalizing of writing instructional professionals everywhere, we will need to first attend to these self-imposed barriers to communication, collaboration, and advocacy, even within our discipline.

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writing with you as our journey continues. Finally, I want to thank the Detroit Auto Dealers Association for their support of this project via the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan (CFSEM). Without their funding, none of this work would have been possible.

NOTES

1. Guided Pathways is intended to guide locally-derived practices developed by faculty with the intention of supporting students to make progress toward a degree by clarifying and simplifying college credit expectations. The degree to which these are locally derived or faculty driven vary by institution.

2. Registration dipped for two reasons in 2019. First, the date of the conference, June 1, coincided with graduation at several institutions, though instructors encouraged us to establish this date over any in May, late June, or July. Second, teachers from Fitzgerald had developed an engagement to serve the staff and friends who knew a student murdered earlier in the year as a way of making peace and strengthening the community and, thus, chose not to attend.

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