# First Year in the Two-Year: A Study of Two-Year College Writing Teacher Transitions

**Principal Co-Investigators**

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## Project Overview

We propose a study to document empirically the career transitions of writing instructors as they move from graduate training and teaching at universities to work as teacher-scholars at open-access, two-year colleges. The proposed project supports new knowledge in WPA studies as well as the work of socially just writing programs. Almost half of college students enroll at community colleges, and some are inadmissible at other institution types. It is of significant ethical importance to align graduate preparation with the work that instructors eventually do in teaching and working with diverse student populations in open-access contexts.

For decades, two-year college scholars have documented how the field of writing studies and its scholarship does not sufficiently reflect the needs of their classrooms and writing programs ([Lovas](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?GMHssO), 2002; [Tinberg](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?9xYIsa), 1997; [Hassel and Giordan](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?ZaAlst)o 2013). Most recently the "TYCA Guidelines for Preparing Teachers of English in the Two-Year College" (2017) calls upon graduate programs to offer coursework and create programs that will specifically prepare MA and Ph.D. students to effectively work in two-year college contexts in order to respond to the reality that "most graduate programs either explicitly or implicitly professionalize students for careers at four-year institutions, with little or no attention to community colleges, the contexts where many graduate students are likely to make their careers" (Calhoon-Dillahunt, 2017 12). Despite the pressing nature of this issue, little to no empirical or systematic work has been conducted to trace the career transitions of graduate students earning masters or doctorate degrees as they acclimate to the two-year college writing program environments. It will remain challenging to make research-based curricular and academic planning choices at the graduate level without having a clearer sense of the professional learning and skills that most benefit these early-career educators moving from one kind of academic environment (in terms of student populations; roles and responsibilities for curriculum, assessment, and evaluation; and program development and leadership work) to another equally common institutional context.

Because of the nature of graduate education in the US, writing instructors at two-year colleges are trained through graduate teaching assistantships where they are responsible for teaching students in first-year or in some cases upper-division writing. However, writing programs (sometimes loosely defined) in two-year colleges are managed in significantly different ways, and full-time and part-time instructors must adapt quickly to these new contexts (Calhoon-Dillahunt, 2011). Community colleges serve students with a much broader range of proficiencies and learning needs as readers and writers, which means that they typically offer multiple levels of first-year writing courses and developmental English through a range of program structures, including accelerated learning, integrated reading and writing, and co-requisite support. New instructors may or may not receive support from a designated writing program administrator (most often not--see Charlton and Rose; Klausman, 2008, 2010, and 2013).

To investigate this significant issue of alignment between the preparation of writing instructors and work in two-year college writing programs, our project will explore the following research questions:

* In what ways does graduate training in English at the MA and Ph.D. level prepare instructors to teach writing in open-access, two-year college contexts?
* What challenges do new instructors identify in moving from their teaching experiences during graduate school to open-access, two-year college English programs?
* To what extent are graduate programs (and graduate teaching experiences within those programs) preparing graduate students to work with diverse learners?
* What is the relationship between writing program and developmental education program administration structures (or lack of them) and new instructors’ experiences in transitioning from graduate school to teaching at two-year colleges? Specifically, in what ways are new instructors at two-year colleges receiving mentoring, support, and instructional resources?

## Methodology

The study will begin with a cohort of new two-year college instructors (ideally eight participants) who have completed graduate degrees or coursework in the prior three years. Participating instructors will document their experiences transitioning from graduate school to two-year college teaching through reflective journal writing, questionnaires about their work experience and professional background, and participation in interviews once per semester. We have completed the first step of preparing and submitting an IRB application for the project.

We will also collect information about each participant’s writing program, including writing program administration, required teaching credentials, curriculum, standardized courses, course sequences, instructional resources, instructor workload, mentoring processes, levels of administrative control and state mandates, and student demographics. We anticipate that this component of the project will be our primary focus during the first year of what we see as a larger, multi-year project. In the second phase of the project, if we are able to secure additional resources to compensate participating instructors for their time, we will follow the first-year cohort into their second year of two-year college teaching and invite another cohort of 8-10 instructors to participate. The total project timeline will be three years so we can follow two cohorts through their first two years, but we are requesting funding only for the first year.

Timetable for 2019 to 2010

* Summer 2019: IRB approval, invite participation, finalize participant pool
* September 2019: Distribute instructions to participants for reflective journal activities
* Fall 2019: Collect initial syllabus and course materials from instructors; collect information about the participating instructors' campus and writing program; collect start of term questionnaire from participants
* Spring 2020: Collect syllabus, questionnaire, and course materials from second semester; conduct interviews with participating instructors about the first semester; analyze and code instructor journals
* Summer 2020: Conduct interviews about the second semester; analyze and code journals; identify themes emerging from the data sources; seek additional participants for a second cohort (as funding permits)

## Proposer Expertise and Experience

The proposers have 12 years of collaborative research and writing experience related to teaching and professional issues at two-year, open-access institutions. Their scholarship and program work has received multiple national awards.

## Dissemination of Results

In this first phase of the project, we intend to produce a white paper or report that could be reviewed and adapted to CWPA needs that would start to trace some of the professional, curricular, and training needs of students who plan on (or end up in) a career working in community and technical colleges. We would additionally plan to present our initial findings at the 2020 CWPA Conference, as well as CCCC or the TYCA National Conference, if our proposal is accepted.

## Budget

We are requesting funding to support stipends for participants to compensate them for the time required to record their experiences as new two-year college instructors in a reflective journal, participate in interviews, and complete other research activities. We will accept partial funding if full funding is not available.

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| **CWPA Budget Item/Request** | **Amount** | **Total** | **Notes** |
| Honorarium for participating instructors | 8 stipends @ $400.00 | $3200.00 | ($400, expected commitment=10 hours/semester). |
| Total Request from CWPA |  | $3200.00 |  |
| **In-kind, alternative, or matching funding** | **Amount** | **Total** | **Notes** |
| Faculty Research Grant from a Principal Investigator’s Institution | $3000.00 | $3000.00  (received) | This funding has been secured for Summer 2019 to support the preliminary work on this project including IRB application, travel for collaboration between the co-investigators, books and materials, and development of research tools. |
| Research Support Services Grant from a Principal Investigator’s Institution | $1000.00 | $1000.00  (potential) | Funding will be requested from one of the investigator's institutional research office to support travel or research assistant project management services. |
| Total in-kind support sought or secured |  | $3200 |  |

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