



WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Volume 42 • Number 1 • Fall 2018

Kurt Cobain, Writing Program Administrator

Looking through Narrow Windows: Problem-Setting and Problem-Solving Strategies of Novice Teachers

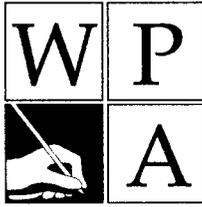
Reclaiming Writing Placement

“Give All Thoughts a Chance”: Writing about Writing and the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy*

Mentoring WPAs for the Long Term: The Promise of Mindfulness

Plenary Address

Innovation through Intentional Administration: Or, How to Lead a Writing Program Without Losing Your Soul



Writing Program Administration

Journal of the
Council of Writing Program Administrators

Editor

Lori Ostergaard Oakland University

Associate Editors

Jacob Babb Indiana University Southeast

Jim Nugent Oakland University

Assistant Editors

Amy Cicchino Florida State University

Kelly Moreland Bowling Green State University

Book Review Editor

Courtney Adams Wooten Stephen F. Austin State University

Ads Manager

Kendra Andrews North Carolina State University

Editorial Board

Bradley Bleck Spokane Falls Community College

Beth Brunk-Chavez University of Texas at El Paso

Sheila Carter-Tod Virginia Tech

Casie Fedukovich North Carolina State University

Tarez Samra Graban Florida State University

Sarah Z. Johnson Madison College

Seth Kahn West Chester University

Carrie Leverenz Texas Christian University

Mandy Macklin (WPA-GO) University of Washington

Mark McBeth John Jay College of Criminal Justice/CUNY

E. Shelley Reid George Mason University

Rochelle (Shelley) Rodrigo University of Arizona

Wendy Sharer East Carolina University

Amy Ferdinandt Stolley Grand Valley State University

Susan Thomas University of Sydney

Chris Warnick College of Charleston

Scott Warnock Drexel University

WPA: Writing Program Administration (ISSN: 0196-4682) is published twice per year—fall and spring—by the Council of Writing Program Administrators. Production and printing of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* is managed by Parlor Press.

Council of Writing Program Administrators

Executive Board

The Council of Writing Program Administrators is a national association of college and university faculty who serve or have served as directors of first-year composition or writing programs, coordinators of writing centers and writing workshops, chairpersons and members of writing-program-related committees, or in similar administrative capacities. The Council of Writing Program Administrators is an affiliate of the Association of American Colleges and the Modern Language Association.

Dominic DelliCarpini, President	York College of Pennsylvania
Mark Blaauw-Hara, Vice President	North Central Michigan College
Susan Miller-Cochran, Past President	University of Arizona
Courtney Adams Wooten	George Mason University
Beth Brunk-Chavez	University of Texas, El Paso
Sheila Carter-Tod	Virginia Tech
Cristyn Elder	University of New Mexico
Genevieve Garcia de Mueller	University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
Lilian Mina	Auburn University at Montgomery
Paula Patch	Elon University
Staci Perryman-Clark	Western Michigan University
Scott Warnock	Drexel University

Ex Officio Members

Christine Cucciarre, Treasurer	University of Delaware
Michael McCamley, Secretary	University of Delaware
Shirley K Rose	
Director, Consultant-Evaluator Service (CES)	Arizona State University
Michael Pemberton, Associate Director, CES	Georgia Southern University
Lori Ostergaard, Editor, <i>WPA</i>	Oakland University
Jim Nugent, Associate Editor, <i>WPA</i>	Oakland University
Jacob Babb, Associate Editor, <i>WPA</i>	Indiana University Southeast
Claire Russell, Chair, <i>WPA-GO</i>	Wayne State University
Amanda Presswood, Vice Chair, <i>WPA-GO</i>	Florida State University

Guide for Authors

WPA: Writing Program Administration publishes empirical and theoretical research on issues in writing program administration. We publish a wide range of research in various formats, research that not only helps both titled and untitled administrators of writing programs do their jobs, but also helps our discipline advance academically, institutionally, and nationally.

Possible topics of interest include:

- writing faculty professional development
- writing program creation and design
- uses for national learning outcomes and statements that impact writing programs
- classroom research studies
- labor conditions: material, practical, fiscal
- WAC/WID/WC/CAC (or other sites of communication/writing in academic settings)
- writing centers and writing center studies
- teaching writing with electronic texts (multimodality) and teaching in digital spaces
- theory, practice, and philosophy of writing program administration
- outreach and advocacy
- curriculum development
- writing program assessment
- WPA history and historical work
- national and regional trends in education and their impact on WPA work
- issues of professional advancement and writing program administration
- diversity and WPA work
- writing programs in a variety of educational locations (SLACs, HBCUs, two-year colleges, Hispanic schools, non-traditional schools, dual credit or concurrent enrollment programs, prison writing programs)
- interdisciplinary work that informs WPA practices

This list is meant to be suggestive, not exhaustive. Contributions must be appropriate to the interests and concerns of the journal and its readership. The editors welcome empirical research (quantitative as well as qualitative), historical research, and theoretical, essayistic, and practical pieces.

Submission Guidelines

Please check the *WPA* website for complete submissions guidelines and to download the required coversheet. In general, submissions should:

- be a maximum 7,500 words;
- be styled according to either the *MLA Handbook* (8th edition) or the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th edition), as appropriate to the nature of your research;

- include an abstract (maximum 200 words);
- contain no identifying information;
- be submitted as a .doc or .docx format file; and
- use tables, notes, figures, and appendices sparingly and judiciously.

Submissions that do not follow these guidelines or that are missing the cover page will be returned to authors before review.

Reviews

WPA: Writing Program Administration publishes both review essays of multiple books and reviews of individual books related to writing programs and their administration. If you are interested in reviewing texts or recommending books for possible review, please contact the book review editor at wpabookreviews@gmail.com.

Announcements and Calls

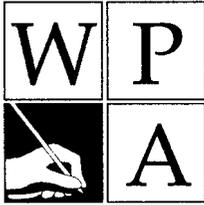
Relevant announcements and calls for papers may be published as space permits. Announcements should not exceed 500 words, and calls for proposals or participation should not exceed 1,000 words. Submission deadlines in calls should be no sooner than January 1 for the fall issue and June 1 for the spring issue. Please email your calls and announcements to wpaeditors@gmail.com and include the text in both the body of the message and as a .doc or .docx attachment.

Correspondence

Correspondence relating to the journal, submissions, or editorial issues should be sent to wpaeditors@gmail.com.

Subscriptions

WPA: Writing Program Administration is published twice per year—fall and spring—by the Council of Writing Program Administrators. Members of the council receive a subscription to the journal and access to the *WPA* archives as part of their membership. Join the council at <http://wpacouncil.org>. Information about library subscriptions is available at <http://wpacouncil.org/library-memberships>.



Writing Program Administration

Journal of the
Council of Writing Program Administrators
Volume 42.1 (Fall 2018)

Contents

Standing for Time: Publishing in <i>WPA</i>	7
Lori Ostergaard, Jim Nugent, and Jacob Babb	
Kurt Cobain, Writing Program Administrator.....	17
William DeGenaro	
Looking through Narrow Windows: Problem-Setting and Problem-Solving Strategies of Novice Teachers	36
Carolyn A. Wisniewski	
Reclaiming Writing Placement.....	56
Heidi Estrem, Dawn Shepherd, and Samantha Sturman	
“Give All Thoughts a Chance”: Writing about Writing and the <i>ACRL Framework for Information Literacy</i>.....	72
Sandie Friedman and Robert Miller	
Mentoring WPAs for the Long Term: The Promise of Mindfulness.....	89
Cindy Moore	
<i>Plenary Address</i>	
Innovation through Intentional Administration: Or, How to Lead a Writing Program Without Losing Your Soul	107
Susan Miller-Cochran	
<i>Book Reviews</i>	
Languages and Literacies in Motion: Transnationalism and Mobility Matters in Writing Studies	123
Nancy Bou Ayash	
Rewriting Labor in Composition.....	130
Meridith Reed	
Viewing Directed Self-Placement Through a Multilingual, Multicultural, Transdisciplinary, and Ethical Lens	136
Marie Webb	

Extending an invitation to join the Council of Writing Program Administrators

The Council of Writing Program Administrators offers a national network of scholarship and support for leaders of college and university writing programs.

Membership benefits include the following:

- A subscription to *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, a semi-annual refereed journal
- Invitations to the annual WPA Summer Workshops and Conferences
- Invitations to submit papers for sessions that WPA sponsors at MLA and CCCC
- Participation in the WPA Research Grant Program, which distributes several awards, ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,000
- Invitations to the annual WPA breakfast at CCCC and the annual WPA party at MLA
- Information about the WPA Consultant-Evaluator Service

ANNUAL DUES

Graduate Student Memberships: \$20

Regular Membership for Non-Tenure Track Faculty: \$20

Regular Membership for Tenure Track Faculty: \$50

Sustaining Membership (voluntary): \$100

Library: \$80

To JOIN

Visit us online at <http://wpacouncil.org/membership> or send your name, address, email address, institutional affiliation, and dues to

Michael McCamley, CWPA Secretary
University of Delaware
Department of English
212 Memorial Hall
Newark, DE 19716
mccamley@udel.edu

Standing for Time: Publishing in *WPA*

Lori Ostergaard, Jim Nugent, and Jacob Babb

The physical text [of WPA] will stand for time, changing in its meaning as readers change, but remaining “these words” by “this author.” In so doing, the journal function stands against time, slowing writers down, requiring them to rethink and revise texts before they are published . . .

—Doug Hesse, “The Function of *WPA* at the Present Time”(6)

In his first editor’s introduction for *WPA*, Doug Hesse reflected on the place of this journal in an era when email listservs, digital indexes, and new archival technologies were beginning to make their mark on the profession of writing program administration. In particular, Hesse suggested that it might be “foolish to assume the editorship of a journal in 1994,” when he and WPAs around the country could turn to one another for immediate counsel in electronic forums like the *WPA-L* listserv (6). In these forums, he noted, “Advice begets advice, messages counter messages, and some sense of the state of the art, or at least of the opinion, forms in a day or two”(6). Against this scene of accelerating digital communication, Hesse celebrated the publication process that made *WPA* “stodgy and slow, inevitably behind” the times, but ultimately significant: he noted that “we write differently knowing that our work will be judged, and we read differently knowing a piece has met the approval of at least some of our colleagues” (6). Nearly a quarter-century later, *WPA* remains stodgy and slow relative to our listserv and social media conversations—and we are grateful for it.

In this editor’s introduction, we present a brief review of the historic publishing practices of the journal, trace the calls for articles over the past forty years, and provide a few insights into how publishing in *WPA* has changed over time. We conclude with some advice for present-day authors

on preparing your work for *WPA* and its readership of committed scholars and administrators.

HISTORICAL DIRECTIONS

While looking back at the journal's earliest years, *WPA*'s inaugural editor Kenneth A. Bruffee noted that "Every issue of *WPA* to date has contained at least one piece intended to explain how to do something, how to accomplish effectively some particular task that is part of almost every *WPA*'s responsibilities" (6). While Bruffee highlighted this more practical function of the journal, the editors that followed him expanded his vision to recognize the enlarged domain of program administrators, the wide array of stakeholders we work with, and our increasing responsibilities to our institutions, departments, programs, faculty, students, and publics. For example, the journal's third editor Christine Hult noted in her guide to authors that "*WPA* is especially interested in articles on topics such as establishing and maintaining a cohesive writing program, training composition staff, testing and evaluating students and programs, working with department chairs and deans, collaborating with high school or community college teachers, and so on" (2). Hesse expanded on this list of priorities when he assumed editorship of the journal in 1994, stating that

possible topics include the education and support of writing teachers; the intellectual and administrative work of WPAs; the situation of writing programs, within both academic institutions and broader contexts; the programmatic implications of current theories, technologies, and research; relationships between WPAs and other administrators, between writing and other academic programs, and among high school, two-year, and four-year college writing programs; placement; assessment; and the professional status of WPAs. ("Author's Guide," 3)

This description remained unchanged for the next twelve years; however, co-editors Dennis Lynch and Marguerite Helmers introduced their first issue in fall 1998 with a call to explore the increasingly political nature of writing program administration. In particular, they saw the journal as a vehicle for research into the "very real political, curricular, and economic issues facing writing programs" (6), issues such as

integrating writing into the general education program; tracing relationships of course materials to intellectual property laws; and learning the invisible power structures of the university, including how money moves, how programs publicize themselves, how pro-

gram directors work with affirmative action policies, how programs strengthen their connections to writing centers, ESL and modern language programs, and community education and action groups. (6–7)

Alice Horning assumed the editorship in 2009 and revised Hesse’s original list of journal topics to reflect the growing variety of programs within our administrative purview. Horning’s journal issues summoned works exploring various types of program and curriculum development, assessment, “extra-institutional relationships with writing’s publics,” technology, history, theory, and “issues of professional advancement” (3).

For most of its history, *WPA*’s “Author’s Guide” called for shorter works than you will find in the present issue. It wasn’t until 2010 that the suggested word count for full-length articles increased from 2,000–5,000 words to 4,000–7,000 words. As figure 1 demonstrates, the overall number of pages per volume and the density of citations per article have tended upward through the journal’s history.

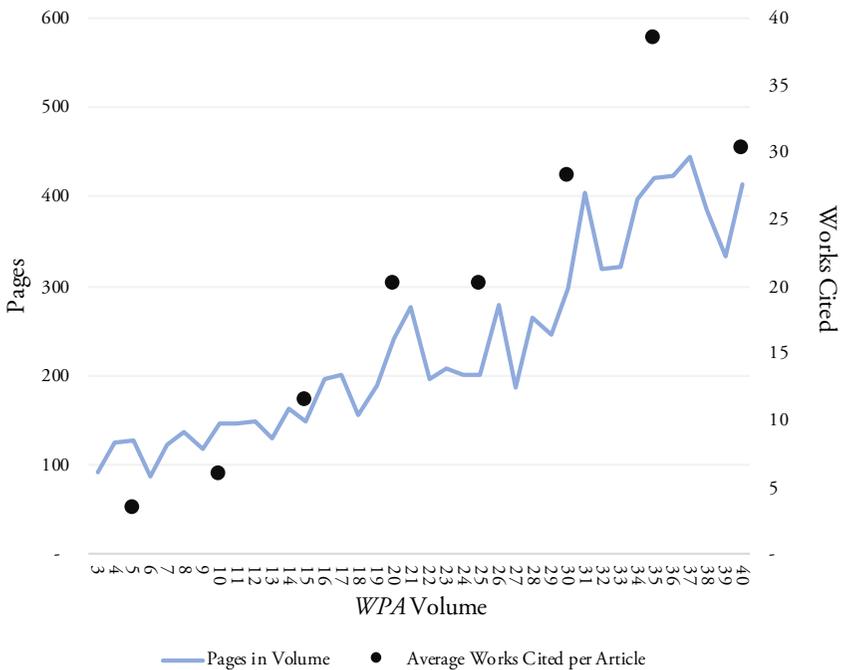


Figure 1. Graph depicting the number of pages in each volume of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* (left scale) and the average number of works cited per article in select volumes (right scale).

As Hesse described in 1994, “The compact is that journal pieces are finished and full, that they invoke their own contexts and locate themselves within the scholarly landscape with the transit of citation” (“Function” 6). As suggested by the journal’s steady increase in the number of citations per article, authors submitting to *WPA* today have a larger and more complex scholarly landscape to navigate, and they have many more citational waypoints available to fix their position within it. Our conversations on listservs, at the annual CWPA conference, and on the pages of this journal include works that employ empirical studies, put program data into conversation with national data, document the emotional aspects of our work with faculty and students, suggest approaches for engaging diverse stakeholders, and interrogate, theorize, politicize, and problematize our discipline, our practices, and our programs. The scope of our work now includes not just first-year writing programs, but writing majors and minors, writing certificates, community writing programs, MAs, and more PhD programs than Bruffee and his authors could likely have imagined. Along the historical path of our field, *WPA* has always made room to accommodate the widening scope and diversity of our scholarly interests.

PUBLISHING IN *WPA* TODAY

Our current “Guide for Authors” was carried over with light modifications from the previous editorial team of Barbara L’Eplattenier, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Lisa Mastrangelo. It calls for “a wide range of research in various formats, research that not only helps both titled and untitled administrators of writing programs do their jobs, but also helps our discipline advance academically, institutionally, and nationally.” During our first year as editors, we received new submissions on a range of topics including assessment, emotional labor, placement, technology, professional development, transfer, writing centers, multimodality, and mentorship. The topics represented in this journal and the range of expertise required for program administrators have expanded, matured, and multiplied over the last four decades. While the journal continues Bruffee’s tradition of including works that demonstrate “how to accomplish effectively some particular task,” our research methods have become more complex, and the questions we ask have moved beyond “how to” to embrace the “why to” of our more diverse practices and programs.

We have no data on the number of submissions Bruffee, Hult, or Hesse received during their tenure as editors, but we can safely assume that their acceptance rate was higher than ours. We received 85 submissions during our first year editing the journal; we will publish ten full-length articles this

year. In the next section we briefly outline the editorial and review process, and we offer some advice for developing your article to better address the expectations and needs of the journal's present-day readers. In doing so, we hope to live up to our commitment to make the editorial process as transparent as possible.

The Editorial Process

We believe *WPA* authors deserve timely feedback on their work. We recognize that our authors are frequently under their own institutional and professional time constraints and we strive to communicate our decisions about manuscripts to our authors within six weeks, whether that decision is a rejection, an editorial "revise and resubmit," an external review, or an acceptance.

To guide peer reviewers as they evaluate manuscripts, we ask them to note their level of agreement with the following statements about the work:

1. The manuscript is positioned within an identifiable context: it is well-situated in the scholarly literature; it addresses a current issue, challenge, or opportunity in the field of writing program administration; or it speaks to an established theoretical or research tradition.
2. The manuscript goes beyond mere local reporting ("here's what I did" or "here's the way we do things around here.") If local reports are given, their connection to theory, history, research, or practice are made evident.
3. The manuscript contributes to knowledge in the field, takes up a controversial position in a new or intriguing way, suggests novel practices, or would provide a useful service to *WPA* readers.

We also suggest that reviewers prepare comments for each manuscript author using the following questions as a guide:

1. Is this piece appropriate (or not) for *WPA: Writing Program Administration* and the *WPA* readership? In what way does this manuscript add to the existing knowledge base? (For example, does it present new or little-known material or does it revisit existing material in an original manner?) If it doesn't, how might it? Is the work contextualized within existing work? If not, are there resources you might suggest to the authors?

2. How can this piece be revised? What might the authors do as they prepare the piece for publication?

Advice for Prospective Authors

The best advice we can offer prospective authors is that they read the journal carefully, make a close study of articles that mirror their particular research approach so that they can catch the rhythm of those works, identify the kinds of information they present and how they present it, and mirror some of their organizational strategies. The journal's archive up to the most recent two years is available to the public at the CWPA website, and CWPA members can access all issues there. Prospective authors should also visit the journal's website, particularly the "Info for Authors" page which provides directions for article length, citation styles, document formatting, and so on.

Regarding the organization and composition of your manuscript, one of the most popular resources we provide at our editors' workshops is a hand-out developed by associate editor, Jim Nugent. A few of the more salient points from that document are summarized here (the complete document is available at the CWPA website):

- **Establish your exigence, and do it fast.** At the outset of your article, make sure your reader can easily tell what scholarly conversations you are speaking to and what your article proposes to add to them. It's hard to overstate just how quickly this exigence should be communicated at your article's outset; it's probably not the case, for instance, that seven paragraphs of literature review are necessary before you can even pose your research question or define the scope of your inquiry.
- **Get out of your own head.** *WPA's* audience is, of course, very scholarly and knowledgeable and they are familiar the broad contours of the field's literature. However, none of them are in the same head-space you are as a researcher. Be sure to keep your audience orientated to your particular research base by providing summaries and reminders of cited material as appropriate. In addition, do not rely on ellipsis and syllogism to carry your arguments: be overt with your claims and be demonstrative with your support for them. Your arguments should not be left as an exercise for the reader.
- **User test your work.** Show your work to one, two, or ten trusted colleagues with an invitation for them to provide serious, critical feedback.

- **Ignore this advice if the rhetorical situation demands it.** These are not edicts. We do not want cookie-cutter essays: the last thing we want is to homogenize and stultify the discourse of our field. These are merely reminders for you to think first about the readerly needs of *WPA*'s audience. Imagine your reader is a time-crunched *WPA*, an exhausted journal editor, a harried graduate student, etc. Even if your readers don't fall among this impatient bunch, they would probably still benefit from you assuming that they do.

IN THIS ISSUE

As editors of *WPA*, we are mindful of the long and significant history of scholarly authorship and editing that precedes us. While the journal serves as a testament to the intellectual tradition and evolution of this organization, it can also act as a powerful vehicle for innovation, revolution, and disciplinary disruption. Although *WPA*'s publication process may be stodgy and slow by the standards of Twitter, Facebook, and *WPA-L*, we believe the articles in this issue represent the kinds of innovative, thought-provoking, and meaningful conversations about writing program administration that few other forums can foster.

This issue showcases a number of perspectives on the affective nature of our program work. William DeGenaro's essay "Kurt Cobain, Writing Program Administrator," details the emotional cost of program administration and demonstrates how Cobain's career trajectory "parallels with the trajectory of a writing program administrator." DeGenaro posits that "Cobain's career reveals how WPAs can conceive of inward and outward directed rage, irreverence, and a grungey consciousness as productive stances." Cindy Moore's article, "Mentoring WPAs for the Long Term: The Promise of Mindfulness" encourages us to engage in "mindfulness-based mentoring" as a way to counter administrative stress and promote success. And in Susan Miller-Cochran's *CWPA* plenary, "Innovation through Intentional Administration: Or, How to Lead a Writing Program Without Losing Your Soul," readers are encouraged to explore the possibilities of "compassionate administration" by identifying the guiding principles that direct our work. Also in this issue, Heidi Estrem, Dawn Shepherd, and Samantha Sturman advocate for "Reclaiming Writing Placement." These authors analyze national educational reforms and doubts about standardized testing, identifying this as a kairotic moment when WPAs can insert themselves into the conversation and promote more robust placement measures at their institutions. Carolyn A. Wisniewski analyzes results from her qualitative study of the "Problem-Setting and Problem-Solving Strategies of

Novice Teachers,” and demonstrates that these new graduate teaching assistants “rarely turned to disciplinary or programmatic resources to resolve challenges.” Wisniewski proposes a “detect-elect-connect model of transfer” to teach novice writing teachers how to “productively transfer learning from their pedagogy education to the classroom.” Finally, in “Give All Thoughts a Chance,” Sandie Friedman and Robert Miller report on the results of their survey of first-year writing students who were asked to respond to the “Research as Inquiry” dispositions in the Association of College Research Libraries *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. Based on their results, these authors posit that WAW helped students to better “articulate their development as researchers and writers.”

The reviews in this issue draw attention to the many literacies at work in writing programs and how well our field is responding to multilingual students. They also ask us to consider how well our field is simultaneously addressing the labor conditions that constrain the work being done in these programs. In her review essay, “Languages and Literacies in Motion: Transnationalism and Mobility Matters in Writing Studies,” Nancy Bou Ayash reviews Steven Fraiberg, Xiqiao Wang, and Xiaoye You’s *Inventing the World Grant University* and Rebecca Lorimer Leonard’s *Writing on the Move* to examine “a nascent *trans* turn” toward “translinguality, transliteracy, transmodality, transculturalism, and transnationalism, to name a few” and how it affects “the mobility work ahead of us” as WPAs. Turning attention out to those in our writing programs who are interacting daily with this *trans* turn, “Rewriting Labor in Composition,” Meridith Reed’s review of *Labored*, an edited collection by Randall McClure, Dayna V. Goldstein, and Michael A. Pemberton, discusses how this book addresses labor concerns constraining writing programs and how our field can respond to these by revising its professional statements about labor. Narrowing in on a more student-focused view of the *trans* turn and how it affects writing programs, Marie Webb’s review “Viewing Directed Self-Placement Through a Multilingual, Multicultural, Transdisciplinary, and Ethical Lens” examines Tanita Saenkhum’s analysis of the use of directed self-placement (DSP) with multilingual writers. These reviews together show how writing program administration is becoming increasingly complex as a variety of forces work with and on writing programs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During our first year as editors of *WPA*, we have been privileged to work with two smart, informed, and skilled graduate students. Katie McWain and Molly Ubessen’s work as assistant editors has set a high bar for the

assistant editors who follow them. Amy Cicchino also joined the *WPA* team last year, serving as our advertising manager. During her tenure in that role, Amy ambitiously secured new sponsors for the journal. We have asked her to continue her service to the journal this year as an assistant editor. Kelly Moreland also began her tenure as assistant editor with this issue, and we are delighted to be able to make use of her considerable editorial and administrative experience. Kelly and Amy played a central role in bringing this issue to press. Finally, we're delighted to welcome Kendra Andrews to the journal staff to serve as our ads manager this year. Please contact her (at wpajournalads@gmail.com) if you're interested in advertising your program, press, workshop, or event in *WPA*.

Over the past year, we have also relied on the members of our editorial board for their advice and support. With this issue, we say goodbye to six members of the board whose service with us ended in spring. We are grateful for the good work and dedication of Michael Callaway, Asao Inoue, Laura Micciche, Chuck Paine, Ellen Schendel, and Elizabeth VanderLei. We are excited to welcome six new members to the editorial board: Beth Brunk-Chavez, Sheila Carter-Tod, Sarah Z. Johnson, Cheri Lemieux-Spiegel, Susan Thomas, and Chris Warnick. We are excited by the incredible range of expertise and experience represented by the editorial board and we are thankful for the generosity of those who have agreed to serve on it.

Finally, this journal would not be possible without the active and engaged membership of the CWPA. As a discipline of program administrators, we understand the role that secure resources play in maintaining vigorous institutions. Please help support the work of the council and this journal by checking your CWPA membership status on the CWPA website; if you are able to, please consider becoming a sustaining member of the organization.

ANNOUNCEMENT

We are delighted to announce that E. Shelley Reid's article "On Learning to Teach: Letter to a New TA" (vol. 40, no. 2) has been selected for inclusion in the 2018 edition of *The Best of the Journals in Rhetoric and Composition*.

WORKS CITED

- Bruffee, Kenneth A. "The WPA as (Journal) Writer: What the Record Reveals." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 9, nos. 1–2, 1985, pp. 5–10.
- Hesse, Douglas. "Author's Guide." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 18, nos. 1–2, 1994, p. 3.
- . "The Function of *WPA* at the Present Time." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 18, nos. 1–2, 1994, pp. 6–7.

- Horning, Alice. "Authors' Guide." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2010, pp. 3.
- Hult, Christine. "Author's Guide." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 12, nos. 1–2, 1988, p. 2.
- Lynch, Dennis and Marguerite Helmers. "Letter from the Editors." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 22, nos. 1–2, 1998, pp. 6–7.



Kurt Cobain, Writing Program Administrator

William DeGenaro

ABSTRACT

Before his suicide in 1994, Kurt Cobain's short career mirrored the professional trajectory of some writing program administrators who similarly struggle with the complex, affective dimensions of their labors and ambivalence about their roles as managers and spokespersons. In this essay, I combine narrative—from the perspective of a WPA and a lover of the music Cobain made with his band Nirvana—with theorizing that extends work reflecting on the psychic and affective toll that administrative labor sometimes takes on WPAs. I perform a close reading of a Nirvana song, "Serve the Servants," which presents like an angry WPA manifesto and infer both possibilities and limits of inward- and outward-directed rage as affective stances.

WPAs daily find themselves immersed in anger, frustration, and disappointment.

—Laura Micciche, "More than a Feeling" (434)

In truth, Nirvana was the last logical outcome of punk and represented a serious version of the "blank" in blank generation. Incoherence, if you take it seriously, can end only in chaos. The gun in Kurt Cobain's hand at the very end.

—Nicholas Rombes, *A Cultural Dictionary of Punk* (163)

Punk won. That seems really clear to me . . . There was a defining era of music, and it created something that is so malleable that it can be used by anybody. It can be used by a guitar player. It can be used by a professor.

—Ian MacKaye, *Global Punk* (Dunn 7–8)

Kurt Cobain's rock band Nirvana appeared on the cover of *Rolling Stone* in April 1992, Cobain in torn jeans and a dime-store cardigan. Visible under the sweater, Cobain wore a T-shirt on which he had written "Corporate Magazines Still Suck" (Cross 231). Cobain drew attention to his ambivalence toward stardom by punctuating the moment's contradictions. What epitomizes mainstream success more than *Rolling Stone*? What's more punk than a homemade T-shirt? Cobain found fame writing lyrics that questioned things like masculinity and gender binaries—set to commercially nonviable punk rock—and in 1992 improbably found himself on the charts. He valued authenticity, ideology, and social change and loudly sloganeered when microphones were shoved in his face (Cross 261). Success seemed like a distraction, at best, and a toxin, at worst, to Cobain, who wished to focus on the music he loved and the ideals to which he was committed. He idealized the bedrooms where he wrote songs and the bars and dorms where he had played to audiences whose members he considered equals. The photo shoots and meetings that came later seemed like the antithesis of "real" work.

Cobain took a lethal dose of heroin and then shot himself in April 1994 while listening to R.E.M.'s *Automatic for the People*, an album best known for the hang-in-there ballad "Everybody Hurts." During the two years between the *Rolling Stone* cover and his suicide, Cobain's career transitioned. The additional trappings and labors of his new position brought less satisfaction, and Cobain experienced guilt and self-hatred, made obnoxious jokes, and succumbed to the depression and substance abuse problems with which he had long struggled. He also administered tirelessly to many of the fairly obscure bands like the Melvins and Meat Puppets who had influenced and supported him and at times used his position to advocate for ethical and progressive causes. Cobain's trajectory—glorious and tragic, alive with real and perceived ethical dilemmas and confrontations drawn between ideals and material realities, characterized by paradoxes—presents parallels with the trajectory of a writing program administrator. This essay explores those parallels and performs a close reading of a Nirvana song, "Serve the Servants," whose narrator sounds at times like an angry WPA. Cobain's career reveals how WPAs can conceive of inward and outward directed rage, irreverence, and a grungey consciousness as productive stances. Cobain also suggests the limits of those stances, as he frequently disavowed his activist orientation post-fame.

SMELLS LIKE AFFECTIVE SENSATIONS

Thanks to an older brother's record collection, I grew up loving punk possibly as much as Cobain himself and I saw the genre's narrative of rebellion as a salve against boredom and the mundane humiliations of childhood. I used first communion money to buy a copy of the Clash's *Combat Rock*, and the lyrics made me want to be a writer while the rhythms made the world look different. I was in high school when *Nevermind* landed Nirvana on that magazine cover, excited and confused by punk's popularity. I had a copy of *Nevermind* and appreciated the band's anger, and, like Cobain, I suffered from depression. I recognized the paradox of power and alienation in songs like "Lithium," whose lyrics suggested loneliness needn't be so lonely. But I was a casual fan, and though I attended lots of rock shows in the early 90s, I never saw Nirvana. I think this was because I associated Cobain as much with tabloid stories about drugs and a dysfunctional marriage as with great music. The spectacle took over. I remember sitting on the lawn at Lollapalooza in 1992, and "Smells Like Teen Spirit" played on the PA between acts. Kids cheered as loudly as they did for any of the day's live performances. I was working at my college newspaper in 1994 when 89X-FM announced my generation's most famous suicide.

But it was recently, watching the affecting documentary of Cobain's life *Kurt Cobain: Montage of Heck*, deep in the angst not of adolescence but rather the angst of writing program administration, where I experienced intense empathy and identification. The documentary explores Cobain's inventional acts—animating journals where he composed both lyrics and a public persona—and reveals the depths of his existential pain and rage. His pain was tied to a crippling depression and addiction, to be sure, but also to an intense sense of professional guilt and a disdain for success. I saw myself also as someone whose relationship with my work had changed and whose own depression had simultaneously worsened.

I had been WPA at my mid-sized comprehensive university for four years when I watched *Montage of Heck*. I didn't step into the role until I had tenure, a privilege not all WPAs have. While a junior faculty, I had taught service-learning courses and written about open-admissions education, basic writing, and working-class studies. Sure, pre-tenure years involved stress, but they also represented a focused effort. I taught my courses and published about matters impacting me, my campus, my community, and my field. I don't mean to idealize a period that involved high-stakes labor and huge student loan bills. But there was excitement and singleness of purpose. Becoming a WPA meant toggling among many, many tasks. The joy we introverts take from the solitary labor of writing seems to disappear. WPAs

teach and write and most of us love to teach and write—but of course we also shake hands and sign contracts (albeit with textbook publishers not record companies), compromise, and learn how the proverbial sausage is made in the administration building. It's hard not to empathize with the soul-crushing frustrations Cobain felt when his life went from writing songs on his guitar and playing punk shows to handling those other tasks demanded of individuals at that next level. Isn't teaching a section of comp a little like playing that gig for, say, 20–25 people?

Watching *Montage of Heck*, it occurred to me that becoming a WPA meant having microphones shoved in my face, too: *Why can't you just use the SAT to place students instead of your expensive holistic reading sessions? Why aren't you teaching students not to plagiarize? Why can't majors in my department format citations properly?* An entire, affective rhetoric of satisfaction surrounds teaching and writing—a rhetoric largely absent when we talk about administration. In her work on how WPAs frame their scholarly identities, Melissa Ianetta points out, “some of us do not represent our administrative work in our public self-imaginings. In general, we are scholars first, teachers second, and . . . administrators? Well last, if at all” (145–46). Ianetta mentions the relative invisibility of WPA work on university websites (144). Part of the reason we don't make our WPA work more visible is because it lacks the affective and material rewards of our other labors. Cobain defined himself as a songwriter and performer, not a representative of his record label or a spokesperson for his generation. In that *Rolling Stone* story, Cobain said, “I'm a spokesman for *myself*. . . I don't have the answers for anything” (Azerrad). I feel that. I've been kept up at night, fretting about the problems on campus I haven't solved: perceived literacy crises, dysfunctional budgetary models, reliance on contingent labor. It's partly the depression, partly a sense of professional responsibility. In *Montage of Heck* I saw myself, a sometimes ineffectual and insecure, sometimes loud, sometimes smart voice.

Kids like Kurt Cobain come up playing in garages and bars, doing what they love in a small, safe space—the rock and roll narrative of the little room.¹ Cobain's little room was a dorm at Evergreen State College where Nirvana played a notorious, raucous show in their probationary days and henceforth became known for “intensity” and “energy” (Cross 113). Fans have romanticized that show to the point of nostalgia, and I don't wish to glorify teaching in a similarly uncritical way by suggesting it is a romantic pursuit rather than part of our material work. My point is that many of us gain an affective joy from teaching—a joy sometimes harder to glean from work done on a more public stage (extending the punk metaphor) while

interacting with an array of stakeholders often with more overtly capitalist values.

THE “VALUE” OF A GRUNGE ETHIC

Recalling Cobain’s struggles with the trappings of the value systems of the larger rooms in which he labored prompted reflection. Can WPAs enact a “grunge” aesthetic?² Should we? What would it mean to look to Cobain’s ethic and infer a usable stance in relation to institutional dynamics that many of us find harmful?

Cobain professed many punk values, and critics have certainly wrestled with the extent to which a punk consciousness can offer diverse individuals and groups “resources for self-empowerment and political resistance” (Dunn 9). Michael Utley analyzes 1980s American hardcore punk, teasing out useful ways his corpus suggests writing pedagogies of resistance against “institutional authority” (111). Geoffrey Sirc sees the formless and raw ethic of punk as both a counternarrative and heuristic for composition classrooms. Responding to Sirc, Seth Kahn fleshes out a DIY punk pedagogy rooted in “the idea that punk discourse moves beyond criticism” and “typically provides alternatives” (“Pedagogy of the Pissed” 101). Trending closer to the concerns of WPAs, Joe Essid suggests that writing center coordinators in austere institutional contexts use a punk ethos to “agitate,” and he writes compellingly about how first-wave punk itself grew out of austerity and thrived therein (3). Essid discusses harnessing negative social conditions (think London and New York during the late 1970s) and responding with vigor and consciousness.

But material conditions ought not be considered apart from affective conditions. In *The Managerial Unconscious in the History of Composition Studies*, Donna Strickland suggests that many compositionists find “management” distasteful though managing is a crucial part of our discipline’s history. Strickland argues that this unconscious dilemma “comes from an affective association that prefers teaching and that is averse to the pejorative connotations of management in a humanistic and occasionally Marxist field of study” (119). She argues the discipline should “investigate our emotional stances toward our work” and use affective potential as “the forerunner to action” (121). Strickland begins to point toward the potential of emotions we might commonly consider negative to instill an ethic of advocacy and activism. Mindful of Cobain’s story, I would argue that rage is one of those emotions with which we (must) contend—and put to use. Like Strickland, Micciche offers a useful framing of the intersections among the material conditions of writing programs and the affective states of WPAs.

While Strickland engages with the paradox of our discipline's ideological opposition to management but our long engagement with that very type of work, Micciche focuses on a different paradox: "the WPA seems to occupy a powerful location" but the relentless affective challenges—including those stemming from the gendered nature of administrative work, unjust labor arrangements, and the ways WPA work is often foisted on junior faculty can be profoundly disempowering (434). Both Strickland and Micciche get at the intensity of the unresolved tensions, the lingering and complex feelings stemming from WPAs being implicated in the machinery of the late-capitalist university. *The Chronicle* has covered the increased rates of depression among academics after promotion (Blanchard; Wilson). Post-tenure depression, according to this flood of media coverage in the higher education press, often involves feelings of "despair and apathy"—boredom and ennui compounded by guilt created by awareness that one has no reason to feel bad after achieving greater material security (Blanchard). Think of Cobain's sense of guilt upon promotion.

Kahn's argument that the DIY punk ethic necessarily involves moving beyond critique toward practical action is useful. Ethical engagement counters ennui. Acknowledging that WPA work involves problems deserving of our rage but finding ways to be in service to something larger than one's own material good are direct confrontations with the negative affective states Micciche and Strickland discuss, and therein lies the value of a grunge ethic. Anger that perhaps had led to an unproductive loss of temper can be recast, can evolve into something different. Lynn Worsham reveals in "Going Postal" how a phenomenon with affective potential—a phrase like "going postal"—can change over time and across contexts.

Reveling in the contradictions of examples like Cobain, who was a deeply flawed advocate and activist, has much to reveal about who we are and who we might be as WPAs. A punk or grunge ethic for WPAs is perhaps above all else an abstraction. "Be more punk" sounds pretty good, possibly due to the term's connection to taking stands against dominant culture and its most problematic apparatuses (see Hebdidge's foundational analysis of punk subcultures in London in the 1970s). Although punk movements and artists have long flirted with nihilism (Hebdidge; Rombes) dating back at least to the Sex Pistols' iconic repetition of "no future for you" (*Never Mind the Bollocks*), punk also suggests, paradoxically, possibilities for action. To be punk might involve a screaming desire for change—personal, institutional, or social. As a lover of punk music, a human being, and a WPA, I have experienced these desires. But the nihilism has reared its head, and so have material realities. Punk has never been pure, as a social movement, an aesthetic, or an ethic. In my role as WPA, for instance, I

have taken inspiration from my lifelong passion for punk and opted to take common cause with less powerful stakeholders on my campus or to stand up to unethical administrators. In my role as WPA, I also have lost my temper in unhelpful, ineffectual fashion, or, worse, felt like a silly puppet crying out, “No future!”

The term *punk* has possibly more optimistic resonances (say, compared to the term *grunge*), resonances that at the very least suggest doing and acting. I recently read the affirming, smart, young-adult novel *The First Rule of Punk* by Celia C. Pérez. It is the story of María Luisa, or “Malú,” a multiracial junior high school girl who inherits her love of punk from her white father and discovers the genre’s connections to Chicano culture when she and her Mexican-American mom move to a new city and Malú slowly plugs into her new race-conscious, multicultural, multilingual neighborhood. The novel’s passion for punk artists like the Brat and the Plugz is palpable, and with a light touch Pérez connects the young protagonist’s discovery of these artists and other punks from the Mexican-American community with her burgeoning sense of identity and her active engagement. Like Malú, as a little kid I had much affinity for punks with a conscious—Joe Strummer, Jello Biafra, et al.—whose entire aesthetics focused on this *something larger*.

Admittedly, punk morphed into something that resonated a bit differently. In the 1990s, grunge seemed at times to emphasize punk’s anger and disaffection more than its productive elements. Kahn suggests that the 1990s iteration of punk, and specifically its chief spokesperson Cobain, foregrounded both a “negative” vibe and an “air of passivity” in both lyrics and Cobain’s public persona (“Kurt Cobain” 85). Kahn suggests this “forfeiting of agency” (86) on Cobain’s part significantly limits the artist’s ability to be an intentional actor and shows how Cobain lost control of his own trajectory while facing down the demands of fame (91). Kahn makes a strong case that Nirvana songs like “Rape Me” and the numerous moments in the media when Cobain disavowed his role as an advocate all signify his rejection of “the attendant power and responsibility” (90). I agree that Cobain lost control but also want to explore in this essay how even the flaws and ambivalences inherent in Cobain’s music and story reveal a narrative at the very least familiar (and for some of us, maybe transformative) to WPAs who wrestle with affective pain.

IN A LITTLE ROOM

Cobain had a pseudo grad school experience when the members of Nirvana relocated to Olympia, Washington, where creatives thrived thanks to Evergreen State—the liberal arts college known for not giving grades

and for allowing students to design interdisciplinary programs across the humanities and creative arts (see Cross; Morgen). Nirvana found its earliest fans in Olympia and Cobain found kindred spirits in Tobi Vail, an Evergreen student who would later gain acclaim in the band Bikini Kill. A high school dropout, Cobain read Vail's women's studies textbooks which contextualized his opinions about masculinity and experiences with bullies (Cross 153–55). Though stimulated by Vail, feminism-as-worldview, and the Evergreen shows he was playing, alienation plagued Cobain. He “felt inadequate” during his time in Olympia, a working-class kid performing for artsier, richer kids who dressed better, read better, and even knew their histories of rock better than him (Cross 88). Cobain's professional paradoxes began in these early, punk days of the band—as he performed, wrote songs, and lived frugally—though perceived inadequacies triggered depression. Think: imposter syndrome.

Vail and her books provided Cobain with an intellectual framework for action. He understood punk ideology as struggle, having grown up in working-class and working-poor communities and a dysfunctional family. But feminism provided an imperative to reflect on experience and sensation. Tobi Vail served as a mentor in Cobain's early professional life, exposing him to abstract knowledge. I suggest Cobain had something like a grad school experience in Olympia not just because he learned to draw on different media, genres, and phenomena in his work, but also because his ethic coalesced: the ethic of taking common cause with the kid in a flannel shirt from the logging family over the undergrad with the cool record collection. I think of my own grad school years, lacking in material security but rich in intellectual exchange and discovery, and the disciplinary-cum-ideological habits that took root (for instance, from taking an influential community literacy practicum during my first term—a three-credit salve for my own imposter syndrome). The ethic Cobain developed in Olympia, likewise, shaped his career.

You probably know the story of *Nevermind* in 1991: Nirvana knocks Michael Jackson off the top of the charts and gains exposure on MTV, magazine covers, *Saturday Night Live*. If you're a WPA, you probably also know the sensation of being pulled away from labor you call “my work,” and you might also know the sensation of being asked to do things for which you do not necessarily have as much training, or that perhaps compromise your lefty values. If so, then maybe you can identify with nostalgia for your “little room.”

BORED AND OLD

After *Nevermind*, the first track on Nirvana's follow-up, *In Utero*, was called "Serve the Servants"³ and led off with a seemingly autobiographical couplet, "Teenage angst has paid off well / now I'm bored and old." Cobain used the first lyrics from the most anticipated record of 1993 to joke that songs about being an outsider have made him rich and to admit his best years are behind him. The line alludes to the rock cliché about not trusting anyone over a certain age, though he was just in his mid-20s when he wrote *In Utero*. If age invokes a familiar rock and roll rhetoric (*Don't trust anyone over 30! If it's too loud . . .*), boredom invokes even more overtly punk tropes. The Ramones, Sex Pistols, Buzzcocks, and Green Day all sang about boredom. Nicholas Rombes suggests that punk sought "to transform boredom into the very premise of modern life" (29), and punk's "disordered" aesthetic has roots in a kind-of bored, "detached" disregard for contemporary culture (28–30). By declaring himself "bored," then, Cobain's narrator positions himself inside of everyday culture and punk subculture. These lines resonate when I think about my own move from junior faculty member to WPA.⁴ On my worst days (a meeting with an administrator went poorly, perhaps), it's hard not to experience this stew of nostalgia and bored resignation. The lines also resonate because ideological critique informed a good deal of my earliest published work and paid off reasonably well. It didn't sell records, but it earned me tenure, and a similar, if less lucrative, irony holds. Cobain wrestled psychically with the notion of commodifying teen angst, and isn't it at least as stark to consider the ethics of profiting from radical theoretical constructs and stepping into a managerial position involving exploitative labor arrangements?

The song's narrator expresses anger at himself for commodifying alienation and depression and loathes his own privilege, but there's outward-directed anger in the subsequent lines:

Self-appointed judges judge
more than they have sold
If she floats than she is not
a witch like we had thought
A down payment on another
one at Salem's lot

As much as Cobain's narrator cops to selling out, he stands by his art and questions those sitting in condemnation—presumably of his music, lifestyle, drug use, and high-profile relationship with Courtney Love (called a witch and worse by the media)—and he boldly boasts of his achievements like a hip hop star rapping about how many records he's sold. References

to the Salem witch trials stand as critiques of the media's sexist fixation on his wife, who was put on trial by a media who alleged she did heroin while pregnant and attempted to break up Nirvana (Cross 262). Certainly a critique of the media's sexist witch hunt would mesh with Cobain's feminism, though the line could also reference Stephen King's novel *Salem's Lot* about blood-sucking, suave vampires, a comparison equally suggestive of what Cobain thought of the media. But an equally important reading acknowledges the juxtaposition of inward- and outward-directed loathing. Even in a humorous lyric, Cobain's existential misery is palpable.⁵

That juxtaposition rings true. With the speed of a Nirvana refrain, I've moved from loathing myself for even having considered "selling out" to Big Publishing, to outward-directed rage, angry at a colleague on the other side of campus for a misrepresentation of a complex issue like plagiarism or for her rush to judge a student. And I've felt like student writing proficiency was on the receiving end of a witch hunt, felt like student error was a drowning witch. Perhaps Cobain felt like the stakes were lower while playing "his" shows in dorms. Maybe I felt the same when I taught "my" classes and then worked on "my" article. Further, the bitterness of the bit about "judges" being "self-appointed" invokes for me writing's unique place as a subject about which many individuals think they are experts since everybody is a practitioner. Who are the self-appointed judges on our campuses? Those who wish to toughen the penalties for plagiarism, or the advocates of skill-and-drill pedagogies, or the administrator who skirts faculty governance? "Serve the Servants" meditates on an awesome ambiguity—at once pointing loathing inward but then subsequently lashing out and expressing anger at such individuals who lack capital—for Cobain, critics; for WPAs, those lacking professional expertise.

The refrain repeats the line "serve the servants," a missive that sounds like an abstraction, a vaguely rebellious battle cry perhaps invoking class allegiances, perhaps the band's interest in being of service not to the media elites they possibly mock in the song but rather their young fans. Perhaps the line is also an abstraction when read through my WPA lens, though perhaps there is catharsis, too, or a similar invocation of class allegiance about whose interests the labor of a WPA might support. As the song spins into tonal shifts, my middle-aged ears listen. Who *do* we serve as WPAs? Someone other than those who sit in faux judgment, hold witch trials, or urge us to take "cost containment" measures and run other neoliberal errands? What might it mean to serve the servants? Better yet, what might it mean *as* WPAs to let our minds be inspired—like fifteen-year-olds—by rebellious rock-and-roll? In my 40s, I hear Nirvana after a day of WPA labor and I am still the same kid buying *Combat Rock* with his first com-

union money. The kid who, like Kurt Cobain, hears punk rock's rage and imagines a world of freedom, not a world of bullies. I hear Nirvana and new narratives emerge too. I listen to "Serve the Servants" and think about inward- and outward-directed rage. I think about whether rage is a usable construct for WPAs. At what moments are we mad at ourselves? At others?

THE CORPORATIZATION OF THE UNIVERSITY STILL SUCKS

During a lively question and answer period following her plenary address at the 2014 WPA Conference, Melissa Ianetta suggested being the WPA means having to be "the grown-up." I think she is mostly right. Yet, what of the affective moments that prompt something else? What would our homemade T-shirts say? *Pearson still sucks. Reliance on contingent labor still sucks. Making fun of student writing still sucks. The corporatization of the university still sucks.* I appreciate the relentlessly performative nature of Cobain's persona, how he refused to rest comfortably after promotion. Was he mature, à la Ianetta's helpful advice? No. He had silly spats with other musicians, for instance. However, Cobain refused to rest comfortably like other elites sometimes do. Certainly we know academics who rest comfortably upon promotion, as surely as we know administrators who care little about the servants.

WPAs exist in a middle space between servant and elite—middle managers—though ultimately what we do is grunge in the world of academe: engaging with first-year and even "remedial" curricula. For those of us WPAs who are angry, or even ambivalent, Cobain's narrative suggests there's no escaping the messy space between elite and servant. The word "bored" positioned Cobain's narrator within punk subculture (using the boredom trope like so many other punk musicians) and within mainstream culture too (copping to being just another boring old guy), and WPAs are a lot like that. WPAs are on the cover of glossy magazine but still wear flannel, even if the outfit is a performance. Cobain's narrative suggests how being a punk has limits. I admit I have failed to be the grown-up. I wish I could say I've behaved better than Cobain when he succumbed to the worst clichés of rock rivalries, but I cannot. I am guilty of passive-aggressive sniping and, in the age of social media, unfriending colleagues after contentious faculty meetings and disagreements involving campus politics. I never succumbed to anger or an immature impulse like this before becoming WPA. My version of a stupid media beef with Axl Rose, I guess. But in addition, the intensely polemical debates over curriculum, scheduling, and the like that I believe are part of the emotional work of WPAing have exasperated my own imposter syndrome and triggered bouts of depression that are

among the worst I have contended with. WPA labor, my own anger, and my mental health have mingled in sometimes toxic ways. Little wonder *Montage of Heck* had such resonance.

On the other hand, I maintain perhaps paradoxically that anger can potentially be a useful stance—including something like the irreverent rage expressed by Cobain.⁶ Cobain's irreverence in the face of his stardom, though at times counterproductive and dysfunctional, kept his performances unpredictable, garnered attention (sometimes a good thing), and worked against blind acceptance. Recently, a high-ranking administrator visited a faculty meeting and was discussing technology initiatives on campus including the creation of a new high-salary administrative position to oversee tech initiatives. Several faculty members raised concerns about working class and working poor students on campus who lacked laptop and internet access. This administrator was unaware that lack of access to technology was a concern—though the campus runs a food pantry for hungry students—and dismissed faculty concerns. When these questions persisted, the administrator suggested there was nothing she could do if concerned faculty were not able to present her with quantitative data on the number of students who lacked access. I responded, “Maybe you should ask your new technology czar to generate that data.” I don't think I accomplished much except perhaps some affective, smug self-satisfaction but my point is that calling out hypocrisy and using indignation and anger (*how can someone in charge of technology—in charge of resources!—not even be considering the material needs of our students?*), rhetorical tools including irreverence and sarcasm, and the credibility that comes along with having the WPA title (such as it is) is a responsibility. Kurt Cobain lost friends, and he sometimes appeared on a very large stage to be acting the fool, but two and a half decades after his death it is hard to accuse him of apathy. He wished to use the privilege he gained from advancing in his chosen profession—even through the psychic pain—for something larger.

Many WPAs may find themselves in a position to act on the rage we sometimes experience as a result of, for instance, the labor conditions of many writing professionals. Indeed, *the corporatization of the university still sucks*. But I tread lightly here, aware that my race (white) and gender (male), for instance, influence how my rage is likely to be received by campus stakeholders. Not to mention the fact that I have tenure. Just as grunge was often a pop culture movement dominated by white males, cavalier suggestions to act on rage in institutional contexts assume particular types of privilege. So, humbly, I offer qualifications, reiterating the notion that as WPAs we may find ourselves in contexts where rage is available to us. We may feel the outward-directed rage at higher administrators (who perhaps refuse to convert

part-time lines into full-time lines) and inward-directed rage at ourselves (as we continue scheduling contingent workers), respectively.

Like the narrator of “Serve the Servants,” we WPAs at once rage at other stakeholders and at some level ourselves too. Which is another way of saying, we are still “boss compositionists,” James Sledd’s term from 1991. “Still” being the keyword, as in “Corporate Magazines Still Suck.” Cobain was familiar with narratives of authenticity; punk rock was already fifteen years old when Nirvana broke. The clichés he critiqued and lived—*Rolling Stone* covers, drugs, death at 27 (like Hendrix et al.)—were already familiar tropes a quarter century ago when Kurt Cobain hit heavy rotation. And, likewise, here we are as WPAs still contending with these feelings. Sledd opens his scathing 1991 critique of the profession in which he coins “boss compositionist” wondering, “why has so much talk [about lousy labor arrangements in writing programs] produced so little action?” (269). Sledd’s article and *Nevermind* dropped at about the same time. Numerous proposals have responded to Sledd’s critique offering reformations of writing programs in order to improve labor conditions (see, for example, Crowley; Harris) and some programs have taken positive steps, but the era of neoliberalism has often meant a restoration of an unjust order. We may find ourselves in positions to act out.

I have often failed to enact broad changes to my school’s labor arrangements, but I’ve fought like hell (successfully) to make part-time faculty and undergraduate writing center consultants co-investigators on institutional research projects, a small punk move. I’ve taken a DIY approach to scheduling and other tasks I was uncomfortable assigning to an administrative assistant. Though we can—and should—acknowledge that we are still boss compositionists, we can also embrace the grunge in small-scale ways. We are already working with first-year and remedial students. We have opportunities to take common cause with outsiders. I think of Bruce Horner’s call to think of “basic writing,” the so-called bottom, as the site of “leading edge” work (19). Horner advocates that WPAs not only value basic writers but collaborate with them on scholarly projects and honor their diverse and dynamic language practices. This is just one example of breaking down hierarchies. And it’s not breaking down hierarchies out of a sense of charity—or even merely out of a sense of justice. Nonhierarchical scholarship can be the two-minute punk anthem, the most interesting thing on the radio. I mean academic journal.

Grungey things we can do as WPAs include:

Bringing them along. To the degree that WPAs possess institutional privilege and capital, we might emulate Cobain’s commitment to sharing

opportunities. I call this “bringing them along.” While rejecting offers from popular touring festivals of the 1990s, Cobain brought relatively obscure punk bands like Tad and the Melvins on tour, exposing these acts to wider audiences than they previously had enjoyed. Cynically, one might accuse Nirvana of making these choices in order to appear to be adopting a “cool” tastemaker pose. Regardless, the end result contributes to an ethos rooted in sharing and collective action. WPAs have opportunities to engage in diverse types of knowledge production and disciplinary labor, from program assessment to institutional research, and much of this labor lends itself to collaboration. With whom are we choosing to collaborate? I like how even through rage, discomfort, depression, and dysfunction, Cobain positioned himself as a mentor, giving to others what members of Bikini Kill gave to him in the early, Olympia days. And not primarily a mentor in the top-down sense of the term, but rather a mentor using privilege (the money and fame in which he suddenly found himself awash) to honor contributions to his craft from those he thought ought to be recognized or those he observed not in possession of the privilege he himself had. I’m not suggesting we abandon responsibilities or prerogatives vis-à-vis more traditional types of mentoring—many of us mentor graduate students or junior faculty in a way that has necessarily top-down qualities—but rather suggesting that we also look for opportunities to use our own privilege (perhaps even the privilege we find discomforting à la Strickland’s argument) to work with and share exposure, glory, and opportunity with a diverse range of deserving, contributing stakeholders, including those who are sometimes overlooked or forgotten such as writing center consultants, part-time colleagues, community members—comrades and collaborators that come from many corners of campus and beyond.

Rejecting bullshit hierarchies. Kevin C. Dunn suggests the punk aesthetic foregrounds “tearing down the artificial boundaries between performer and audience” (13). Dunn paraphrases Frankfurt School critic Walter Benjamin and characterizes punk’s artist-audience connection as one of the keys to punk’s potential for affecting social change, suggesting that connection “turn[s] consumers into collaborators” (136). For Cobain, feminism and punk coalesced into an angry worldview, a suspicion of authority. He did not like to be seen on a separate, higher plane than kids at his shows, and he likewise refused to see journalists and industry executives as authority figures to which he should bow. That is to say, his rejection of authority could be directed both inward and outward in the same way that rage and loathing could be directed both inward and outward. If “Serve the Servants” suggests Cobain’s dual anger at himself and the world around

him, then his larger worldview also suggests his consistent rejection of hierarchies. He didn't see himself as being any better than his fans and, in fact, scoffed at the notion. He certainly didn't see reporters or industry executives as worthy of kowtowing and dealt with them accordingly. This consistent egalitarianism is instructive. WPAs can identify with that middle ground position—potentially “over” some stakeholders and “under” some, and may find occasion for scoffing and irreverence—perhaps to the point of destruction. Cobain had that posture of rage against outsiders from “above” who came at his craft—members of the media, for instance, or a producer who didn't have his trust—and lashed out. Part of this was to protect his work, but that caretaking was made possible by Cobain's staunch belief that power, money, and a job title did not entitle anyone to tell him what to do. I don't think I have to speak of the imperative to put that ethic into effect when having words with the Vice Chancellor For Dumbfuckery. And, likewise, when recasting our relationship with those we might come to see as “collaborators” (Benjamin 98; Dunn 136–140).

Serving the servants. On one level, serving the servants is about acknowledging our aforementioned middle manager status as WPAs and identifying down instead of identifying up—staying closer to the first-year students and the lecturers and adjuncts than the deans and provosts. To be sure, WPAs inevitably navigate relationships with all of the above. Obviously it behooves us to develop effective strategies for working with all. But whom do we serve? Who are the stakeholders who get us to campus early on Monday morning and keep us there well past 5:00? I'm not talking about identifying down because it feels good and because of the affective dissatisfaction we have with our management role (Strickland). Nor am I talking about holding hands and singing Kumbaya, a stance that a punk like Cobain would despise. I am talking about making a deliberate, conscious choice to take affirmative stances in favor of the servants. Feminist punks like Bikini Kill often asked men at their shows to step to the back of the crowd and invited women to step forward and get closer to the stage (Dunn 42). That is an affirmative, material stance and an embodiment of this ideal. Cobain himself went out of his way to stay in alignment with the marginalized—from bands that lacked his own band's fame to the queer and bullied kids in his audience. And while cynics (including, perhaps, the narrator of “Serve the Servants”) might claim he cashed in on this pose, consider the lucrative opportunities he missed by opting out of tours with arena rock acts whose gender politics he critiqued. And so I return to the question, whom do we serve? Refusing to get into bed with Big Textbook or Big Testing because we decide refusing is the best way to serve students

might mean passing on a lucrative opportunity—lucrative for the college’s bottom line, for instance, and by extension a chance to score points with administration, but an opportunity not in the best interests of students.

Talking some shit. My temper has gotten the best of me as WPA and I am not always proud of that. Having said that, to the degree that we have privilege and power (e.g., tenure, a contract, etc.) within our institutions, are we taking risks and putting ourselves out there? Are we willing to talk some shit? Cobain’s notorious willingness to speak his mind in frank, sometimes offensive ways translated into moments where he shattered taboos—expressing, for example, his disdain for machismo, sexism, and homophobia in the world of rock and roll and the culture at large (see Azerrad). This, too, is a tricky proposition for WPAs, as we are told as members of academe to be collegial and exercise decorum. That is, to be more middle class and, by extension, to prop up the current status quo. Part of rage is expressing rage. Part of privilege is giving voice to important ideas because those ideas are important and because we have a platform to speak. Talking shit can be the right thing to do—a way in which to advance a just cause. But in addition, it can be a way to find release, to let go of some of the unresolved, negative paradoxes Strickland and Micciche describe being all-too-common in WPAs. There are moments that call for us to be mature, à la Ianetta. There are moments that call for us to talk shit, to be embodied, affected, and grungey.

Cobain’s story is instructive. My professional life shifted dramatically upon getting tenure and becoming WPA. My depression worsened. I let the stress impact relationships. I am not a drug addict and don’t suffer the existential battles that Cobain did. But like other WPAs, I found myself in crisis mode, debating the merits of my program and my field of study with administrators, struggling with the guilt of being a middle manager and a boss compositionist, living a professional life of emotions, often bringing those struggles home, and trying, as the poet May Sarton writes, “to handle it all better” (101).⁷ It’s tempting to avoid giving offense, to avoid conflict and rage, and to seek comfort. The mythology of earned, *deserved* privilege is ingrained to the point that those who do not collect warrant something like pity. *Kurt worked so hard to attain success, and he can’t even enjoy it.* As if performing on *Saturday Night Live* or topping the charts must gratify. Perhaps we all sometimes feel we are deserving of pleasures and instant gratifications and feel the pull to act apathetically, or to be calm and decorous when emotions are perhaps justified.

I have moments like this as a WPA, where either my temper or my apathy wins. There’s something to be said for willingness to speak and

fill uncomfortable silences, sometimes with an irreverent, sarcastic, angry, grungey, utterance. I'm glad that I have not been a WPA who seeks at all costs to avoid conflict. But I'm also haunted by Ianetta's admonition that WPAs need to be grown-ups. Intellectually, I know that being the grown-up means letting things go, or at least waiting until the kairotic moment to take action. To sit back, listen, weigh options, and then act strategically. Right? Of course. And yet—here is the paradox—the strategic, prudent course of action can sometimes be too safe, and too decorous. WPAs can look to Cobain's anarchic spirit, including his rejection of decorum but also his rejection of doing what is easy and what is logical. Logically, it makes sense to remain calm. But what of emotions? When Cobain declared, "I'm a spokesman for *myself*. . . I don't want to be a fucking spokesperson," he wasn't saying he didn't care for anything or anyone outside of himself—just that he had little interest in the liberal decorum that so often leads to presumption. He didn't want to be Bono speaking earnestly on behalf of the Western world, presuming to solve every social problem. But the problems remain, and, in Sartre's words, I need to handle it all better. Kurt didn't. I want to try.

NOTES

1. The White Stripes captured the dilemma of the little room in their song of the same name: "Well you're in your little room / and you're working on something good / but if it's really good / you're gonna need a bigger room." Like Nirvana, the band could not be contained by little rooms for long. "Little Room" appeared on the White Stripes' breakout album, *White Blood Cells*.

2. The media dubbed Nirvana and its contemporaries "grunge." In the early 1990s the term came to refer to an amorphous genre of latter-day punk rock, a wardrobe of flannel shirts, and, briefly and regrettably, a generation. Grunge and punk music improbably became so profitable that soon after Nirvana's *Nevermind* became a hit, the fifteen-year-old, genre-defining record *Never Mind the Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols* went platinum (Waksman 300).

3. A great deal of the song seems to address Cobain's painful relationship with his father. Cobain wrote a scrapped set of liner notes:

I guess this song is for my father who is incapable of communicating at the level of affection in which I have always expected. In my own way, I decided to let my father know that I don't hate him. I simply don't have anything to say to him, and I don't need a father/son relationship with a person whom I don't want to spend a boring Christmas with. In other words: I love you; I don't hate you; I don't want to talk to you. (qtd. in Cross 262)

4. It is worth reiterating that numerous WPAs assume their roles before or without tenure. I do not wish to uncritically equate “WPA” with “senior member of the profession.” Certainly, faculty of all ranks and graduate students serve as WPAs.

5. See Morgen for a graphic, compelling, and often surreal representation of Cobain’s struggle with mental health issues.

6. Cobain seemed angry at music journalists on principle and often answered specific questions from the media with abstractions like “Punk rock is freedom” (Cross 191), just one example of his irreverent, pissed pose.

7. In her memoir *Journal of a Solitude*, Sarton captures the imperative to interrogate our own values and behaviors. She writes, “I asked myself the question, ‘What do you want of your life?’ and I realized with a start of recognition and terror, ‘Exactly what I have—but to be commensurate, to handle it all better’” (101).

WORKS CITED

- Azerrad, Michael. “Nirvana: Inside the Heart and Mind of Kurt Cobain.” *Rolling Stone*, 16 Apr. 1992, rollingstone.com/music/news/nirvana-inside-the-heart-and-mind-of-kurt-cobain-19920416.
- Benjamin, Walter. “The Author as Producer.” *Understanding Brecht*. 1966. Translated by Anna Bostock, Verso, 1998, pp. 85–103.
- Blanchard, Kathryn D. “I’ve Got Tenure. How Depressing.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 31 Jan. 2012, chronicle.com/article/Ive-Got-Tenure-How/130490.
- Cobain, Kurt. *Journals*. Riverhead, 2002.
- The Clash. *Combat Rock*. CBS Records, 1982.
- Cross, Charles R. *Heavier than Heaven: A Biography of Kurt Cobain*. Hyperion, 2001.
- Crowley, Sharon. *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*. U of Pittsburgh P, 1998.
- Dunn, Kevin C. *Global Punk: Resistance and Rebellion in Everyday Life*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
- Essid, Joe. “Working for the Clampdown? Being Crafty at Managed Universities.” *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2005, pp. 1–5.
- Harris, Joseph. “Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss: Class Consciousness in Composition.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2000, pp. 43–68.
- Hebdidge, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Routledge, 1979.
- Horner, Bruce. “Relocating Basic Writing.” *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2011, pp. 5–23.
- Ianetta, Melissa. “Absence and Action: Making Visible WPA Work.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2015, pp. 141–58.
- Kahn, Seth. “Kurt Cobain, Martyrdom, and the Problem of Agency.” *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2000, pp. 83–96.

- . "Pedagogy of the Pissed: Punk Pedagogy in the First-Year Writing Classroom." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 49, no. 1, 1998, 99–104.
- Micciche, Laura R. "More than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work." *College English*, vol. 64, no. 4, 2002, pp. 432–58.
- Morgen, Brett, director. *Kurt Cobain: Montage of Heck*. HBO Documentary Films and Universal Pictures, 2015.
- Nirvana. "Serve the Servants." *In Utero*. Geffen, 1993.
- . *Nevermind*. Geffen, 1991.
- Pérez, Celia C. *The First Rule of Punk*. Viking, 2017.
- R.E.M. *Automatic for the People*. Warner Brothers, 1992.
- Rombes, Nicholas. *A Cultural Dictionary of Punk, 1974–1982*. Continuum, 2009.
- Sarton, May. *Journal of a Solitude*. Norton, 1973.
- The Sex Pistols. *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*. Virgin Records, 1977.
- Sirc, Geoffrey. "Never Mind the Tagmemics, Where's the Sex Pistols?" *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 48, no. 1, 1997, pp. 9–29.
- Sledd, James. "Why the Wyoming Resolution Had to Be Emasculated: A History and a Quixoticism." *JAC*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1991, pp. 269–91.
- Strickland, Donna. *The Managerial Unconscious in the History of Composition Studies*. Southern Illinois UP, 2011.
- Utley, Michael. *Bad Rhetoric: Towards a Punk Rock Pedagogy*. 2012. Clemson U, MA thesis.
- The White Stripes. *White Blood Cells*. Sympathy for the Record Industry, 2001.
- Waksman, Steve. *This Ain't the Summer of Love: Conflict and Crossover in Heavy Metal and Punk*. U of California P, 2009.
- Wilson, Robin. "Why Are Associate Professors So Unhappy?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 3 June 2012, chronicle.com/article/Why-Are-Associate-Professors/132071.
- Worsham, Lynn. "Going Postal: Pedagogic Violence and the Schooling of Emotion." *JAC*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1998, pp. 213–45.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the very supportive editors of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* and especially to reviewers Harley Ferris and Seth Kahn for helping me shape this essay into its present form. Thank you, Kurt Cobain, for leaving behind so much beautiful music.

William DeGenaro is professor of composition and rhetoric at the University of Michigan–Dearborn, a writer, and a Fulbright Scholar. He has taught in Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates and frequently collaborates with Detroit area non-profits on service learning initiatives. His academic work focuses on community-based teaching, working-class studies, and basic writing pedagogies.

Looking through Narrow Windows: Problem-Setting and Problem-Solving Strategies of Novice Teachers

Carolyn A. Wisniewski

ABSTRACT

This article presents results from a qualitative study of the development of teaching knowledge among twelve novice graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) of college composition. Contributing to recent empirical research in composition studies about the processes by which GTAs learn to teach writing and adopt a professional teaching identity, this study examines how GTAs cultivate adaptive expertise through critical reflection on teaching challenges. Analysis of 30 semi-structured interviews revealed that GTAs located teaching challenges in students, curriculum, classroom management, and pedagogy. GTAs rarely used problem-solving strategies that would help them understand and avoid problems, and they rarely turned to disciplinary or programmatic resources to resolve challenges. The author recommends that writing pedagogy educators consider a detect-elect-connect model of transfer to encourage GTAs to routinize problem solving with disciplinary resources. One potential avenue for incorporating this model is to use action research in pedagogy education.

The *CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing* (CCCC) emphasizes that teaching assistantships provide emerging practitioners opportunities to cultivate a professional teaching identity by exploring and applying the principles and practices encountered in their writing pedagogy education in the classroom. The statement offers a glimpse of this professional identity: “highly competent, reflective practitioners who prioritize students’ learning needs and experiences, integrate contemporary composition theory and research into their teaching practices, and contribute their disciplinary expertise to improve their departments and institutions.” Recent studies of writing teacher development have drawn attention to the challenges of fostering this professional teaching identity, exploring

the uneven ways in which graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) incorporate composition theory and research into their teaching and the overriding influence of prior experience and institutional context on their classroom practices (Barr Ebest; Dryer; Estrem and Reid; Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir; Restaino). While composition studies is beginning to establish an empirically grounded understanding of teacher development, much remains to be learned about how GTAs acquire writing pedagogy knowledge and transfer that learning to classroom teaching.

In this article, I first review composition studies and teacher education scholarship about teacher expertise and challenges to professional growth and development. I next review theories of reflective practice and problem solving, which provide a useful lens for examining teacher growth as dissonant experiences—surprising or troubling teaching situations—prompt instructors to reflect on their beliefs, knowledge, and classroom practices. I then present data drawn from a larger qualitative study of the experiences and beliefs of novice GTAs of first-year composition (FYC) as they completed their preservice writing pedagogy education (WPE) and began independent teaching. The present piece will focus on the following research questions:

- How do novice GTAs describe—or *frame*—troubling or challenging teaching situations?
- How do GTAs make sense of and resolve those troubling situations?

TEACHER EDUCATION AND EXPERTISE

Teacher education aims to facilitate the acquisition of “adaptive expertise,” allowing instructors to balance efficiency and innovation as they develop automatized schemas for common issues and therefore an ability to address nonroutine problems without becoming overwhelmed or losing sight of important goals (Hammerness et al. 363; see also Borko and Livingston). According to teacher educators, the primary challenge to adaptive expertise is the “problem of complexity” (Hammerness et al. 359). Because teaching is characterized by multidimensionality and simultaneity, an instructor must process many different kinds of information at once, thinking across multiple domains of knowledge: disciplinary knowledge, purposes for teaching, instructional strategies, students’ learning processes, and the local curriculum, as well as knowledge of schooling and social and cognitive development (Grossman; Hammerness et al.). As the educational researchers Hilda Borko and Carol Livingston explain, perhaps *the* central cognitive task of early career teachers is to begin drawing connections among these domains of knowledge to form a conceptual framework for teaching that

will allow them to identify classroom patterns and anticipate and resolve problems that stem from these interrelationships.

While adaptive expertise is the aim of teacher education, researchers in composition studies and teacher education have begun to reveal the complex challenges instructors face as they assimilate and apply new learning to classroom practices. Studies have found that novice teachers are likely to value personal experience over other sources of knowledge and that new teachers rarely turn to disciplinary scholarship as a resource for practice (Hillocks; Rankin; Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir; Zuidema and Fredricksen). GTAs filter new knowledge through tacit assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning; in some cases, they may experience productive dissonance as these tacit assumptions come into conflict with new knowledge (Bishop; Farris; Rankin). GTAs form these tacit assumptions about how teaching and learning work through prior classroom experience and cultural influences: new teachers are most likely to teach as they were taught, extrapolating from their own experiences and assuming that what worked for them will work for all students (Barr Ebest; Grossman). Teachers' beliefs about writing and learning shape the way they perceive student behaviors; similarly, preconceived beliefs about students' capabilities shape the ways they think about and interact with learners (Hillocks; Pajares). As well, GTAs' prior writing experiences influence their receptivity to composition theory and pedagogy (Barr Ebest) and their construction of students' writing ability and agency (Dryer).

Writing pedagogy educators also confront challenges specific to the college-level teaching context. FYC has a fraught labor history, as an underpaid, underprepared, and ever-rotating population of graduate students has been charged with teaching one of the most-required courses on college campuses (Crowley; Restaino). Many writing programs continue to rely on a "one-shot" model of WPE consisting of a single pedagogy practicum or seminar (Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir), and many GTAs are expected to teach during their first semester of graduate school, concurrent with their WPE. Additionally, scholarship about resistance to composition theory (Barr Ebest; Crowley; Rankin) suggests GTAs' professional disciplinary identities and motivations may be at odds with their teaching identities. Given these challenges of institutional context, identity and motivation, and the "problem of complexity," teacher educators have studied methods, such as reflective practice, that may encourage novice teachers to reconcile competing beliefs with professional knowledge.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Reflective practice offers a productive framework for examining instructors' professional development by directing attention to the thinking processes that allow novices to develop theorized and adaptive teaching (Barr Ebest; Farris; Hillocks; Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir). Typically prompted by troubling teaching situations, practitioners may come to identify and interrogate their tacit assumptions through reflection-on and reflection-for-action. According to Donald Schön, when practitioners reflect on challenges, they compose the "window" through which they view the situation by naming and framing the problem—selecting what will be treated as the "things" of the situation. Through this problem-setting and problem-solving process, they begin to determine what is wrong and in what direction the situation needs to be changed. Schön posits that this process gives rise to a repertoire of strategies practitioners can draw upon when faced with divergent situations but cautions that this development may be constrained by practitioner knowledge and experience. He explains:

When practitioners are unaware of their frames for roles or problems, they do not experience the need to choose among them. . . . When a practitioner becomes aware of his frames, he also becomes aware of the possibility of alternative ways of framing the reality of his practice. (310)

This constraint on critical reflection has been acknowledged by many scholars in teacher education (e.g., Hillocks; Zeichner and Liston); however, the limitations imposed by inexperience and lack of knowledge have not been widely explored by WPE scholars.

Heidi Estrem and E. Shelley Reid have helped us realize how difficult identifying and responding to problems can be for novice GTAs. Their study connected the limited actions GTAs took to resolve reported problems to GTA's narrow range of explanations for tricky, difficult, or surprising teaching situations. Few of their GTAs' accounts illustrated critical reflective practices that prompted GTAs to rethink their own behaviors or pedagogies. Instead, GTAs' narrations of these situations revealed that most interpreted them in terms of individual teaching events and students (student resistance, behavior, and student-teacher relationships). Estrem and Reid found that these GTAs drew on a range of strategies for responding to difficult teaching situations (e.g., "Being there for students when they struggle" [473]), yet their accounts pointed "toward a lack of resources: new instructors simply have not yet developed a large composition pedagogy repertoire" (474). This research highlights a key challenge for writing pedagogy educators: While critical reflection is crucial to development

of expertise, GTAs appear to engage in limited reflection and struggle to explain what they learn from problematic teaching situations; the thin resources they use to address problems points to difficulty accessing and applying composition knowledge in these situations. The present study seeks to extend research such as Estrem and Reid's by investigating how GTAs frame problematic teaching situations and what those frames suggest about their development of adaptive expertise—that is, their ability to draw connections across multiple domains of teaching knowledge to understand, resolve, and avoid such situations.

METHODS

Context and Participants

This study was conducted at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, a research university that requires a two-semester FYC sequence of most incoming undergraduates.¹ New instructors follow a common sequence of units but may individually construct lessons and assignments. The writing program emphasizes preservice preparation and provides a year-long apprenticeship for master's-level GTAs before they begin independent teaching. In the fall of their first year, GTAs attend a pre-semester orientation; shadow an experienced Composition I instructor by attending all class sessions, teaching a few classes under supervision, and grading some papers; and tutor in the writing center, where they also attend biweekly tutor training meetings. In the spring, they observe an experienced Composition II instructor, continue to tutor in the writing center, and take the composition pedagogy seminar. In their second year in the program, most GTAs teach two classes each semester. They receive ongoing mentoring and professional development by attending required teaching workshops and being observed and evaluated by members of the composition office.

The twelve participants in this study were master's students specializing in literature, creative writing, or rhetoric and composition who would be teaching FYC for the first time in the fall of their second year. Participants were recruited through a brief verbal invitation in the composition pedagogy seminar and a follow-up email. In total, four women and eight men chose to participate. While not intended to be representative, this population may share characteristics with composition instructors in similar contexts.

Methodological Framework and Study Design

Social constructivist theory guided the research design of this study, as I adopted a naturalistic set of methodological procedures (Denzin and Lin-

coln 32), using multiple interviews and classroom observations to investigate GTAs' teaching beliefs, knowledge, and practice. Following Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss's revision of grounded theory methodology, which they argue may be particularly useful for identifying and describing a process, this study sought to generate thick description of GTAs' processes of critical reflection, focusing on problem-setting and problem-solving patterns.

As is appropriate in grounded theory, this study adapted theoretical sampling methods, in which cycles of data collection are conducted in response to emerging conceptual trends in the data (Corbin and Strauss 144). This study originally intended to investigate the experiences of one group of GTAs during their apprenticeship and first year of independent teaching. However, during initial data analysis, I realized I needed to better understand GTAs' preservice experiences in the composition pedagogy seminar to trace how those experiences affected subsequent teaching.² I therefore extended the study for a second cycle of data collection to include participant observation of the pedagogy seminar.³ Due to limitations of time and feasibility, as well as an emerging sense of saturation, I followed the second group of participants through the pedagogy course and first semester of teaching, excluding a second semester of in-service data collection. Six GTAs participated in the first cycle of data collection and six GTAs participated in the second.

Cycle one of data collection, which took place from February 2010 to May 2011, included six, 60–120 minute semi-structured interviews with each participant, classroom observations performed during each participant's first two semesters of teaching, and classroom documents. Cycle one interviews took place twice during the preservice composition pedagogy seminar (the middle and end of the semester) and twice during the initial fall and spring semesters of teaching (near the beginning and end of each semester). Cycle two, which took place from January to December 2012, collected data from participant observation of the composition pedagogy course, reflective writing composed in that course, one 60–90 minute interview with each participant conducted near the end of their preservice year, a second 60–90 minute interview with each participant gathered during their first semester of independent teaching, classroom observations performed during each participant's first semester teaching, and classroom documents. The findings presented here are drawn primarily from the in-service interviews. The interview protocols included questions about GTAs' backgrounds (e.g., "Tell me about a teacher who helped you become a better writer."); experiences (e.g., "Tell me a story about a challenge you faced in the classroom," "What changes did you make to your teaching after

encountering that problem?,” and “How did you decide to make those changes?”); feelings (e.g., “How did you feel about that experience?”); values (e.g., “What is your goal for teaching first-year composition?”); and knowledge (e.g., “What concepts or readings from the pedagogy seminar have you returned to this semester?”). Following previous scholarship (Estrem and Reid; Farris), this study recognized that the interviews gave participants an opportunity to reflect on their teaching in a purposive manner that they might not otherwise have experienced.

Data Analysis

Using grounded theory procedures, data analysis was ongoing, inductive, and comparative. I completed open and conceptual coding for all 48 interviews (36 from cycle one and 12 from cycle two); the categories presented here arose from a secondary analysis I conducted of the 30 in-service interviews. Following Corbin and Strauss’s advice on coding data for process, I first identified and coded events that participants defined as problematic or perplexing (a total of 55 events) and then the actions they took to resolve those events. Problematic teaching situations arose in the data in response to questions about teaching challenges (I asked about surprises and successes, as well) but also arose elsewhere of the GTAs’ own accord.

As I coded the interview accounts, I attempted to use participants’ own frames for teaching problems rather than impose external interpretations. As I conceptualized and refined categories, I also turned to prior scholarship. For example, I struggled to find a connection between problems such as pacing lessons, managing the paper load, and struggling with classroom authority until I referred to Pamela Grossman’s conception of “classroom management” as a form of general pedagogic knowledge that includes scheduling, pacing, and maintaining respect, authority, and leadership (5). Throughout, I sought additional perspectives on my emergent findings, speaking with participants about the direction of the research and soliciting their verbal feedback about how my interpretations coincided with or contradicted their own sense of the phenomenon.

RESULTS

Framing Teaching Challenges

This study sought to understand how GTAs compose the “windows” through which they view troubling teaching situations—how they name and frame the things that they attend to in these situations. In total, the participants identified 55 events during their teaching that they found to be perplexing or confusing, and they used four frames to describe those

events: students (45%), the FYC curriculum (18%), classroom management (18%), and pedagogy (18%). The participants most often framed problems through the “window” of students, which accounted for nearly half of all problem-setting narratives and included experiences from all twelve GTAs.

When GTAs framed classroom challenges or surprises through students, they ascribed problems to student behavior or performance. The majority of these accounts referred to student behaviors, such as resistance to revision, refusal to complete course readings, failure to apply in-class lessons to papers, and lack of engagement, including inattentiveness, sleeping, and poor participation in discussion. For instance, Victoria reported being surprised and frustrated by her sense that students were resistant to incorporating peer and teacher feedback in revision.⁴ She explained, “I was just amazed . . . the students wouldn’t have out pen and paper when they were being reviewed. They wouldn’t even have a copy of their paper in class.” She connected this lack of engagement with peer review to students’ disinclination to take advantage of her revision policy, saying,

You tell that student “you can revise and your grade will go up,” and they don’t take advantage of that at all. You pour your heart and soul into all of these comments thinking that I’m being so specific here because this is exactly what the student needs to fix when they revise. I took that for granted in terms of *when* they revise and not *if*.

Other participants similarly reported being troubled by student behaviors that they interpreted as a lack of engagement with the course. For example, Aaron described being frustrated by students’ tendency to sleep during a morning class and his fight “to keep a portion of the students awake and attentive and really just focused on class.”

Additionally, GTAs described being challenged or surprised by student performance, such as by students’ writing quality. Several GTAs reported being surprised by students’ inability to effectively perform analysis or to make complex arguments. Edward described his frustration with finding that students are “deeply ingrained with a position-paper-type mindset,” suggesting they think “it’s either a yes or no answer; whereas, obviously, it’s not that at all.” Aaron also reported feeling disappointed with student performance on a research-based argument, explaining that he hadn’t “read too many [papers] that get to that point of synthesizing the results into an actual argument, and not getting bogged down and . . . just focusing on personal opinion.” Here, GTAs experienced dissonance between their expectations for college-level student writing and the papers they received, and they ascribed that problem to student ability, disposition, and prior preparation. Overall, in the problem-setting narratives framed through stu-

dent behavior or performance, these GTAs identified a sense that students weren't adequately engaging in the learning processes that these teachers built into their classes. In viewing these problems through the "window" of students, these GTAs distanced classroom problems from their own agency and instructional choices.

In other instances, GTAs framed problems through the "window" of the FYC curriculum, identifying problems that resulted from the rhetoric content in Composition I, the archival and qualitative research methods in Composition II, and specific units or assignments. Several GTAs framed teaching challenges through the rhetoric-based pedagogy in Composition I. Bart, for example, reported feeling challenged by his ability to teach rhetoric and worried that students were "bored" or intimidated by the rhetorical vocabulary presented in the course. Other GTAs described similar problems teaching the research methods in Composition II, framing their teaching challenges through inexperience with research methods or lack of programmatic clarity in course outcomes. For example, John explained feeling overwhelmed, stating,

I feel like we're asked to do a lot in this [course], and sometimes I feel like too much. Okay, so we're supposed to do research methods, writing—research methods, by the way, that I am not versed in, writing, and this content.

Other GTAs described feeling uncertainty about program goals or expectations for specific assignments, particularly those with which they had little prior experience. Commonly, GTAs attributed problems that fell under this category of "curriculum" to programmatic mandates perceived to be out of their control.

A third category of problem-setting occurred when GTAs described teaching challenges through the frame of classroom management. These accounts revolved around instructors' efforts to sustain a structured learning environment and included establishing authority, pacing lessons, and managing the paper load. When GTAs framed problems through the window of authority, they described instances in which they felt disrespected by students. In several interviews, Paige described experiencing a problem: "chaos reigned" in her classes as students ignored her instructions, failed to meet deadlines, and so on. At the end of her first semester, she discussed these challenges, saying,

I did not expect to have trouble with managing my classroom. I did not expect to have to fight to make myself heard. I didn't expect for them to need to be so explicit in things . . . And I didn't really, I didn't expect to have so much trouble with them hearing me.

Other GTAs also reported problems that arose from management skills, such as pacing individual lessons. David felt frustrated that his day-to-day lessons did not always go as expected, identifying as particularly problematic:

days where [students'] previous night's homework, the exercise, the things I had planned . . . that we got through them too quickly. . . . Just not having something else in my back pocket that I could apply instead of forcing them to stay in class and stare at me and me stare at them and not know what to say and fill the room with that discomfort . . . [before] letting them go.

A few participants also framed problems through the challenge of managing the paper load, particularly feeling guilty about not returning papers as quickly as they and their students would have liked. In these instances, GTAs identified problems related to inexperience organizing learning environments.

Finally, some GTAs framed problems through the “window” of pedagogy, describing issues that occurred as they adapted instructional strategies for particular concepts and individual students. A few participants recounted experiencing dissonance when an in-class activity did not work as expected. For example, Betty reported being surprised by a classroom activity about audience awareness that “just didn’t work” when students weren’t as invested in the exercise as she expected. Others reported challenges that arose from needing to create in-class activities that would meet the needs of a range of learners. Andrew, for instance, explained that he was “trying to do more writing stuff in class, but it is difficult because people are at such different levels.” Only two GTAs framed pedagogical problems through assessment, worrying about grade inflation and providing effective feedback. Bart explained:

I can see how their paper could be better, but I can’t describe it. The way I grade papers is by correcting them . . . and then I look back through and see how much correction I had to make. That gauges what the grade should be. . . . Saying things like “clumsy wording” or something like that doesn’t really make any sense, so I don’t say things like that. . . . But in the end, I feel like I’m not saying what they need to hear to fix the problem.

In these instances, GTAs experienced troubling teaching situations—that their activities or feedback weren’t working as intended—and looked to their own pedagogical knowledge and choices to frame the problem.

In a few cases, the pedagogical problems identified by these GTAs resulted from misinterpretation of information presented in the pedagogy

seminar or other WPE experiences. For instance, Andrew believed the program expected him to teach grammar through skill-and-drill in-class exercises, although his WPE never took such a stance. This problem arose through a misperception, yet Andrew still worried that he was not living up to the program's expectations when he chose to address grammar within the context of student writing, a misperception that continued throughout his time in the program.

As described above, GTAs in this study used four frames to describe troubling teaching situations: students, curriculum, classroom management, and pedagogy. The next section describes the actions GTAs took—or did not take—to understand and resolve these problems.

Problem-Solving Actions and Resources

While GTAs' problem-setting narratives offer insight into how they perceive troubling teaching experiences, their representations of the actions they took following a problem illustrate how they used knowledge and resources to interpret and resolve those problems. In the face of the 55 separate problematic or perplexing teaching events described in our interviews, GTAs responded in four different ways: with inertia (33%), with self-approration (33%), with experimentation (22%), or with rejection and replacement (13%).

In about one-third of the problem-setting narratives, instructors reported taking no action following a troubling teaching situation, seeming to experience a state of inertia: after reflecting on these situations, GTAs took no action because they were uncertain of what to modify and were disinclined to seek resources to help resolve the problem. For example, while David reported a persistent problem—releasing students from class early—he did not seek resources that would help him to better fill class time, such as lesson plans shared on the program's wiki. Instead, he seemed to enter a state of inertia, unable to draw on prior experience to help him manage a 75-minute class period. Paige, on the other hand, drew on her accumulating knowledge from rhetoric and composition to design a course influenced by critical pedagogy scholarship, seeking to establish a decentered, student-run classroom. However, she repeatedly experienced a sense that her class was out of control, and while she recognized “that there were some students who . . . needed something more structured,” she made no changes to her teaching practice, seemingly unsure of how to reconcile her teaching philosophy with her emergent understanding of student learning needs.

In another third of these problem-setting narratives, instructors took no action to resolve a troubling teaching situation because they appeared to

experience a state of self-approbation, a sense that what they set out to do *should have worked* and therefore a disinclination to critically examine the classroom experience. In some of these cases, the GTAs had prior experience with the instructional method as students and believed their students would have similar reactions as their own. For example, when Victoria reported being frustrated by students' lack of revision, she thought back to her own experiences as an undergraduate, saying,

Anytime I got to revise a paper, even if I'd made a 90, I would freak out, going at it. . . . It's hard, I think, for a teacher that's really young to think about [how] the undergraduates they're encountering are going to be that different from the way that they were.

While Victoria reflected on differences between herself and her students, she did not make changes to her methods for encouraging revision because she felt that her strategies should work and that students were at fault for not taking advantage of them. Similarly, Andrew experienced frustration when his students failed to apply source integration skills covered in class to their papers. He explained:

We spent a good 15 minutes, we went over each answer, everyone was in class, but they still didn't learn how to do a simple thing. It's not simple. I shouldn't say that. It's putting a quote into a paper, and they just can't grasp it, some of them. It's just laziness, I think, to be honest.

Here, Andrew's frustration that students failed to learn what seemed to him a simple task led him to blame students rather than to question his instructional methods.

In cases of inertia and self-approbation, GTAs did not turn to programmatic resources or knowledge gained through their WPE to understand or resolve problems, instead entering states of inaction that resulted from lack of prior teaching experience, reliance on their own prior experiences as learners, and lack of teaching knowledge. Inertia and self-approbation were most often associated with problem-setting narratives framed through students and management. In many of these cases, particularly those associated with feelings of self-approbation, the instructor came to blame the students much as Andrew did above.

In less than a quarter of the problem-setting narratives, GTAs' accounts indicated that they adopted a stance of flexibility and experimentation that helped them to critically reflect on and address the perplexing teaching situation. These GTAs drew on knowledge they had encountered in their WPE or turned to more experienced teachers for advice. In some of these cases, instructors began to look to their students for feedback; others were able to

draw on prior or accumulating teaching experience. All were characterized by a tendency to be critical of the instructional choice, and these accounts were most often associated with problem-setting narratives framed through pedagogy, or, in some cases, through students. For instance, when Betty encountered a problematic teaching situation—students were not producing strong analyses—she first thought about students’ prior knowledge and skills, noting, “I found writing analysis, it wasn’t that they didn’t want to; they were not sure how to. Because they come out of a summary-based system.” After reflecting on students’ prior experiences, Betty reported experimenting with her instruction by creating a worksheet on “how to do analysis in a paper.” While Betty revised her teaching strategy after thinking about students as learners, Aaron reported experimenting with in-class activities after repeatedly experiencing the challenge of keeping students awake and engaged. Midway through the first semester, he experimented with an audience-awareness activity that asked students to convince him to see a particular film. He explained that this activity was “out of the ordinary,” because earlier “I didn’t want to do stuff like that, where the risk is that they might not actually be comprehending any of it and they just see it as a game.” Here, Aaron’s developing knowledge of student reactions—and his emerging confidence as an instructor—allowed him to experiment with active learning practices.

Finally, in about 13% of these narratives, GTAs took actions that would help them to avoid problems by rejecting a programmatic component and replacing it with something more familiar. When Bart felt uncomfortable with the rhetorical concepts taught in Composition I, he decided to give students “different forms of analysis,” namely, excerpts from an introductory text to literary theory. Bart then gave students a “brief overview of these different forms of analysis—it’s criticism, it’s analysis” and was excited that “some of them got really into the literary theory ideas, especially Foucault and things like that.” In other words, Bart rejected a central aspect of the FYC curriculum—rhetoric—and replaced it with an area he was more familiar with—literary theory—in the belief that they both helped students accomplish the same thing—to analyze texts. While Bart did not explicitly set his teaching goals against those of the program, other instructors did: After describing his sense of being asked to do too much by the FYC program, John explained, “My approach at the beginning of the semester was sort of like, ‘Well, you know what, I know that’s what the institution wants but it can’t always get what it wants,’” choosing to privilege his thematic content over the course’s introduction to research methods. John had selected his philosophy-oriented course theme because “it would be comfortable” and he could “teach it confidently and have the content as

an anchor when maybe there are other parts that weren't as comfortable." In these cases, lack of knowledge about programmatic content caused instructors to reach for concepts with which they felt more familiar. These instances of rejection and replacement were associated exclusively with problem-setting narratives framed through curriculum. They were also reported only by male participants in the first cycle of data collection, while all other categories were represented among both groups of participants.

In sum, these participants did not take action to resolve or avoid a problem in most cases; others sought to better understand and resolve the problem through experimentation or to avoid it altogether by rejecting and replacing some aspect of the FYC curriculum. As indicated in the above accounts, participants primarily drew on personal experience and beliefs to help them understand troubling teaching situations, reporting this resource as their only or primary means of making sense of a problem in the majority of these narratives. This reliance on personal experience, with little attention to composition knowledge and little movement toward making connections across multiple domains of teaching knowledge, shapes how GTAs understand problems and the extent to which they're likely to reflect on such problems. In other words, belief structures about learners, learning, and writing determined the breadth and depth of the windows through which these GTAs viewed teaching situations. When GTAs like Andrew, Paige, or Victoria expected learners to be like themselves, they experienced frustration and struggled to look beyond student behavior to understand classroom events. Or, when GTAs like Andrew or Bart believed that writing is equivalent to grammatical correctness or textual analysis, they framed teaching problems in ways that reflected those beliefs. As these narratives indicate, oftentimes troubling teaching situations were not addressed because of the limited frames and resources GTAs used in their reflective processes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study sought to better understand how GTAs frame troubling or challenging teaching situations and how they reflect across domains of teaching knowledge to understand or resolve those situations. This study contributes to our understanding of how GTAs begin to develop professional teaching identities as reflective practitioners who assimilate new learning into their pedagogical reasoning and practice. The results indicate that these GTAs used narrow frames to describe troubling teaching situations, locating problems in students, curriculum, classroom management, and pedagogy. When these GTAs—who, notably, had experienced a full appren-

ticeship year before independent teaching—discussed troubling teaching situations, they rarely turned to programmatic resources or knowledge from their WPE, instead relying on personal experience and beliefs about learners, learning, and writing. In most cases, this reliance led to inertia or self-approbation, where instructors seemingly reflected only fleetingly on problems and did not appear to learn from them. When GTAs did take steps to resolve problems, they took one of two routes: experimenting with an instructional strategy or rejecting a component of the curriculum and replacing it with something more familiar.

The problems these GTAs reflected on during their interviews align with those reported in similar studies (Estrem and Reid; Obermark, Brewer, and Halasek; Rupiper Taggart and Lowry): maintaining classroom authority, managing the paper load and responding to student writing, and wrestling with pedagogical methods to support writers across a range of abilities. Strikingly, in many problem-setting narratives in the category of “students,” these GTAs explicitly framed problems through student faults, using phrases like “students don’t read,” “students don’t revise,” “students don’t make connections,” and “students aren’t engaged.” While Estrem and Reid were careful to point out that GTAs in their study “*were*’t blaming students, . . . for the majority of respondents, a ‘teaching challenge’ was a ‘student challenge’” (468), other scholarship suggests that blaming students for problems may be more common than we would like to believe. Sally Barr Ebest suggests that “teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy” may “blame the students rather than themselves” when an instructional strategy does not work as intended (106–07), and she links blaming behaviors to teachers’ beliefs about writing: “Correlating good writing with good thinking, they assumed that those students who did not measure up were either lazy or dumb” (102). Teacher education scholarship has also found that teachers’ classroom practices are strongly entwined with their attitudes toward students; for example, Hillocks found that teachers who were not optimistic about students typically focused on writing problems and weaknesses, “without speaking to any strengths of the students” (44). While the data collected in this study demonstrates that these GTAs’ attitudes toward students were not static, most engaged in this kind of blaming pattern, particularly in moments when GTAs characterized students as most unlike themselves. This pattern raises concerns about novice instructors’ ability to critically reflect on problems identified through the frame of “students.”

Furthermore, this study found that problem-setting and problem-solving behaviors were closely linked, as GTAs were unlikely to critically reflect on problems that they perceived to be out of their own control or that resonated with their beliefs about learners, learning, and writing. This

lack of critical reflection was compounded by GTAs' reliance on personal experience to understand problematic teaching situations. Consistent with the findings of other studies (e.g., Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir; Zuidema and Fredricksen), the teachers in this study rarely turned to composition knowledge, or even programmatic resources. In some cases, their problems resulted from misinterpretations of composition theory. GTAs' reliance on viewing classroom situations through prior belief structures led most teaching problems to go unresolved due to inertia or self-approbation. Additionally, reliance on personal experience as the primary source of teaching knowledge has been tied to teachers' likelihood to ascribe blame elsewhere and to form misleading or negative beliefs about students and teaching (Grossman).

However, most instructors in this study reported at least one teaching challenge that they addressed by drawing on their emerging teaching knowledge in a way that allowed them to critically reflect on the situation and experiment with their practices. This category of problem solving may help writing pedagogy educators to better understand under what circumstances GTAs seem best able to reflect on troubling teaching situations. In these cases, GTAs were most likely to draw on their emerging knowledge of students as learners as well as on a component of the curriculum they felt knowledgeable about, and this combination seemed to lend them the ability to critically examine instructional strategies to understand tensions. Accumulated teaching experience and increasing professional confidence may also be factors in GTAs' likelihood to experiment following a teaching challenge.

This study accentuates several emerging themes in the accumulating body of research on GTA preparation and development: (1) new instructors encounter predictable problems, and those problems revolve around student interactions; and (2) GTAs take little recourse to professional resources, especially disciplinary scholarship. In particular, this study demonstrates that some novice GTAs may experience little initial growth in their teaching knowledge and that reflection-on-practice may be constrained by a tendency to reduce complexity in the naming and framing of problems, as these GTAs typically ascribed problematic teaching situations to one factor with little reflection across multiple domains of knowledge. In other words, this study illustrates the challenges to critical reflective practice that new instructors experience and that echo Schön's warning that effective reflection hinges on knowledge and experience (310). The challenges encountered and (un)resolved in these early teaching experiences raise questions about the content of WPE as well as the goal of fostering reflective teaching

identities that integrate knowledge about rhetoric and composition, student development, and the local curriculum.

Writing pedagogy educators might productively turn to transfer of learning research for insight into the challenge of adapting formal learning for use-in-action. David Perkins and Gavriel Salomon's detect-elect-connect model of transfer usefully highlights the different "bridges" that need to be crossed, either consciously or unconsciously, for transfer of learning to happen. In this framework, learners must first *detect* a relationship to prior learning. Crossing this bridge may be hampered by challenges such as: inert knowledge, or something learned and understood but not activated in the relevant context (such as the shifting context from learner to teacher); fixedness and mental set, or an inability to see alternatives; and comfort with situations that align with existing beliefs (253–54). Next, learners must *elect* to pursue a possible connection, a process that may be impeded by entrenchment in habitual responses, indifference, or immersion in a social context that erodes learned concepts or behaviors (255). Finally, learners must *connect*, defined as "finding a relevant relationship between initial learning and the transfer situation" (252). Here, obstacles may include insufficient learning in the first place and the challenge of discerning underlying patterns or seeing beyond the surface of a problem.

Because of the challenges to successful transfer posed by each bridge, Perkins and Salomon suggest that educators must teach for a motivational or dispositional shift. To foster a mindful disposition, Perkins and Salomon propose a model of learning that "would engage learners in farther ranging and more open-ended experiences where supports are 'faded' over time" and would ask learners "to grope for potentially relevant prior knowledge (detect) and use judgment to decide on its relevance and how to proceed (elect). Such a culture would anticipate likely counterhabits and counter-motivations undermining later opportunities and prepare learners to face them" (257).

What might this model look like if applied to GTA preparation? I suggest that several experiences seem key to helping novice instructors productively transfer learning from their pedagogy education to the classroom. First, writing pedagogy educators might use the detect-elect-connect framework to structure a seminar or practicum, incorporating scenario posing and inductive problem solving that would foster the habitual use of composition theory in teaching situations, offer practice in thinking across multiple domains of teaching knowledge, and cultivate an inquiry-oriented disposition toward the writing classroom. Action research (also called classroom research or teacher research) might provide a learning experience that would encompass all of the areas above, and, indeed, Barr Ebest argues that

“engaging graduate students in action research may be the most effective means of addressing and overcoming their resistance to pedagogy” (61). Action research offers an opportunity for GTAs to investigate new pedagogies and to develop a systematic approach to identifying, understanding, and learning from classroom situations. While I am no longer involved in GTA education, later iterations of this program’s composition pedagogy seminar have required students to conduct small-scale classroom research studies that, anecdotally, have been successful in helping novice teachers to develop habits of using composition theory to experiment with and reflect on their teaching strategies.

These curricular suggestions offer directions for exploration. They also suggest several areas of needed research. First, WPE research has been spurred by a desire to help novice GTAs acquire and apply teaching knowledge and has therefore focused on initial teaching experiences; however, scholarship from composition studies and teacher education indicates that assimilation of learning is a long-term, recursive process (Bishop; Estrem, Reid, and Belcheir; Hammerness et al.). What happens after the second semester of teaching FYC? Do GTAs’ classroom practices ossify? Do GTAs become more critically reflective, flexible, and likely to incorporate composition theory after accumulating experience? How do instructors come to define their own professional teaching identities, which may extend beyond FYC? Additionally, comparative empirical studies of different models of GTA education could help us assess effective practices and develop concrete guidelines for WPE. For instance, what effect does FYC curriculum appear to have on GTAs’ teaching knowledge and classroom success? Are there curricular models or learning outcomes that are most accessible for novice GTAs? What would intervention studies that control for curricula indicate about successful models of GTA preparation? These and other questions remain to be explored. Ultimately, by better understanding processes of teacher growth we can develop strategies to more ethically and ably support our instructors along the path of expertise in the teaching of writing that would help them achieve the competencies set out in disciplinary documents like the *CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing* (CCCC).

NOTES

1. Composition I emphasizes rhetoric and argumentation; Composition II introduces archival, qualitative, and secondary-source research methods through an instructor-selected thematic inquiry topic.

2. This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (IRB-14-08150 B-XP and IRB-14-09394 B-XP).

3. I had a role in each class: During the initial cycle of data collection, I served as a TA for the faculty instructor; during the second, I cotaught the class with the faculty member and received permission to engage in the research setting as a participant observer.

4. All participants are referred to by pseudonyms.

WORKS CITED

- Barr Ebest, Sally. *Changing the Way We Teach: Writing and Resistance in the Training of Teaching Assistants*. Southern Illinois UP, 2005.
- Bishop, Wendy. *Something Old, Something New: College Writing Teachers and Classroom Change*. Southern Illinois UP, 1999.
- Borko, Hilda, and Carol Livingston. "Cognition and Improvisation: Differences in Mathematics Instruction by Expert and Novice Teachers." *American Educational Research Journal*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1989, pp. 473–98.
- [CCCC] Conference on College Composition and Communication. *CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing*. NCTE, 2015, ncte.org/ccccc/resources/positions/statementonprep.
- Corbin, Juliet, and Anselm Strauss. *Basics of Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed., SAGE, 2008.
- Crowley, Sharon. *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*. U of Pittsburgh P, 1998.
- Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research." *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3rd ed., SAGE, 2008, pp. 1–43.
- Dryer, Dylan B. "At a Mirror, Darkly: The Imagined Undergraduate Writers of Ten Novice Composition Instructors." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 63, no. 3, 2012, pp. 420–52.
- Estrem, Heidi, and E. Shelley Reid. "What New Writing Teachers Talk about When They Talk about Teaching." *Pedagogy*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2012, pp. 449–80.
- Farris, Christine. *Subject to Change: New Composition Instructors' Theory and Practice*. Hampton P, 1996.
- Grossman, Pamela. *The Making of a Teacher: Teacher Knowledge and Teacher Education*. Teachers Coll. P, 1990.
- Hammerness, Karen, Linda Darling-Hammond, John Bransford, David Berliner, Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Morva McDonald, and Kenneth Zeichner. "How Teachers Learn and Develop." *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers Should Learn and be Able to Do*, edited by Linda Darling-Hammond and John Bransford, Jossey-Bass, 2005, pp. 358–89.
- Hillocks, George, Jr. *Ways of Thinking, Ways of Teaching*. Teachers Coll. P, 1999.
- Merriam, Sharan B. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. Jossey-Bass, 2009.

- Obermark, Lauren, Elizabeth Brewer, and Kay Halasek. "Moving from the One and Done to a Culture of Collaboration: Revising Professional Development for TAs." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2015, pp. 32–53.
- Pajares, M. Frank. "Teachers' Beliefs and Educational Research: Cleaning Up a Messy Construct." *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 62, no. 3, 1992, pp. 307–32.
- Perkins, David N., and Gavriel Salomon. "Knowledge to Go: A Motivational and Dispositional View of Transfer." *Educational Psychologist*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2012, pp. 248–58.
- Rankin, Elizabeth. *Seeing Yourself as a Teacher: Conversations with Five New Teachers in a University Writing Program*. NCTE, 1994.
- Reid, E. Shelley, and Heidi Estrem, with Maria Belcheir. "The Effects of Writing Pedagogy Education on Graduate Teaching Assistants' Approaches to Teaching Composition." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2012, pp. 32–73.
- Restaino, Jessica. *First Semester: Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground*. Southern Illinois UP, 2012.
- Rupiper Taggart, Amy, and Margaret Lowry. "Cohorts, Grading, and Ethos: Listening to TAs Enhances Teacher Preparation." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2007, pp. 11–28.
- Schön, Donald A. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. Basic Books, 1983.
- Zeichner, Kenneth M., and Daniel P. Liston. *Reflective Teaching: An Introduction*. Erlbaum, 1996.
- Zuidema, Leah A., and James E. Fredricksen. "Resources Preservice Teachers Use to Think about Student Writing." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2016, pp. 12–36.

Carolyn A. Wisniewski is director of the Writers Workshop in the Center for Writing Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. Her research focuses on writing pedagogy education and writing center studies.

Reclaiming Writing Placement

Heidi Estrem, Dawn Shepherd, and Samantha Sturman

ABSTRACT

Writing assessment research has long described the harmful effects of using standardized test scores for writing placement. Now, national higher education reform efforts are critiquing the use of these tests as well. In this article, we explore how external pressures in higher education offer new spaces for WPAs to advocate for richer placement processes. We propose that placement is a moment where faculty can and should shape the conversation in order to help others—policymakers and nonprofit agencies involved in remediation reform—see placement anew. Finally, we describe our own locally developed writing placement process as one possible placement approach that encourages student reflection and draws on faculty expertise.

INTRODUCTION: INNOVATIONS IN WRITING PLACEMENT

The first-year writing (FYW) placement decision lies at the intersection of state politics, higher education reform efforts, and writing assessment research. For decades, writing assessment research has described what writing teachers and administrators knew through experience: that placing students using only a standardized test score was not a sound approach and often did educational harm (see Huot, “A Survey”; Haswell). While several alternatives to this placement practice have been reported on within our field, one approach that has helped WPAs and campus stakeholders most substantially reconsider the purposes and aims of placement is Dan Royer and Roger Gilles’s directed self-placement (DSP) model. They created an exigency for redefining placement on their campus; we see a somewhat parallel exigency in placement at the national level now.

DSP, which was detailed in Royer and Gilles’s September 1998 *College Composition and Communication* article, puts “students at the center” of

the placement decision (61). It asks students to learn about their upcoming courses, to reflect on themselves as learners and writers, and to choose (or self-place into) the course that fits them best. With this new model of placement, Royer and Gilles successfully disrupted how we think about the placement moment. They reimagined placement not as something that happens *to* students but instead as something that happens *with* them. Their reframing of the placement interaction nudged our field to see writing placement as more than an assessment instrument, and that reconsideration has resonated in both placement practices and scholarship.

Since then, others have continued to build on Royer and Gilles's efforts through engaging students in purposeful activities that help them make decisions about their course selection. For example, the University of Michigan uses a modified DSP model in which students, as part of their decision-making process, complete an essay assignment similar to one they might encounter in a college writing course and then answer reflective questions about the writing process they completed (Gere et al. 609). At Sacramento State University and Wake Forest University, students also complete other reading and writing tasks, in addition to a self-reflective survey, to help them eventually make informed decisions about their course selection ("Directed Self Placement for First Time Freshmen"; "The 2017 DSP Task"). All of these options offer students opportunities to reflect on their own experiences and the expectations of the college writing classroom; some ask students to complete tasks similar to those they might face in college.

Beyond DSP, other scholars have experimented with and implemented portfolio-based placement processes (see Lowe and Huot; Huot, *(Re)articulating*; Daiker, Sommers, and Stygall) and "curriculum-based, expert reader approaches" (Isaacs and Keohane 55). These variations on placement continue to interrogate the placement moment, and all seek to provide richer data and different data to inform placement decisions. Still, for most college students at most colleges and universities, test-based placement has continued (see Isaacs and Molloy). WPAs have been hampered by state or system policies that favor the efficiency of using an already-available test score over implementing placement alternatives.

Now there is an emerging opportunity for WPAs to disrupt placement practices in substantive, creative, and ethical ways. As Nancy Welch and Tony Scott point out, institutions in higher education are currently faced with reform efforts that are offered through a "rhetoric of austerity" that "admonishes universities to make themselves more efficient and affordable amid deep funding cuts" (4). Concurrently, private foundations and non-profit organizations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the

Lumina Foundation support the enactment of higher education reform efforts that emphasize efficiency, reduced time to degree, and lower costs for students. For example, California’s state university system will, as of fall 2018, end remedial testing. Instead, campuses will “consider a variety of other measures, including high-school grade-point averages, English-and math-course grades, and SAT, ACT, and Advanced Placement scores” (Mangan). While we should remain critical of these reform efforts that directly affect FYW, we also look to Royer and Gilles and these other pioneers in placement alternatives as models of how to respond within a problematic context. Royer and Gilles (like so many of us now) were trapped by what they describe as a frustrating placement process. To intervene on it, they rethought the placement decision (who does it, where it happens, and what informs it) altogether. As WPAs, we might currently feel hampered by policies developed by external bodies and reform efforts led by national organizations, but there is also new space to rethink placement again in substantial, learning-centered ways. As we describe later in this article, some of these unsettling national reform efforts are directly linked to placement. If we are strategic, there just may be new inroads available for local WPAs to implement placement processes that better serve students and that resonate more closely with our field’s research.

Our earlier *WPA: Writing Program Administration* article describes how we have advocated with colleagues to make changes to writing placement processes across Idaho (Estrem, Shepherd, and Duman). This advocacy happened largely through grassroots efforts: we developed proposals, did careful research, presented to policymakers, and met with our on-campus administrators. Policy change was slow to come. Now, though, we are experiencing a higher education landscape with urgent, dramatic shifts that provide opportunities for placement reform. As in many states, we have reduced or removed “remedial” writing courses at every institution in Idaho. Like many states, as well, we face continued budget shortfalls, increased pressures for student retention, and more language and cultural diversity than ever. All of these curricular changes shift the possibilities for placement. At the same time, these changes might mean that we need to partner with—or at least seek to find common ground with—external organizations that make us uncomfortable.

In this article, we describe how substantial, progressive placement work is newly possible through sometimes uneasy alliances with higher education reform organizations. First, we explore how the changes in higher education offer new spaces for WPAs to advocate for richer placement processes. We offer pragmatic ways that WPAs might participate in conversations that seem predetermined, ways to “proceed from principle” (Adler-Kassner,

The Activist 92) to affect the potentially damaging narratives about students that surround the placement reform efforts. Then, we describe the evidence-based placement process we have developed on our campus while exploring the rhetorical and pragmatic decisions that went into its development. We describe our approach to illustrate how we tried to build an intentional, contextual placement process, and we offer it only as an example, not as a universal solution. We propose that placement is a moment where faculty can and should shape the conversation in order to help others—policymakers, nonprofit agencies involved in “remediation reform”—see placement anew.

NAVIGATING REFORM EFFORTS THAT IMPACT FIRST-YEAR WRITING

In the eighteen years since Royer and Gilles’s article was published, much has changed in higher education. In our state, we have experienced reform initiatives that directly affect FYW through our state’s alliance with the nonprofit organization, Complete College America (CCA). With a focus on streamlining higher education through creating a “clear path” for students to “successfully complet[e] college and achiev[e] degrees and credentials,” CCA’s charter has been adopted by thirty-nine states (“About Complete College America”). We are mindful of Linda Adler-Kassner’s sobering analysis of the “Educational Intelligence Complex” that drives these reform efforts (“Writing is Never Just Writing”), but the political landscape of our state has meant that if we want to be heard at all, we can neither ignore nor protest against our state’s alignment with CCA. Instead, we have tried to act in rhetorically pragmatic ways and use these reform conversations to make the material conditions of learning better for students. We remain wary of both the alarmist rhetoric of these organizations and the push for “quick, efficient, low-cost education defined by the needs of business” while also viewing these uncomfortable alliances as an opportunity to enact change (Gallagher 26; see Adler-Kassner, “The Companies We Keep” for a review of these tangled reform efforts and initiatives).

As WPAs, we try to be alert to openings for research-based changes—changes that might better support students’ learning—within the crisis-driven approaches of these reform efforts. One brief example before we turn back to placement: in our state, CCA presented “corequisite remediation” as one of their five “game changers” in their work to raise college degree attainment (“The Game Changers”). They describe the dismal persistence rates for students who begin in non-credit-bearing courses. Of course, various corequisite and mainstreaming approaches are not new, and the success of these models in supporting students and increasing retention has

been well documented by Peter Adams, Judith Rodby, Barbara Gleason, and others.

So, while we worked to expand our CCA representatives' understandings of what remediation really meant, who had defined it, and how it had evolved, we also used this mandate to reduce remediation to implement some of the approaches that we had been advocating for years. In Idaho, WPAs and writing faculty across the state collaborated on a corequisite, credit-bearing course that replaced all remedial courses on six of our seven campuses. At our own institution, students who formerly would have had to complete a non-credit-bearing course prior to our first semester course, English 101, now are placed directly into English 101 Plus (English 101, plus a one-credit intensive studio with their English 101 instructor). According to recent institutional data, students who begin in English 101 Plus successfully complete the course at the same rate as their English 101 counterparts. So far, students from both courses are enrolling in and completing English 102 at similar rates (*English 90 and 101 Completion Over Time*).

In other words, we were able to leverage the CCA “game changer” into a change that mattered to us and to our students: replacing non-credit-bearing remedial courses with credit-bearing options that provide additional support. We aren't interested in horribilizing earlier “remedial” coursework, as these courses were taught tirelessly by dedicated faculty. However, we are interested in providing coursework that better supports students and increases their opportunities to learn and continue in college. Through finding space to navigate within the larger CCA initiative, we were able to improve course offerings for our students. Similar fissures are opening in placement practices.

REFRAMING WHAT “MULTIPLE MEASURES” ARE FOR WRITING PLACEMENT

Writing placement is also an area where the language and goals of higher education reform efforts benefit from the expanded definitions found within our field's research. For example: CCA's solution to the inappropriate use of standardized test scores for placement is to advocate using much wider bands of test score ranges instead of cut scores. To illustrate, under our state's previous approach, an ACT score of 17 or less placed students into a non-credit-bearing course, while a score of 18 placed them into our first-semester course. Instead of using clear cut-offs for each course, CCA encourages campuses to

use a placement range to start most underprepared students in college-level courses with corequisite academic support, within which 75 or more of those students can succeed. In essence, [institutions should] establish two cut scores: one that provides direct entry into standard college courses and another that signals very low level of readiness for college work, even with corequisite assistance. (“The Game Changers”)

From the perspective of writing assessment scholarship, this does at least loosen the bonds of a standardized test—but it still assumes that student aptitude is measured, in some way, by these tests. This problematic assumption is one that WPAs can challenge.

Further, CCA also promotes the use of multiple measures to “provide a complete understanding of student ability” (“The Game Changers”). However, they describe multiple measures as simply an increased array of singular measures that might get students out of college writing courses. Generally, these multiple-singular measures are proposed to be given throughout the last few years of high school, either as numerous instances of the same test or a variety of different tests, to gauge how students are doing and where they might need additional instruction so that they can be “remediated” before they leave high school. For example, an idea discussed at one point in our state was to give the state’s version of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium’s English Language Arts college readiness test multiple times starting in a student’s junior year, so that high schools could “remediate” students who weren’t ready for college.

However, these depictions of multiple measures differ in substance and approach from the multiple measures imagined by writing assessment scholars. One of the central tenets described in the *WPA-NCTE White Paper on Writing Assessment* is that sound writing assessment “should use multiple measures and engage multiple perspectives to make decisions that improve teaching and learning” (see also Yancey 1997). This perspective can be seen most clearly in holistic portfolio assessment: students create a small body of work that then provides a particular kind of picture of them as writers and learners. As WPAs, then, we can draw on these richer definitions of multiple measures, ones that are complex and integrative rather than singular.

CCA’s definition of multiple measures comes from their focus on degree attainment; our field’s definition focuses on how to best capture and describe student learning. In spite of the substantial differences in perspectives, WPAs can use the term both to inform external constituencies on what it means for writing assessment and to offer substantive examples that demonstrate this approach. Just as we can accept the model of corequisite

FYW courses as research-based from within our field while also continuing to reject the remediation label for these courses, we can also accept the opportunity to develop placement approaches that take up the call for multiple measures even as we reject the instrumentalist approach often underlying how organizations like CCA define it.

WHY PLACEMENT MATTERS DIFFERENTLY NOW

Why placement, and why now? WPAs always have a wide range of issues that are begging for attention. If “reforming remediation” or improving retention are conversations that are occurring on your campuses, it might be time to act on placement. Here are a few reasons why.

Student Needs

Students’ tuition costs have risen substantially, so doing placement well matters more than ever. The recession substantially reduced higher education budgets; more students are coming to college, but the resources to serve these students have diminished. At our institution, for example, state funding provided 65% of our institution’s revenue in 1987. In 2012, it had decreased to 30%, and the reductions have been even more significant at other institutions (“25 Years of Declining”). To make up for decreased state support, tuition, fees, and board costs have risen 34% over the past decade at public institutions (“Tuition Costs”). This shift in support for higher education not only has placed an undue burden on parents and students but also has created an increased ethical responsibility on institutions to do writing placement well.

First-Year Writing and Retention Efforts

We also need to point out one of the many tensions in placement work: we are advocating for developing careful, locally based approaches to writing placement even as our own state legislators press for more and more ways for students to complete these courses prior to arriving in college, thus circumventing the placement moment altogether. Our state, drawing from Utah’s model, is charging higher education institutions with developing programs so that students can complete an associate’s degree while they are in high school. It is a different undertaking altogether to place 15- and 16-year-olds into college writing courses when they are, in fact, still in high school. That particular challenge is one we will address in the future.

Yet at the same time, higher-level administrators, advisors, and student success colleagues generally recognize the critical importance of first-year writing courses—taken while in students’ first year on campus—to overall

university retention efforts. These stakeholders also understand that sound placement can have a demonstrable effect on student retention. At our university, for example, shifting to our evidence-based placement process, in combination with credit-bearing coursework, has led to student pass rates increasing in all of our FYW courses (*Reduce Remediation Report*). This improvement occurred without changing curriculum, staffing, or student preparedness in any significant way. It also meant that more students began in our first semester rather than our second semester course. Every time a first semester student is successful in their coursework, the opportunities increase for her to persist in college. Further, FYW courses often serve as prerequisites for later coursework across campus—at least ours do. Students quite literally *must* find success in first-year writing if they are, in turn, going to persist in college.

Changes in the Placement Product Market

Finally and importantly, there has been a disruption in the placement test market, which offers faculty the opportunity to try something new. A problematic and unreliable test used by thousands of colleges and universities, ACT's Compass test, has been withdrawn from the market. The closest product on the market to Compass is The College Board's ACCUPLACER test. While this vacuum will not likely remain for long, it creates a space for those interested in placement change to move forward, and quickly. For example, just in our state, all eight public institutions used to require the use of Compass, and now none do; consequently, thousands of incoming students need to be placed in some way—or not placed at all. Therefore, there is an exciting window of opportunity to develop and market approaches to placement that draw on multiple measures, that are expedient, and that have the opportunity to positively influence student persistence in college.

None of these factors and few of these pressures for reform were in play in quite the same way when DSP arose and had the impact that it did. Because the stakes are so much higher—and so very different—than they have been for decades, WPAs can look for opportunities to propose new placement processes. By redefining what the placement moment is, who gets to participate, and how it is experienced, we can move toward more progressive models within our field. There are many possibilities; what we offer here is one example of how we have intervened on the placement moment through recasting it as a conversation, an invitation, and a calibration of sorts for students. In the next section, we describe our delivered

substantiation of what progressive, multiple-measures placement looks like and why we have designed it as we have.

DEVELOPING MULTIPLE-MEASURES, EVIDENCE-BASED PLACEMENT PROCESSES

How we engage with students through placement policies and procedures communicates to them what we value. In this section, we focus on The Write Class, our local, multiple-measures placement process that is a response to the shifting landscape in higher education. Again, we want to reiterate that this article is not an argument for our process itself: it is for doing something, anything, to use this opportunity to make changes to writing placement that will benefit students.

Engaging Students with the Placement Conversation: The Write Class

The Write Class is a web application that uses an algorithm to match students with a course based on the information they provide. It uses multiple measures to determine a student's optimal range of starting courses. While we initially developed The Write Class to improve placement accuracy, it has also provided key opportunities to reach students with additional, customized information. In other words, it links placement and curriculum in ways we had not previously considered.

Our context offers students three options for their initial writing course. English 101: Introduction to College Writing is a three-credit course that is the most common starting point for students. This course familiarizes students with university reading and writing practices, and an increasing number of instructors are implementing an explicit writing about writing approach within the course. English 101P: Introduction to College Writing Plus is a four-credit (all college level) course that supplements a section of English 101 with a one-hour writers' studio with the same instructor. The writers' studio extends and explores the content of English 101 in an interactive nine-student class. English 102: Introduction to College Writing and Research is a three-credit, second-semester course designed to build from English 101. In this course, students engage in inquiry-based research, working from the viewpoint that we produce knowledge by engaging with others' ideas.

The Write Class has four primary phases. In the first phase, students enter identifying information (e.g., name, student ID, email address), answer questions about language use, and provide previous testing and GPA data. Starting with information students readily associate with performance measurement eases them into this placement process.

The second phase engages students in reflection on their literacy histories through a set of questions about reading and writing experiences and confidence, somewhat like those Royer and Gilles outline in “Directed Self-Placement: An Attitude of Orientation” (56–57). The Write Class presents students with eleven pairs of descriptive statements and asks students to pick the ones that better describe them. This process offers students the opportunity to carefully consider the kinds of work they have done in the past and their relationship with that work. It also begins to shape their understanding of college courses by aligning reading and writing practices with this new setting. This oscillation between reflecting on previous reading and writing experiences and projecting into future writing situations represents a core ethic of our program and introduces students to meta-awareness, a key habit of mind that is foundational to our curriculum.

The third phase leads students through information on our FYW course options and asks them to think about which seems most appropriate for them as learners. First, students review detailed course descriptions and sample materials, such as syllabi and assignments. We’ve labeled these options with generic names (e.g., “Course A”) both to help students and advisors concentrate on each course’s content and approach and to obviate tendencies to seek out courses based on their number or name. Next, students are presented with instructor expectations for what students should know and be able to do at the outset of each course.

Our belief is that the procedures allow students to express preferences based on course information rather than focusing on enrolling in or avoiding one course or another. This moment helps them begin to situate themselves within the college learning environment. It marks a key shift; we want students to realign what they might think FYW courses cover and to consider themselves in light of these actual courses.

The fourth phase asks students to deepen their projections by considering the context of their upcoming semester. It reminds students of the expectations of college students and the general homework load for each course; it prompts them to consider their course load and work/family obligations in light of a potential course selection. On our campus, student success is often linked to whether students feel engaged and prepared or uninterested and overwhelmed (Shepherd). Therefore, we give students the chance to think carefully about their situation.

When students have completed The Write Class, they reach a results screen that contains both their course placement and additional information tailored for them, depending on their answers to particular questions. This page presents one of four possible results: English 101P, English 101 with the option to enroll in English 101P, English 101 with the option to

submit an English 102 accelerated placement application, or English 102 with the option to receive credit based on test scores, transfer/concurrent enrollment credit, or both.

The Write Class's questions enable more nuanced placement results than conventional measures. For instance, all students who receive an English 101 result have both a primary and secondary placement. Most students' primary placement is English 101 with the option to enroll in English 101P, which allows them to choose a traditional FYW course or one with additional support. Alternatively, students whose responses indicate a strong likelihood for success (e.g., top-range high school GPA in combination with tendencies to read challenging texts and other indicators) have a primary placement of English 101 with a secondary placement that allows them to apply to begin in English 102.

In addition to more nuanced placement options, the results message screen and the online environment's flexibility lets us guide students to various options in ways unique to our institution. Perhaps most importantly, one of our ongoing frustrations—our inability to communicate with students until the semester has begun—is mitigated through the initial conversation that begins through this system. Further, because it is locally controlled, we can tailor messaging and fine-tune advising as needed. We are better able to communicate about our courses and their expectations to students and can add messaging if unanticipated challenges arise.

We view the 15–20 minutes that students spend working through The Write Class as a pedagogical moment, one in which we can help students begin to understand the college context and their role in it. This process extends the other thoughtful, research-based placement approaches from our field in three ways that are key to its success: re-envisioning this moment of placement as one of reflection and projection, inviting the student into the college learning environment, and acknowledging faculty expertise.

The full implementation of The Write Class occurred because we were able to position it as a response to CCA's call for multiple-measures placement. While we had piloted it for several years, it was only through demonstrating how it aligned with this larger conversation that our provost was willing to support its implementation for all students. In the past few years, we have been able to work with colleagues at other colleges across the United States to design and customize The Write Class for their context, as they too had a new opening for reconsidering placement that had not previously existed. While a full exploration of The Write Class's efficacy and efficiency is beyond the scope of this article, suffice it to say that improving on the use of a single standardized test score for placement is relatively easy to

do. One brief example: our course placements shifted during the first year of implementation—more students began in English 101 and our pass rates increased—students were more successful in the course into which they'd been placed (Belcheir). A reflective approach that blends student input and faculty expertise continues to shift the conversation about the role, purpose, and context of first-year writing at each of these campuses.

Institutional Context: Being Agile and Responsive

The Write Class is fully administrated within the FYW program. This has meant that we now have access to placement in a way that we never did before. We can control the content and the messaging that students receive about our program. Our position in administering placement for our courses has allowed us to make connections across campus. We work closely with admissions, registrar, advising, and orientation offices to communicate with students and to develop processes for helping students enroll.

We can access student responses to all questions within The Write Class. This has allowed us to make improvements in advising in two substantial ways: one-on-one advising with students who have questions about their results, and advising prior to orientation sessions to help students get enrolled in classes. In the (rare) instances when students want to discuss the placement result they received, we can have a meaningful conversation about the time they spent in The Write Class, the responses they provided, and what led them to make the decisions they did. We can then connect that information with the course options and help them understand their results. The latter has allowed us to develop processes—with support from advising and orientation units on campus—for identifying students who may need guidance in getting enrolled in classes prior to their orientation sessions. For example, if a student received an English 101 placement but also has prior learning credits (test credits or transferred courses), we can reach out to them before they get to orientation to help them make their decision about where to enroll. We know that FYW courses are important when it comes to retention, and having access to placement data has allowed us to assist students in getting enrolled in their FYW courses as early as possible.

Administering the placement mechanism also means that we can make adjustments when necessary. As changes on our campus occur, we can adjust The Write Class accordingly. For example, we made a change to the prior learning credit policy by including International Baccalaureate credits. We were able to include information about this shift in The Write Class so students have the most current policies at hand. We are working on a

curriculum redesign in our program, and when we have that in place, we will be able to make necessary changes in The Write Class to ensure that it is aligned with our curriculum.

In short, having access to both the content and the data from the placement site has given us the ability to be responsive to changes and to be proactive in student support efforts.

RETHINKING PLACEMENT: CONCLUSION

When we not only reconfigure our courses but also make visible how they are content-rich experiences designed for all entering college students, we can affect how FYW is understood and described across campus. When we reconsider the placement process, we can begin to shift from sorting students or providing them mechanisms for “getting things out of the way” to starting a conversation about college-level work and what it means to be a college student. In an era where K–12 education includes an increasing number of high-stakes standardized tests, it is vital that students’ first interaction with college writing is not a static test that happens to them but rather a dynamic conversation that happens with them.

As institutions that operate in a complex system that simultaneously emphasizes rigor while also working to expand the ways that students can forego courses such as FYW, public colleges and universities will likely need writing placement mechanisms of some kind for the foreseeable future. We must, then, keep engaging in higher education reform efforts while also continuing to build our own approaches that meet student needs, respond to research from our field, and speak to external stakeholders. We must develop our own ethical, progressive, multiple-measures approaches before we are required to use processes developed by others.

We invite you to consider whether this is the time to press forward on placement change at your institution. As part of your own inquiry surrounding placement, we encourage you to ask about the role, context, and purpose of placement at your campus. Perhaps it can serve a different purpose, open a new conversation, or promote a different understanding of your courses. Of course, a fully credit-bearing FYW sequence enables a different conversation about placement into appropriate courses than does a sequence that includes non-credit-bearing coursework. Alternatives to single test placement instruments can more reasonably help students encounter our courses and be matched with the best curriculum—rather than being placed into a course about which they know little to nothing. There are multiple models in our field, and the time just might be right to

propose a new, research-based placement approach that better supports student learning on your campus.

WORKS CITED

- “The 2017 DSP Task,” Wake Forest College Writing Program, 2017, college.wfu.edu/writingprogram/directed-self-placement.
- “25 Years of Declining State Support for Public Colleges,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 3 Mar. 2014, chronicle.com/interactives/statesupport.
- “About Complete College America.” *Complete College America*, 2014, completecollege.org/about-cca.
- Adler-Kassner, Linda. *The Activist WPA*. Utah State UP, 2008.
- . “2017 CCCC Chair’s Address: Because Writing Is Never Just Writing.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 69, no. 2, 2017, pp. 317–40.
- . “The Companies We Keep or The Companies We Would Like to Keep: Strategies and Tactics in Challenging Times.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2012, pp. 119–40.
- Belcheir, Marcia. *English Placement Task Force Summary of Findings*. Boise State U, 2010. Report.
- Daiker, Donald A., Jeff Sommers, and Gail Stygall. “The Pedagogical Implications of a College Placement Portfolio.” *Assessment of Writing: Politics, Policies, Practices*, Edited by Edward M. White, William D. Lutz, and Sandra Kamusikiri, MLA, 1996, pp. 257–70.
- “Directed Self Placement for First Time Freshmen.” California State U, Sacramento, csus.edu/writing/directedsselfplacement.
- Estrem, Heidi, Dawn Shepherd, and Lloyd Duman. “Relentless Engagement with State Educational Policy Reform: Collaborating to Change the Writing Placement Conversation.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2014, pp. 88–128.
- English 90 and 101 Completion Over Time*. Boise State U, 2018. Report.
- Gallagher, Chris W. “Our Trojan Horse: Outcomes Assessment and the Resurrection of Competency-Based Education.” Welch and Gallagher, pp. 21–34.
- “The Game Changers,” Complete College America, 2014, completecollege.org/the-game-changers.
- Gere, Anne Ruggles, Laura Aull, Moisés Damián Perales Escudero, Zak Lancaster, and Elizabeth Vander Lei. “Local Assessment: Using Genre Analysis to Validate Directed Self-Placement.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 64, no. 4, 2013, pp. 605–33.
- Gleason, Barbara. “Evaluating Writing Programs in Real Time: The Politics of Remediation.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 51, no. 4, 2000, 560–88.
- Haswell, Rich. “Post-secondary Entrance Writing Placement.” *CompPile*, 1 Mar. 2005, comppile.org/profresources/placement.htm.
- Huot, Brian. *(Re)articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning*. Utah State UP, 2002.

- . “A Survey of College and University Writing Placement Practices,” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 17 no. 3, 1994, 49–67.
- Huot, Brian, Peggy O’Neill, and Cindy Moore. “A Usable Past for Writing Assessment.” *College English*, vol. 72, no. 5, 2010, pp. 495–517.
- Isaacs, Emily, and Catherine Keohane. “Writing Placement That Supports Teaching and Learning.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2012, pp. 55–84.
- Isaacs, Emily, and Sean A. Molloy. “Texts of Our Institutional Lives: SATs for Writing Placement: a Critique and Counterproposal.” *College English*, vol. 72, no. 5, 2010, pp. 518–38.
- Lowe, Teresa J., and Brian Huot. “Using KIRIS Writing Portfolios to Place Students in First-Year Composition at the University of Louisville.” *Kentucky English Bulletin* vol. 46, 1997, pp. 46–64.
- Magnan, Katherine. “Cal State’s Retreat From Remediation Stokes Debate on College Readiness.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*. 15 Sept. 2017, chronicle.com/article/Cal-State-s-Retreat-From/241227.
- NCTE-WPA White Paper on Writing Assessment in Colleges and Universities*. CWPA. 2005–2014, wpacouncil.org/whitepaper.
- Reduce Remediation Report*. Boise State U, 2015.
- Remediation: Higher Education’s Bridge to Nowhere*. Complete College America, Apr. 2012, completecollege.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CCA-Remediation-final.pdf.
- Rodby, Judith. “What’s It Worth and What’s It For? Revisions to Basic Writing Revisited.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 47 no. 1, 1996, pp. 107–11.
- Royer, Daniel J., and Roger Gilles. “Directed Self Placement: An Attitude of Orientation.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1998, pp. 54–70.
- Shepherd, Dawn. “Supporting Student Success: Retention, Engagement, and Students Who Repeat First-Year Writing Courses.” Conference on College Composition and Communication, 15 Mar. 2013, Las Vegas, NV.
- “Tuition Costs of Colleges and Universities,” *National Center for Educational Statistics*, 2015. nces.ed.gov/FastFacts/display.asp?id=76.
- Welch, Nancy, and Tony Scott. *Composition in the Age of Austerity*, Utah State UP, 2016.
- Yancey, Kathleen Blake, and Irwin Weiser. *Situation Portfolios: Four Perspectives*, Utah State UP, 1997.

Heidi Estrem is professor of English and director of the First-Year Writing Program at Boise State University, a public metropolitan research university. Her research interests in first-year writing pedagogy, writing program administration, assessment, and instructor development and support have led to publications in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, *Rhetoric Review*, *Composition Studies*, and several edited collections. Most recently, she co-edited *Retention and Persistence in Writing Programs* with Todd Ruecker, Dawn Shepherd, and Beth Brunk-Chavez

(University Press of Colorado, 2017). She regularly teaches graduate courses in writing pedagogy as well as courses in first-year writing.

Dawn Shepherd is associate professor of English and associate director of the first-year writing program at Boise State University. She is the author of *Building Relationships: Online Dating and the New Logics of Algorithmic Culture* (Lexington Books, 2016) and co-editor of *Retention, Persistence, and Writing Programs* (University Press of Colorado, 2017). Her work has been published in edited collections as well as *Computers and Composition* and *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. Two of her recent book chapters on genre and weblogs, co-authored with Carolyn R. Miller, have been translated into Portuguese. She teaches undergraduate courses in rhetoric, writing, and media and graduate seminars on research methods and digital rhetoric.

Samantha Sturman is a lecturer in the English department at Boise State University and is the Placement and Assessment Manager for the first-year writing program. She helped pilot and continues to regularly teach English 101 Plus at Boise State and to provide mentorship to other faculty members teaching the course. Since writing her master's thesis on student self-efficacy in an earlier iteration of The Write Class placement tool, she has continued to serve as its co-developer and lead administrator at Boise State and has overseen deployments of The Write Class at six other institutions, from community colleges to private and public universities. Her research interests include first-year writing placement, writing and transfer, and assessment.



“Give All Thoughts a Chance”: Writing about Writing and the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy*

Sandie Friedman and Robert Miller

ABSTRACT

The Association of College and Research Libraries’ Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education offers librarians new ways to approach information literacy instruction. Because of the potentially important role of the Framework in the writing classroom, we surveyed first-year writing students to gauge their reactions to a specific section of the Framework, the dispositions (habits of mind) put forth in the Framework under the heading “Research as Inquiry.” Survey responses showed that the Research as Inquiry dispositions spoke to the students’ experiences and their self-images as beginning academic writers. We posit that the students’ affinity to the Research as Inquiry dispositions stems in part from the work they did in a first-year writing class that used a writing-about-writing (WAW) approach. WAW fosters the type of metacognitive self-reflection valued in the Framework; the students’ involvement with WAW enabled them to use the concepts and language of the Framework to help articulate their development as researchers and writers. We further suggest that the Framework can enhance WAW pedagogy, serving as a heuristic within the WAW curriculum to foster productive dispositions toward research.

INTRODUCTION

By adopting the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) opened new pathways for librarians to conceive of and practice information literacy instruction. Ideally, when working with students on critical approaches to information, librarians will be in close collaboration with writing instructors: scholarship is emerging that attests to the complementarity of the ACRL *Framework* and heuristic models already in place in writing-studies

communities (see Albert and Sinkinson, "Composing Information Literacy"; McClure; McCracken and Johnson). Indeed, the *Framework* applies to information literacy the theory of threshold concepts, transformative habits of mind that, once acquired, enable a student to enter into and gain fluency within an academic discipline (Meyer and Land 1). A parallel movement is taking place within the field of composition pedagogy, evidenced by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's edited volume *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*.

Given the ACRL *Framework's* potential importance within the writing classroom, we surveyed a group of first-year writing (FYW) students to gauge their reactions to a specific "frame," or section, of the *Framework*, entitled "Research as Inquiry." We wanted to know if the "dispositions" (a researcher's habits of mind) as put forth in that frame resonated with the students' own experiences and self-images as beginning academic writers. (Our survey, which contains the "Research as Inquiry" dispositions, is included in the appendix.)

Although the ACRL *Framework* was not taught in the students' FYW class, their responses to our survey showed a receptivity to and understanding of the "Research as Inquiry" dispositions: the language of the document struck a chord with the students. We believe that this is due not only to the *Framework's* ability to speak to the intellectual and affective experience of the student researcher: we would argue that the content of the students' FYW class, writing about writing (WAW), prepared the students with metacognitive skills that enabled them to reflect on themselves as beginning researchers and writers. Students taught in a WAW classroom to think critically about their own literacy narratives, to analyze the rhetoric of a discourse community, and so on, were apt to see the value in dispositions such as "maintain an open mind and a critical stance." A WAW class prepared students to examine their own minds and stances as developing researchers and writers. Such metacognition or self-reflection is a value that permeates the *Framework*, as explained in the following synopsis of the *Framework's* history and purpose.

THE ACRL *FRAMEWORK*: A BRIEF GUIDE

The *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* was formally adopted by ACRL in January 2016, replacing a former document, *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, that had been in place for the previous sixteen years. The introduction to the *Framework* explains its *raison d'être*: the information landscape in which college students conduct research had changed so radically since the year 2000,

when the now superseded *Standards* were published, that librarians needed a new model, based on pedagogical theory, to transform their practices surrounding information-literacy instruction. Thus the *Framework* was drafted and adopted.

In a departure from the prescriptive-sounding “standards” used in the title of the earlier document, the new model’s operative word, “framework,” bespeaks openness and flexibility, encouraging librarians to rethink their instruction practices around six key frames, or concepts, within the broad field of information literacy. Thus, the librarian-educator seeking to help student researchers understand and use information effectively may direct her class to the following ways of conceptualizing and working with information, each being a frame in the *Framework*:

- Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
- Information Creation as a Process
- Information Has Value
- Research as Inquiry
- Scholarship as Conversation
- Searching as Strategic Exploration

The *Framework* breaks down each frame into two subcategories, knowledge practices and dispositions. Knowledge practices may be thought of as behaviors exhibited by a student who is gaining competence with regard to a frame. For example, one of the knowledge practices attached to the frame “Research as Inquiry” is that information-literate students will “formulate questions for research based on information gaps or on reexamination of existing, possibly conflicting, information.” Dispositions speak to attitudes or mindsets that librarian-educators may want to inculcate in student researchers. The “Research as Inquiry” frame includes dispositions such as, “consider research as open-ended exploration and engagement with information,” and “value intellectual curiosity in developing questions and learning new investigative methods.” Indeed, each frame offers a variety of knowledge practices and mindsets, giving the information-literacy instructor a rich set of evocative topics to address in a class discussion or exercise.

The *Framework* explicitly draws on a number of theoretical projects, including:

- **Threshold concepts**, which are ways of thinking, of approaching a problem or topic, that a student must master before he or she can fully engage in the work of a discipline (Meyer and Land). The *Framework* can be said to represent threshold concepts that the student researcher must gain fluency in, to be able to find, evaluate, and use information effectively. For example, the student ought to conceive of research as

inquiry to be able to produce research and writing that are suitably nuanced and complex.

- **Metaliteracy**, which is a rethinking of information literacy that centers on the student researcher as knowledge producer and encourages students to engage in critical reflection with respect to the research process. Metaliteracy includes metacognition: the student reflecting on his or her own attitudes as a researcher (Mackey and Jacobson). The *Framework's* dispositions especially encourage metacognition, as they draw the student's attention to his or her habits of mind. In the "Research as Inquiry" frame, for example, the student is taught to consider and value cognitive dispositions such as "intellectual curiosity . . . an open mind and a critical stance . . . persistence, adaptability, and flexibility . . . [and] intellectual humility."

The *Framework's* emphasis on threshold concepts, dispositions, and metacognition aligns the practice of information literacy instructors with the work of educators who employ those theoretical constructs in teaching other disciplines. We would argue that the *Framework* helps bridge, specifically, information literacy and writing studies by giving the two disciplines a common language for their pedagogy.

FRAMEWORKS AND COMMON GROUND

The *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*, a precursor to the ACRL *Framework* from within the field of writing studies, was unveiled in 2011—a collaboration among educators from the CWPA, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project. The CWPA et al.'s *Framework for Success*, like the ACRL *Framework*, focuses on habits of mind, including curiosity, openness, and creativity; the two frameworks share values, as well as other features of the heuristic genre of the "framework." In fact, work has been done to elucidate the common ground between frameworks in writing studies and information literacy.

Barbara D'Angelo and Teresa Grettano have mapped the confluences between the ACRL *Framework* and parallel documents developed by the CWPA. They see the ACRL *Framework* as extending the *WPA Outcomes Statement 3.0* (adopted in 2014) by acknowledging the rhetorical nature of writing and research. According to D'Angelo and Grettano's detailed mapping, the ACRL *Framework* and the *WPA Outcomes Statement* share a number of key learning goals for students, including a more sophisticated understanding of how authority is constructed; a recognition of writing and research as complex processes; and an approach to research as "strategic exploration."

D'Angelo and Grettano also mapped correspondences between the ACRL *Framework* and the CWPA et al.'s *Framework for Success*. Comparing these two documents, D'Angelo and Grettano note that the "habits of mind" identified in the *Framework for Success* run parallel to the "dispositions" of the ACRL *Framework*, and they lay out the shared values between the two. For example, D'Angelo and Grettano see a resonance between the "Research as Inquiry" frame, and the CWPA et al.'s habits of mind: curiosity, openness, creativity, and persistence.

Building on D'Angelo and Grettano's work, Michelle Albert and Caroline Sinkinson describe their efforts to develop a FYW program that unifies information literacy and rhetorical pedagogy. In newly envisioning their FYW curriculum, Albert and Sinkinson were able to take advantage of conceptual parallels among the CWPA documents (both the *Outcomes Statement* and the *Framework for Success*) and the ACRL *Framework*. As these parallels show, the fields of information literacy and writing studies are drawing closer in our thinking about productive dispositions towards research and writing, potentially strengthening partnerships among librarians and writing studies faculty. D'Angelo, along with several colleagues, recently co-edited the collection *Information Literacy: Research and Collaboration Across Disciplines*; this volume demonstrates a growing interest in synthesizing information literacy and writing instruction.

Both the CWPA and the ACRL frameworks are heuristics that push us to focus on teaching habits of mind, and especially the skill of metacognition. Our survey drew on the highly reflective pedagogy of WAW; that is, students came to the survey having already developed a facility for reflection through the WAW curriculum.

STUDENTS RESPOND TO THE ACRL *FRAMEWORK*

We valued the approach of the ACRL *Framework* and appreciated the principles it set out. But would it actually make sense to students? How directly does it speak to their needs as beginning researchers? In order to answer these questions, we created a survey that introduced students to the *Framework* and asked them to respond, drawing on their experience in Sandie Friedman's FYW class in George Washington University's writing program. We received IRB approval for the survey from our respective universities. To conduct the survey, we asked for volunteers from Sandie's FYW classes held in fall 2015 and spring 2016. Nine students volunteered and sent us their responses in fall 2016.

We analyzed the responses by examining how students used terms from the *Framework*. Because of the relatively small data set and the close match

between survey questions and responses, we were able to analyze the data rather informally. It was essentially a close reading process; however, it could be characterized as a "utilitarian" or "structural coding" method. As Saldaña describes it, such a method "applies a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question" (84). The *Framework* itself provided our coding terms: *exploration*, *curiosity*, *persistence*, *openness*, and *humility*. Because of the nature of the survey, at least one of these terms appeared in every segment of the data.

Students naturally responded in what Peter Elbow and Patricia Belanoff would call "believing" mode—not only affirming that the *Framework* spoke to them, but also adding their own language and reasoning, and attesting that their experience resonated with the *Framework*. We were certainly pleased to see these positive responses, but they also raised questions: to what extent did the students' receptiveness to the *Framework* depend on the FYW curriculum? Would they have embraced the *Framework* if their experience in FYW had been different? These questions suggested that our study evaluated not only the *Framework*, but also how well FYW had prepared students to encounter such a metacognitive heuristic.

WAW AND THE ACRL *FRAMEWORK*

In their responses, students—aware of their audience—praised the work Sandie had done with them in class: how she had helped them develop an open-minded and exploratory approach to research. However, we want to argue that students' readiness to respond to the *Framework* depended in essential ways on the curriculum, more than the individual teacher's work. Specifically, we will argue that the WAW curriculum, with its emphasis on threshold concepts and metacognition, primed students to embrace the *Framework*. Given the powerful resonance, we make a case for the *Framework* as a tool for extending the WAW curriculum, as well as for strengthening ties among the discourse communities of writing studies scholars, composition practitioners, and instruction librarians.

It has been more than ten years since Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle's landmark article on WAW, "Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions," appeared in *College Composition and Communication*. Although Downs and Wardle were not the first to suggest making writing the content of a FYW course (see Kitzhaber; Russell; Dew), their 2007 piece presented the case for a writing-focused curriculum with new force. Since that time, they have followed this piece with several others, elaborating and clarifying the WAW approach, as well as editing a WAW

reader for FYW. As Cristina Hanganu-Bresch notes, programs across the country have adopted a WAW curriculum, and a network supporting writing program administrators (WPAs) and instructors in these programs has developed.

WAW curriculum is best understood as a response to concerns about transfer of writing knowledge. In her 2007 article, Wardle presents a fairly bleak picture of the possibilities for transfer from FYW to upper-level courses: writing is so context-specific that students have very limited opportunities to use writing knowledge from FYW. Given that, Wardle and Downs (“Reflecting Back”) recommend focusing on two key elements in FYW: first, teaching students *about* writing or, as they put it, giving them declarative knowledge of writing, rather than only procedural knowledge or *how* to write. To that end, Wardle and Downs advocate making writing studies content the focus of the course. Second, they recommend enabling students to become more flexible and self-aware writers by fostering habits of metacognition. Wardle concludes her study of transfer by suggesting that metacognition might be the central skill we teach in FYW:

meta-awareness about writing, language, and rhetorical strategies in FYC may be the most important ability our courses can cultivate . . . What FYC can do . . . is help students think about writing in the university, the varied conventions of different disciplines, and their own writing strategies in light of various assignments and expectations. (82)

Beyond metacognition and writing studies content, Downs and Wardle (“Teaching about Writing”) also offer basic practices for WAW, including assigning readings “centered on issues with which students have first-hand experience”—getting “blocked” in the writing process, for example, or struggling to make sense of differing expectations about writing in various academic contexts (560). In concert with the readings, which give students a new perspective on their experience as writers, Downs and Wardle give students many opportunities to reflect on their own attitudes and practices related to writing.

The most important practice is the chance for students to conduct primary research in writing studies. Students in their writing seminars develop research questions about writing, and they use interviews, surveys, and observations to gather data in response to these questions. They go on to analyze this data and present it both as a formal paper and an in-class presentation. Beyond these key principles and practices, WAW pedagogy is flexible and can take many forms (Downs and Wardle, “Reimagining the Nature of FYC”; Wardle and Downs, “Reflecting Back”). Sandie’s course

makes use of Downs and Wardle's central principles and key practices, and, of the three types of WAW curricula they name—literacy/discourse, language/rhetoric, and writing/writers' practices—Sandie's course would best be categorized as focusing on literacy/discourse, although it also addresses writers' practices.

Sandie was not an early adopter; in fact, as an instructor in theme-based FYW writing programs since 2002, she was deeply skeptical. Her main concern was about student engagement: she worried that students in a FYW program that offered only WAW, who were deprived of the ability to choose the content of a course, would naturally resist. In addition, Sandie doubted whether first-year students would find writing studies content interesting. There was also the issue of her own expertise; like many instructors in writing programs, her formal training was not in rhetoric and composition (her PhD is in American Studies). She was both eager to work with writing studies content and hesitant about her own authority to teach the material. But Sandie's anxiety and skepticism were mixed with deep curiosity, and she also found Downs and Wardle's research compelling. Further, as a WPA, she felt a responsibility to understand—from the inside—the most recent approach to teaching FYW. She decided to try teaching a WAW course and to be forthright with students about learning along with them—not to present herself as an authority on the material, but as a learner alongside them.

In fall 2015, Sandie embarked on teaching the WAW course with a mixture of excitement and fear, partly born of her long experience teaching with cultural studies content in FYW: would students find the readings too difficult, or just boring? Would they detect her lack of expertise and dismiss her authority? The experience of teaching a WAW course offered many surprises, including students' generous willingness to share literacy experiences, both good and bad; their fortitude when faced with difficult readings; and their ambitious and creative approaches to the research project. Class discussions of readings were not just interesting—they were even, at times, thrilling, because the readings elicited a new level of work from students. The instructor felt she could almost see the threshold concepts rearranging students' ideas about writing.

Wardle and Downs's *Writing about Writing* course reader introduces students to threshold concepts, defining them as ideas that "literally change the way you experience, think about, and understand a subject. . . . Every specialized field of study . . . has threshold concepts that learners in that field must become acquainted with" (6).¹ Each chapter in the reader focuses on one or two threshold concepts, including: "Writing mediates activity"; "Writing is completely dependent on the situation, readers, and uses it's

being created for”; and (a favorite of Sandie’s) “Writing is not perfectible” (7–8). Students in the class, then, not only were familiar with the term “threshold concept,” but also had worked with threshold concepts that are closely related to those in the ACRL *Framework*, and particularly to the frame “Research as Inquiry.”

Students often enter FYW with misconceptions about the research process, and especially the notion that the purpose of outside sources is to “back up” claims. In fact, students frequently are hobbled by the belief that they can only put forward a claim if they can find an authoritative source to “back it up.” The effect is that they are prohibited from making their own, original claims; another implication is that they approach the process of seeking sources with a pre-established thesis in mind, looking for articles that will confirm that idea. Students with this mindset may be stymied when they cannot find sources to plug into a pre-set argument. It takes a radical reorientation for these students to, as the ACRL *Framework* puts it, “formulate questions for research based on information gaps,” problems, or conflicts in the literature. Yet that is one key reorientation WAW tries to encourage.

NEW DISPOSITIONS, NEW PRACTICES

Although we didn’t choose the frame “Research as Inquiry” because it was the one that related most closely to students’ experience in FYW, in retrospect, we might have. In fact, students learned several of the “knowledge practices” described in this frame—especially how to develop questions based on a gap in the research. The *Writing About Writing* reader includes a short piece by John Swales, “Create a Research Space,” in which he presents three “moves” academic writers make in introductions: defining a “territory,” establishing a “niche” or gap, and filling that niche. Sandie’s students worked with the “Swales moves,” both as readers and as writers, and most of them moved well beyond the habit of looking for sources to “back up” pre-existing claims.

One student, Ben (we’ve used fictitious names in reporting all students’ survey responses), explained this shift in his approach to the research process with simple clarity. Before taking Sandie’s class, he observed:

I would stick with the original research questions that I’ve come up [with] in the early stage. Then, I would assume an answer of that research question and looking for relevant sources to be the evidence. After Prof. Friedman’s class, I always remember that the research question could be adjusted and changed through the research process.

Because the question can shift in response to his discoveries, it no longer makes sense to "assume an answer" for the original research question. The sources Ben finds can alter both the question and the answer. This student did come to adopt the ACRL *Framework* disposition: "Consider research as open-ended exploration and engagement with information."

All of our survey participants responded positively to the "Research as Inquiry" frame, and many of them singled out the dispositions of open-mindedness and curiosity as being especially resonant for them. But there was no overarching consensus about which dispositions within the frame were most relevant. Rather, the responses reflected students who had become quite self-aware about their diverse approaches to research and writing. In other words, particular self-portraits began to emerge as each student weighed the language of the frame in relation to his or her own experience.

In her response, Helen turned back to a concept from the *Writing About Writing* reader: Stuart Greene's term, the "framing concept," which Helen explains is "a guiding tool for the researcher. It allows the individual to look at their research from a particular perspective (though not remaining closed to others)." Helen brought in her own project as an example of how to use a "framing concept"—a sign of her sustained investment and pride in the project, as well as a desire to show how she applied Greene's term. An example of a researcher using a framing concept, Helen writes,

might be a student researching the effects of masculine stereotypes on female rugby players using a framing concept of gender conflict. In this way the student may delve further into the idea of gender conflict as relating to women's rugby without being overwhelmed entirely by questions stemming from stereotypes and women's athletics.

This passage reveals several layers of self-awareness about the writing/research process. First, Helen recalls how she consciously made use of a framing concept as she crafted her paper on women's rugby. At the same time, she acknowledges the potentially overwhelming nature of the process, the risk of being pulled in too many directions at once—for instance, by broader questions about gender and sports.

In her astute translations of each point in the "Research as Inquiry" frame, Helen suggests that the dispositions helped her to see research as a pleasurable task; she entered into the exploratory spirit of the process. In her rewording of the third disposition—"value intellectual curiosity"—Helen offered: "Interact with the work in a playful and investigative manner that fosters new learning and dynamic approaches." Helen chose a topic about

(athletic) play, and deliberately cultivated a “playful and investigative” mindset as she developed the project. In summing up her response, she reflected that if she were presenting the “Research as Inquiry” frame to college students, she “would emphasize having fun with the process, remaining open-minded, and seeking help when needed.” “Having fun with the process” reflects Helen’s particular orientation towards research. We even see touches of humor in the survey response itself, as when she remarks about the *Framework’s* fourth disposition—“maintain an open mind”—with a slightly British primness: “I quite like this disposition as it is.”

In contrast to Helen’s deliberately playful approach, Lindsay acknowledges her anxiety about research, and especially around her efforts to remain open-minded during the process: “I at first was frightened by the idea of my original idea or topic changing and transforming into a whole different paper.” Part of that anxiety may have to do with the difficulty of relinquishing the mindset Ben described: embarking on the process with an answer already formulated, and looking for material to “back up” the prefabricated claim—an approach that allows students to remain in familiar territory and avoid challenging their own ideas. With admirable self-awareness, Lindsay observes that she must grapple with the uncertainty that accompanies a more exploratory process. As further evidence of this emotional awareness around research, she assesses each disposition according to how easy or difficult it was to practice it. For example, she found it especially hard to practice “flexibility” and to “recognize that ambiguity can benefit the research process.”

Through reflective writing for the class, Lindsay discovered that in order to manage this anxiety, she liked to think of the research process as an adventure or a journey. She describes the process to herself as a “metaphorical journey. Going down different paths, turning around,” persevering despite obstacles—she tells herself these are all natural parts of the journey, and not signs that she has gone off course. If she had stuck with the mindset Ben described, she certainly would have feared these detours.

Similar to Lindsay’s response, Paula’s reflection highlights the ways that cognitive and emotional elements might be intertwined in students’ experience of research. While many of us struggle with critical internal voices that may inhibit the writing process, Paula recalls an actual interaction with her mother that could have discouraged her from pursuing her research project on “the uses of language and literacy in dance.” Reflecting on the “Research as Inquiry” concept that simple questions might yield unexpected complexity, Paula writes:

I remember talking to my mother about my project and hearing her tell me that it seemed like an unimportant question which could easily be answered without needing a full research paper. This made me think long and hard about my question, wondering if it were really relevant and if I would be able to find enough information about it.

Despite the doubts her mother raised, Paula did persist and, through the process, "realized that my topic was quite rich." Paula's response suggests that the dispositions she had begun to adopt in the course enabled her to keep going and ultimately write a "rich" paper, one that she found intellectually satisfying.

HABITS OF THINKING: FLEXIBILITY

We'd like to conclude our analysis of the surveys with a discussion of Joan, because her response most clearly embodies the habits of metacognition fostered by the WAW curriculum and encouraged by the ACRL *Framework*. In Joan's answer, we glimpse a young researcher who approaches the process primarily as an activity of *thinking*, and for whom the encounter with outside sources is an occasion for creative and critical intellectual work.

Joan's favorite point in the "Research as Inquiry" frame, the one she returns to several times, was: "value persistence, adaptability, and flexibility and recognize that ambiguity can benefit the research process" (*Framework*). "Flexibility" is the term she focuses on:

For most of the research papers that I have written, I almost always change my thesis at least three times. Most of the time it is because I find new interesting information or I have thought of the research prompt in a different way and a new idea emerged.

In contrast to Ben, who approached research with a pre-set answer, Joan practices flexibility—a willingness to change her thesis "at least three times." For Joan, being "flexible" means allowing her central idea to change with new information or because she has discovered a new way of thinking about the assignment.

Joan also offers a set of translations for the points in the frame, and here is where she is most explicit and forceful in advocating, not just for thinking, but for metacognition in the research process. She begins her translations in the third person: students "should think of research as interaction with the information" (as opposed to merely gathering information). But she quickly shifts to the second person, addressing the reader as "you": "That simple question might help you find the puzzle piece you have been searching for." At this point in the response, she assumes the mantle of the experienced researcher, speaking not to her former professor, but to a fellow

college student who is less experienced, and offering friendly advice. Playing off the disposition about humility, she tells her imaginary novice: “Don’t act like a know it all.” And while she is advising her fellow student not to put on a show of knowledge, she also genuinely embraces the stance of *not knowing*—not assuming an answer.

Her most important advice is not just about thinking creatively, but about the metacognitive skill of noticing and entertaining various ideas. Joan counsels her friend to have an “idea/vision,” but to deliberately remain open to the shifts that might happen when you discover new information: “Entertain any thoughts or ideas that may pass through your mind regarding your topic. Don’t discard or ignore a thought because you think it might be irrelevant, give all thoughts a chance.” In keeping with this principle, Joan offers several other axioms related to awareness and respect for one’s own nascent ideas: “It is important to let your mind wander and explore”; “Don’t be afraid to tread on unfamiliar ground. Try something new”; “Don’t be afraid to try and examine information from different angles and perspectives.” Given her emphasis on overcoming fear, Joan might well be talking to Lindsay or someone like her—to students who may prefer to stick with their first idea, rather than explore the “unfamiliar ground” of new sources, new angles, new claims.

CONCLUSION

We set out to evaluate the ACRL *Framework*, hoping to understand how well it spoke to beginning college researchers: would the language make sense to them, and would the dispositions align with their experience of doing research during their first year of college? However, as the “Research as Inquiry” frame itself recommends, we were open to a shift in our investigation, and as we read the data, new questions arose: What enabled these young researchers to embrace the *Framework*? How did their survey responses reflect their learning in FYW?

We have argued that a WAW curriculum, with its focus on metacognition in relation to research and writing tasks, primed students to respond positively to the *Framework*. Overall, our survey participants enthusiastically affirmed that the language of the “Research as Inquiry” frame resonated with their experience in FYW. Their responses showed they had moved beyond the typical approach, which one student described as “sticking with the original research question,” “assuming an answer” for that question, and looking for sources to “back up” that answer. Instead of this familiar, circumscribed process, students had learned to remain open to shifts in their questions and to allow their thinking to develop in response

to new data. In order to manage the anxiety that accompanied this more open-ended process, Lindsay adopted the metaphor of the "journey" or the "adventure" of research. Joan came to see research as an activity of thinking, one best conducted with an awareness of the welter of ideas that offered themselves for consideration.

Based on students' responses, we can see the *Framework* as a natural—perhaps even essential—extension of WAW pedagogy: a heuristic that can be used in tandem with the WAW curriculum in order to foster productive dispositions towards research. With the emphasis on metacognition in WAW, students become ready to embrace the *Framework*, in spite of its somewhat recondite language, and to regard it as resonating with their own experience.

At the same time, we would also suggest that the metacognitive elements of WAW could be integrated into other FYW curricula. A theme-based writing seminar—one that focused on content other than writing studies—could also make space for the kinds of self-reflection that prepared students to encounter the *Framework*. In fact, the *Framework* might become a motivation to revise FYW curriculum in order to bring out some of the benefits of WAW pedagogy, including familiarity with threshold concepts of writing studies. Not every student would emerge from FYW with Joan's intellectual flexibility—but we hope that many of them might develop a willingness to "give all thoughts a chance."

NOTE

1. When Sandie taught her WAW course in academic year 2015–16, she used the most recent edition of Wardle and Downs's reader then available, the 2nd. The expanded 3rd edition (2017) offers students an even more developed and effective introduction to threshold concepts, including writing and thinking activities in response to each concept.

APPENDIX: SURVEY

We would like you to review a brief set of library learning goals and tell us how they match (or don't match) your experience in Professor Friedman's class and your image of yourself as a researcher and writer.

Librarians nationwide have developed a set of learning goals for college students doing research-based writing. The goals, published by the Association of College and Research Libraries, are called the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. The *Framework* describes various skills and dispositions (attitudes, mindsets) that librarians want college students to have when they conduct research.

In one part of the *Framework*, about “research as inquiry,” librarians list a set of dispositions (again, attitudes or mindsets) that a student hopefully will have—or learn to have—when doing research-based writing.

Here are the dispositions as listed in the *Framework*. Please read through them and, as you do, reflect on how they relate (or don’t relate) to your experience in Professor Friedman’s class.

Librarians believe that students, when conducting research for a paper, should:

- consider research as open-ended exploration and engagement with information;
- appreciate that a question may appear to be simple but still disruptive and important to research;
- value intellectual curiosity in developing questions and learning new investigative methods;
- maintain an open mind and a critical stance;
- value persistence, adaptability, and flexibility and recognize that ambiguity can benefit the research process;
- seek multiple perspectives during information gathering and assessment;
- seek appropriate help when needed;
- follow ethical and legal guidelines in gathering and using information;
- demonstrate intellectual humility (i.e., recognize their own intellectual or experiential limitations).

Now that you’ve reviewed the list of *Framework* dispositions, please answer the following questions. Please write one to three paragraphs in reply to each question.

1. Overall, do the *Framework* dispositions align with your experience as a researcher/writer in Professor Friedman’s class? Are there one or two items in the list that jump out to you as being especially relevant? Please explain why and give examples if you can.
2. The words and phrases used in the list of dispositions: do they match words and phrases you would use to describe your own attitude as a researcher/writer? Would the language used in the dispositions help you describe your self-image as a college student doing research-based writing? Please explain why or why not.
3. How would you “translate” the list of dispositions for other students who are going to do research in a writing class, or in another class? Are there certain dispositions in that list you would

emphasize? Would you use different language? Please explain your choices.

WORKS CITED

- Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Elizabeth Wardle, editors. *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*. Utah State UP, 2015.
- Albert, Michelle A., and Caroline Sinkinson. "Composing Information Literacy: A Pedagogical Partnership Between Rhet/Comp and Library Faculty." Georgia International Conference on Information Literacy, 25 Sept. 2015, Savannah, GA, digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/gaintlit/2015/2015/24.
- . "Sharing an Information Literacy Curriculum." Conference on College Composition and Communication, 16 March 2017, Portland, OR.
- CWPA, NCTE, and the National Writing Project. *Framework for Success in Post-secondary Writing*. CWPA, 2011, wpaacouncil.org/framework.
- D'Angelo, Barbara, and Teresa Grettano. "Sharing Outcomes and Goals: Mapping the Documents." Conference on College Composition and Communication, 16 March 2017, Portland, OR.
- D'Angelo, Barbara J., Sandra Jamieson, Barry Maid, and Janice R. Walker, editors. *Information Literacy: Research and Collaboration across Disciplines*. The WAC Clearinghouse / UP of Colorado, 2016, wac.colostate.edu/books/infolit.
- Dew, Debra Frank. "Language Matters: Rhetoric and Writing I as Content Course." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2001, pp. 87–104.
- Downs, Doug, and Elizabeth Wardle. "Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning 'First Year Composition' as 'Introduction to Writing Studies.'" *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 58, no. 4, 2007, pp. 552–84.
- . "Reimagining the Nature of FYC: Trends in Writing-about-Writing Pedagogies." *Exploring Composition Studies: Sites, Issues, and Perspectives*, edited by Kelly Ritter and Paul Kei Matsuda, Utah State UP, 2012, pp. 123–44.
- Elbow, Peter, and Patricia Belanoff. *A Community of Writers: A Workshop Course in Writing*. McGraw-Hill, 1999.
- The Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016, ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.
- Greene, Stuart. "Argument as Conversation: The Role of Inquiry in Writing a Researched Argument." Wardle and Downs, *Writing*, pp. 27–38.
- Hanganu-Bresch, Cristina. "Quo Vadis, Independent Writing Programs? Writing about Writing and Rhetorical Education." *A Minefield of Dreams: Triumphs and Travails of Independent Writing Programs*, edited by Justin Everett and Cristina Hanganu-Bresch, WAC Clearinghouse / UP of Colorado, 2016, wac.colostate.edu/books/minefield/chapter9.pdf.
- Kitzhaber, Albert R. "Death—Or Transfiguration?" *College English*, vol. 21, no. 7, 1960, pp. 367–73.
- Mackey, Thomas P., and Trudi E. Jacobson. *Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners*. American Library Assn., 2014.

- McClure, Randall, editor. *Rewired: Research-Writing Partnerships within the Frameworks*. Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016.
- McCracken, I. Moriah, and Brittney Johnson. "Sustainable Partners: Librarians and Instructors Using Threshold Concepts to Reinforce Information Literacy." Georgia International Conference on Information Literacy, 25 Sept. 2015, Savannah, GA. digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/gaintlit/2015/2015/40.
- Meyer, Jan, and Ray Land. "Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines." *Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses Project Occasional Report*, no. 4, Universities of Edinburgh, Coventry, and Durham, May 2003, www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/ETLreport4.pdf.
- Russell, David. "Activity Theory and Its Implications for Writing Instruction." *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction*, edited by Joseph Petraglia, Routledge, 1995, pp. 51–77.
- Saldaña, Johnny. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. 2nd ed. SAGE, 2013.
- Swales, John. "'Create a Research Space' (CARS) Model of Research Introductions." Wardle and Downs, *Writing*, pp. 12–14.
- Wardle, Elizabeth. "Understanding Transfer from FYC: Preliminary Results of a Longitudinal Study." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 31, nos. 1–2, 2007, pp. 65–85.
- Wardle, Elizabeth, and Doug Downs. "Reflecting Back and Looking Forward: Revisiting 'Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions' Five Years On." *Composition Forum*, vol. 27, 2013, compositionforum.com/issue/27/reflecting-back.php.
- Wardle, Elizabeth, and Doug Downs, editors. *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*. 2nd ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014.
- WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (3.0)*, Approved July 17, 2014. CWPA, 2014, wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html.

Sandie Friedman is assistant professor of Writing at George Washington University, where she served as Director of First Year Writing from 2014 to 2017. Her research focuses on curriculum design for first year writing, particularly the role of disciplinary knowledge in writing courses. Her current project is a comparative case study of multidisciplinary first year writing programs. Her work has appeared in *Currents in Teaching and Learning*, *Enculturation*, and *Writing on the Edge*, and her personal essays appear online at *The Nervous Breakdown* and *The Rumpus*.

Robert Miller is a reference and instruction librarian at University of Maryland University College. Robert has previously published and presented with Sandie Friedman on the intersections between information literacy and writing studies. He has contributed to library publications such as *College and Research Libraries News*, *American Libraries*, and *Journal of Library and Information Services in Distance Learning*.

Mentoring WPAs for the Long Term: The Promise of Mindfulness

Cindy Moore

ABSTRACT

Since at least the mid-1960s, writing teachers have used mindful practices such as close observation, visualization, deep-breathing, and meditation to help students feel less anxious, develop greater self-awareness, and, ultimately, to produce better, more meaningful writing. Despite the wealth of research that now confirms both the psychological and physical benefits of such practices, and the broader acknowledgement of the importance of embodied awareness or “emotional intelligence” to effective leadership, their potential for writing program administrators has only recently begun to be explored. One of the best examples of such exploration is Christy Wenger’s 2014 article in which she offers “contemplative administration” as a “feminist alternative for WPA work” that encourages “a fresh look at wellbeing—of people, programs and leadership” as well as administrative identity and agency (122). The discussion below, which draws on decades of literature on contemplative pedagogy, seeks to extend Wenger’s argument by outlining how mindfulness-based mentoring of WPAs might help to both alleviate the stress of administration and enhance possibilities for long-term success.

INTRODUCTION

Increasing pressures on colleges and universities to account for student learning and to improve efficiency and affordability in the face of funding cuts have had wide-ranging consequences for writing programs and for writing program administrators (Scott and Welch 4). While our field has done a superb job over at least four decades of preparing new and prospective WPAs for knowledgeable, strategic management of curriculum and instruction, we have been less successful at equipping especially capable

colleagues to assume the leadership roles necessitated by the rapidly “shifting sands” (5) of higher education: roles that require not only disciplinary expertise and rhetorical savvy, but resilience, i.e., the ability to creatively and courageously respond to complex challenges in a sustained, sustainable way.

It is not insignificant that, as our administratively focused scholarship has expanded and deepened to help WPAs keep pace with changing expectations for teaching and learning, personal accounts of the professional, psychological, and even physical costs of administration have seemed not to diminish, as we might expect, but to grow ever-more intense. Such is especially the case for women, as illustrated by recent CCCC roundtables on the challenges of feminist leadership (Nicolas, et al.; Crow, et al.). That is, despite all of our efforts to support WPAs through books, articles, conference panels, workshops, and mentoring networks, talented colleagues—the very people we need most to lead our programs and step into other, more influential academic leadership roles—are burning, and dropping, out.

I was nearly one of these casualties. After many years of work in administration, first as a long-time WPA and then as a department chair, I started to unravel. The strain of keeping the “plates” of administration (but also teaching, research, family, and friends) “twirling” (Pinard) had left me psychologically and physically exhausted. Then, on my way back from the 2012 CWPA conference, I chanced upon Gretchen Rubin’s *The Happiness Project* in an airport bookstore. That book, particularly its chapter on paying attention, led me to other books on nurturing awareness, self-trust, and empathy, which helped me reconcile my own sources of struggle and see how, as a discipline, we might supplement the invaluable work on administrative ways of *doing* with attention to ways of *being* that make the doing both more effective and possible for the long term.

At the most basic level, we might adopt an approach to WPA mentoring suggested by Christy Wenger’s 2014 article outlining her efforts to integrate contemplative practices into her work as a new program administrator: mindfulness, or “the awareness that arises by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn xxxv, emphasis removed). In addition to non-judgement, mindfulness requires “patience, a beginner’s mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go” (Kabat-Zinn 21). It is best cultivated through regular non-doing, breath-focused meditation, observation of thoughts and feelings, and discernment of “how we might choose to be in relationship” to the world in and around us (xxxv). Mindfulness helps relieve stress, highlight “what is deepest and best” within ourselves (liii), and inspire new forms of personal and professional agency. My own developing mindfulness practice has,

like Wenger's, helped me work with more presence and purpose (Wenger 132–33) and “respond differently,” more calmly and deliberately, to stressful situations (136).

As Wenger suggests, while not always framed in terms of mindfulness, *per se*, the practice of pausing to allow for both physical and mental presence and considered reflection on emotions, thoughts, and the full range of possible responses is familiar to our field. Compositionists have, over many decades, sought methods of helping students “slow down,” “become aware of,” and examine their “inner stream of thoughts, feelings, and images,” in order to more fully engage in the writing process (Moffett, “Reading and Writing” 321–22, 315); compose more interesting, insightful, meaningful, and better-revised texts (Schmidt 74–75); and, in so doing, develop a stronger sense of who they are and what they have to say. Typically, such methods, borrowed from cognitive psychology, various spiritual traditions, and alternative medicine, have included meditation, creative visualization, breathing activities, yoga, and even reading and writing themselves. Though similar techniques have been offered to and embraced by composition teachers to enhance their own writing, self-reflection, and sense of well-being (Moffett, “Women’s Ways”; Murray; O’Reilly; Fontaine) and those of the teachers they mentor (Tremmel, Mathieu, Sullivan), the potential benefits of these techniques for composition administrators have not yet been fully explored in our WPA scholarship.

In the discussion that follows, I extend Wenger’s work by proposing ways that those of us who mentor program administrators might adopt ideas and insights from mindfulness-oriented pedagogical practice in an effort to foster both effective and sustainable administration. It’s a proposal that, in questioning what it means to “draw on everything you know” in order to survive and succeed as an administrator (Bizzell viii), seems both necessary and timely, given the increasing complexity of higher education as well as the growing recognition that effective leadership requires not just technical skill and cognitive ability but an emotional intelligence that, I would argue, is not adequately addressed in the WPA literature (Goleman 3). I begin where mindfulness practice typically begins—with a focus on presence—and continue with a discussion of some of the most common methods for enhancing student awareness of thoughts, feelings, and responses in the present moment and how they might be integrated into our WPA mentoring, despite both practical and conceptual challenges.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE “NOW”

A central premise of mindfulness, and the spiritual and scientific thought that informs it, is that much human suffering results from dwelling in a past we cannot change or worrying about a future we have little control over—and letting this shape our interpretations of and reactions to present circumstances. We have trouble seeing and appreciating what is happening now, which limits our perceived range of possible responses. The fewer options we perceive for responding, the less empowered we feel; the less empowered we feel, the more frustrated we become, often without even knowing why. Stopping to acknowledge with Kabat-Zinn that, literally, we only have moments to live allows for the mental stillness needed to fully consider what is happening in the present, why it is happening, and how to most appropriately and effectively respond.

In classrooms that are informed by mindful practices, teachers recognize the pull of the past and press of the future on students' ability to pay attention and engage (Kroll 70–72) as well as on their attitudes about writing, their writing processes, their willingness to take risks, and their interpretations of intent (of assignments, class activities, and peer and instructor responses). As Paula Mathieu argues, both teachers and students carry “accumulated past experiences, preconditioned responses, resistance and fears into every class” (14). If left unexamined, worries about the past and future can compromise not just what we do, but who we are in relation to those we seek to teach and to learn from. They hamper the ability to forge “ethical commitments” (Mathieu) as well as to recognize that any given rhetorical situation is always “momentary,” “impermanent,” and, thus, “dynamic,” i.e., inviting “improvisation” in addition to reliance on expected rhetorical strategies (Peary 22–24).

Much administrative angst is similarly rooted in unexamined residue of past experience or assumptions about an uncertain future. Such can be seen most readily in moments when a program (department, school) faces the prospect of change (of curriculum, instruction, assessment approach, etc.), particularly change imposed from the outside. Veteran faculty, staff, and administrators who feel invested in whatever is changing often have trouble considering new initiatives with fresh perspectives, especially if change is introduced by people with whom they have too much or too little history. Colleagues newer to the scene, lacking the contextual knowledge and experience to predict and understand possible implications of change or the change process, can be overly confident about both.

What complicates matters for composition and rhetoric specialists is that, as a discipline, we tend to be preoccupied with our past and ever-

anxious about our future. As Pat Belanoff points out, for example, many of our intradisciplinary disagreements are rooted in an obsession with origins:

Our discipline, while acknowledging the creative power of words, seeks almost obsessively for their origins, causes, and pre-existent contexts. . . . Do the words we speak or write on the blank page come spontaneously from a source within us? Is that source in direct (or indirect) contact with a higher power of some kind? Or are we merely channelers for the words of our culture, constructed by that culture to say only that which can be said within it? (400).

Disagreements over foundational questions such as these make it difficult to articulate a unified disciplinary identity, which, then, causes worry about the future, especially during tough fiscal times when “how we name ourselves and our actions” becomes highly important (419). The way we imagine the future is itself influenced by our historical commitment to process, particularly the “sense that what awaits us all is a world ready and willing to be ‘revised,’” that we have more control over the results of our efforts, however noble and well executed, than we can possibly have (Miller 8). When, as administrators, we realize the limits of our influence, we risk feelings of “cynicism and despair” as well as a disillusion-borne “moral superiority,” which prevent us from seeing all of the options “available at this moment” and making the most principled decisions we can with the “information at our disposal” (7, 12–13).

Following the lead of mindfulness-oriented writing teachers, those of us who mentor WPAs might then extend our traditional skill training to help our administrative colleagues “pay attention—to observe, to see the richness and detail that is right before us” (Kroll 76). A first step is to prompt them to ponder how distracted they are by thoughts of “what they have just done or what they need to do, that they are not present” (73). To orient his writing students in this way, Keith Kroll uses the familiar example of driving from one place to another without remembering much of what happened in between—a kind of “detachment and disengagement” that shows up everywhere in their lives, including in their approach to writing (72–73). Similarly, Mathieu asks new writing teachers to consider how each classroom “interaction” is influenced not just by their students’ “preoccupations”—but by their own (14–15). Among other strategies, both invite personal expression, via narrative essays (Kroll) and open, honest discussion (Mathieu), to highlight what it means to be “fully present—as a writer or a teacher—in the current moment” (Mathieu 15).

In much the same way, WPAs can be encouraged to recognize unhelpful “attachment[s] to past and future” (Tolle 61). Like Kroll and Mathieu, I

have found that simply making space for mutual sharing of administrative stories (i.e., the narratives we create around events or issues) inspires awareness in this regard. If, after asking an advice-seeking colleague to explain a current challenge, I sense that she is focusing too much on aspects of the situation that are beyond her control (i.e., past and [presumed] future happenings) and not enough on those that are within her control (how she relates to the challenge and frames it for herself and others), I offer that observation and share one of my own stories of struggling to focus on, accept, and respond to a problem with awareness of what I can and cannot change. Assuming that the exchange has enhanced trust (in my experience, if I speak authentically, it almost always has), we can then figure out, together, solutions that acknowledge the past and possible future(s), but are not dictated by them.

STOPPING

Above all else, developing awareness requires a commitment to regularly stopping whatever one is doing at the moment. Though not a required component of stopping, silence—a quiet environment—helps many people see its benefits. As Charles Suhor observes, stopping in silence is already part of our English-teaching “tradition,” particularly with respect to process pedagogy (24). Focusing specifically on the pedagogical uses of “purposeful silence,” Suhor encourages expanding on familiar practices such as quiet reading, brainstorming, and reflection-enhancing instructional wait time during class discussions as a way to inspire the “sensitive listening, speaking, and reading” that leads to greater (aesthetic, spiritual, self) awareness (24). Silent stopping in the writing classroom can also take the form of visualizing a process or end product before actually embarking on a writing project. In one of the earliest published explorations of the benefits of contemplative classroom practice, for example, James Moffett recommends “that teachers coach students on how to get themselves into a meditative state of unusual absorption in a subject that interests them and then to visualize, imagine, feel, and think everything they can about that subject without at first concerning themselves about writing something down” (“Writing” 243).

As a long-time administrator myself, and as someone who supports other administrators, I have found the deliberate use of wait time and creative visualization particularly helpful in understanding and improving workplace dynamics. Similar to instructional wait time, administrative wait time simply requires resisting the urge to do what one might be conditioned or expected to do, at any given time, out of sheer habit (and often

in haste), i.e., mindlessly. Examples include forming an opinion about, or solution to, a situation before it is fully understood, interrupting colleagues, and responding to provocative emails immediately after receiving them. As I learned over decades of using wait time in my classrooms, choosing to say or do nothing can change the dynamics of an interaction which, then, can change the shape and eventual outcome of an entire situation. Simply resisting filling conversational spaces, particularly saying the first thing that comes to mind, has worked to minimize the emotional toll of my administrative work in several ways: I say fewer words that I wake up in the middle of the night regretting, and I listen more, and more actively, which has improved my relationships. Additionally, as is the case with students, wait time has helped me delegate responsibility for a productive discussion to colleagues, which they are typically happy to take, along with shared responsibility for the matters under discussion. Wait time can be readily modelled in mentoring situations and its benefits experienced and highlighted within a single interaction. All a mentor needs to do is listen as a problem is described; keep quiet or, at most, ask non-leading questions, until her colleague reaches a feasible conclusion; and then note both the use of wait time in the interaction and how it can be employed productively with faculty and staff who may be the source of an administrative challenge. Wait time is easy for WPAs to practice, too: all that's required is a face-to-face or electronic exchange in which to test the effects of remaining silent when feeling compelled to respond.

Visualization activities have also helped me a great deal as both a teacher and an administrator. Just as a teaching mentor encouraged me to do before the first class session of every semester, if I am faced with a potentially stressful administrative meeting, I try to imagine myself at the meeting from beginning to end, confidently offering ideas and asking questions, listening, taking notes, and responding patiently. If it's a particularly important meeting, I will sometimes visit the assigned room beforehand in order to better envision myself in the context. While it can also be helpful to picture everyone else in a meeting listening and responding with goodwill, I try to remind myself that, as with the uncertain future, I have no real control over others' interpretations or responses; I can only "take each moment as it comes and [be] with it fully as it is" (Kabat-Zinn 28). Like wait time, visualization can be readily explained in a variety of mentoring contexts, practiced, and then evaluated for usefulness.

Some forms of stopping or non-doing are more accurately thought of as different-doing—engaging in activities that provide a break from work to allow space for rest, contemplation, and renewal. From a mindfulness perspective, any activity will do, as long as the beneficial effects are regis-

tered and greater awareness inspired. To prompt “heightened consciousness and self-communication” among students, for example, Moffett suggests a range of absorbing physical activities, including “pleasantly monotonous craft movements like knitting and weaving or work activities like hauling a rope or wielding a pickaxe or shovel or thrusting seedlings into mud” (“Writing” 245). Writing, too—particularly personal or unstructured writing—can offer refuge from daily stresses if its primary purpose is to be present and attentive to one’s life (Kroll 73); experience “emotional excitement” (Schmidt 68); or to see the subject at hand differently (Murray 19). The more the activity feels like a “creative intervention,” offering new space for “the growth of intuitive erudition,” the more transformative it can be (Musial 224–25).

Importantly, mindfulness practitioners, within and outside our field, recognize that no single form of non- or different-doing works to raise self-awareness for everyone. Which is why they encourage teachers to “create a space” for students to discover those things that will “nourish an inner life” (O’Reilley 2–3). In my experience as a mentor of administrative colleagues who are feeling frustrated or burned out, I have found that in order to inspire others “to stare out the window, to stay in bed, to have lunch, to have tea, to walk the dog, to fingerpaint,” (O’Reilley 15), I had to first “follow the deepest leadings of [my] own heart” (14). I had to “get a life” that I could model for others—a process facilitated by observation and reflection.

OBSERVING

As suggested above, many of the methods used in mindfulness-oriented writing classrooms are prevalent in writing classes, generally. One such method is close observation, especially of places, people, and events that serve as subjects or contexts for student writing. What makes observation different within a mindfulness framework is its purpose, which expands beyond the production of detailed, vivid, interesting papers to developing the capacity to notice, to “be awake” (O’Reilley 10). As Mary Rose O’Reilley explains, “Precise details open a window in the spaces where spirit abides and plays; our attentiveness to them measures the extent to which we are present” (12).

Writing teachers who take a mindfulness approach to instruction often invite students to keep observation journals—of the world around them but also their “inner state” (Woodward 81). As a method for enhancing “insight, intuition, and awareness” among her basic writing students, for example, Angela Woodward experimented with asking them to note when they felt happy in the class and when they felt unhappy. Regularly noting

how they were feeling about class activities and then discussing the source of those feelings inspired students to “bring more of themselves, including their resistance [to writing and reading] into the classroom” (81), which enhanced trust and classroom community. Similarly, Donald R. Gallehr introduced various methods of “witnessing” thoughts and emotions into his writing classes, including, for example, a “worry sheet” exercise, in which students “map and discharge thoughts that bother them” and interfere with their work as writers. By concretizing and then “sitting with” troubling thoughts, as if they are “old friends rather than enemies,” students learned to “disarm them” (25).

With respect to mindfulness-oriented WPA mentoring, Robert Tremmel offers a model for awareness-raising observation in his discussion of how he helps new TAs to “pay attention in the midst of all of this confusion” (including, e.g., the “contradictory demands of teaching itself” that are “compounded” by demands of their “academic work”) (57). For his “slices of classroom life” activity, Tremmel asks TAs to first write a narrative of “some specific and limited ‘event’ in school” and then reflect on “the thoughts, feelings, and speculations that arise during and after the event” (58–59). According to Tremmel, this activity prompts beginning teachers to understand how their “actions and perceptions” of “what is happening in [the] classroom” are “strongly conditioned” by how they feel and what they “make of” those feelings (60). As a result, they begin to “know their students and in the process come to know themselves and how they function as teachers” which, in turn, can immediately impact their teaching practice (61–62).

A “slices of administrative life” mentoring activity, based on Tremmel’s model and engaged in through either informal writing or conversation, offers potential for heightened awareness as well as acceptance that “it is the quality of [one’s] consciousness at this moment that determines the future” (Tolle 60). Mary Pinard’s reflection on her first year as a WPA demonstrates as much by highlighting how her creative writing background, which emphasized careful observation and the ability to “stare something, anything, into meaning,” allowed her to more readily “take risks and to tolerate [the] ambiguity” that comes with WPA work (61). Quickly recognizing the need to “slow down [and] take note of the issues [she] was encountering” with greater awareness made it easier to achieve a balanced view of the strengths and weaknesses, the “imminent disaster (or triumph)” in each issue she faced (61–62).

REFLECTING

Beyond providing examples of how observation might be used in an administrative mentoring context, Tremmel and Pinard both highlight the natural connection between observation and reflection. Though it can be beneficial to simply observe, the possibilities for mindful action in response to observation come from reflection, especially reflection without judgment, for “what you judge you cannot understand” (de Mello 37). As with observation, reflection is so prevalent in our discipline as to be considered part of our DNA, a threshold concept of our field, “critical for continued learning and participation” in our “community of practice” (Adler-Kassner and Wardle, “Naming” 2). Reflection from a mindfulness perspective, however, is meant to enhance not only the “ability to theorize and question” the “processes, practices, beliefs, attitudes, and understandings” about a particular realm of doing (writing) (Taczak 78), but to inspire self-awareness that informs all areas of one’s life.

While reflective practices such as keeping an administrative journal or annotating meeting agendas can help raise awareness of the multiple possible sources of WPA-related stress, I have found two exercises particularly beneficial for increasing broader self-awareness and self-efficacy. The first, included in Kabat-Zinn’s groundbreaking *Full Catastrophe Living*, is the “Awareness Calendar,” various versions of which are used frequently in stress-reduction mindfulness workshops. Whether focused on daily events or interpersonal communications, the calendar requires noting what happened, describing associated feelings and thoughts, considering reasons for any gaps between expectations and outcomes, and, if applicable, determining possible resolutions (Kabat-Zinn 612–16). The second method, an administrative ways-of-being statement, is modelled after the now-ubiquitous teaching philosophy statement, but goes beyond articulating the values that inform one’s practice (e.g., honesty, transparency, generosity, collaboration) to include the habits of self-care needed to maintain commitment to those values without compromising psychological or physical health. While my administrative work has always been guided by a set of well-articulated administrative principles, it wasn’t until I began to engage in awareness-enhancing activities on my own and discuss their benefits with close administrative colleagues, that I recognized that the very activities I was not making time for (daily walks, lunch with friends, writing and reading for pleasure) were standing between the present, patient, kind administrative self I wanted to be and the stressed-out, short-tempered, bone-tired administrative self I had become.

EMBODYING

Though the term *mindfulness* might suggest otherwise, developing self-awareness requires attention to both mind and body, particularly the links between them. This attention involves “feeling the body from within,” observing emotions, considering their sources, and reflecting on how and why they influence perceptions and reactions (Tolle 26–27). It is through “honoring the body” and “listening to the messages it is trying to give” that the full range of psychological and physical health benefits associated with mindfulness can be experienced (Kabat-Zinn 353–60). Some of the best strategies for hearing what the body has to say are focused breathing, meditation, and yoga.

Writing teachers who work from a mindfulness perspective are aware that one of the easiest ways to “get in touch with the inner body” is through what spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle calls “conscious breathing” (125). They often incorporate breathing exercises into their curricula in order to help students slow down, attend to what they are experiencing in “the here-and-now,” recognize the “close connection” between thoughts and feelings, and, with that recognition, develop ways of interpreting and changing them (Moffett, “Writing” 244). Such exercises range from “simply attending to breathing without altering it” to “some of the most powerful consciousness-altering exercises [that] entail slowing, holding, or patterning the breath” (244). Mindful breathing, especially when combined with other mindfulness practices, is also used in classrooms to inspire “inventive” thinking (Pery 31) as well as a sense of connection with others, leading to greater empathy and “ethical practice” (Mathieu 18). The air we breathe, after all, is, quite literally, one thing we share with every other human being. Further, because breath is a constant as long as we are alive, but “responds to our emotional state by changing its rhythm, sometimes quite dramatically,” simply noticing how they breathe can help students “get comfortable with change” (Kabat-Zinn 41).

One of the most widely recognized methods for attending to breath, in the moment, is meditation, which mindfulness practitioners identify as an important “way of ‘re-minding’ ourselves” of who we are beyond our intellect, of “who is doing the doing—or, put otherwise, with the world of being” (Kabat-Zinn 56, 55). Meditation’s familiarity as a means of inspiring “embodied awareness” (50–51) is likely why it shows up so frequently in discussions of efforts to bring mindfulness practices into the writing classroom. In addition to offering students “an opportunity to concentrate, to allow their minds to be quiet and aware,” “to be in the moment,” and achieve “clarity and insight” (Kroll 76), meditation, when practiced regu-

larly, decreases the performance anxieties of otherwise “apprehensive or blocked writers” (Campbell 246).

For many, the term *meditation* calls to mind sitting on a cushion, legs folded, hands resting upright on knees, with incense burning in the background. In actual practice, however, it can be more or less formal and take place in brief periods throughout a day or in longer sessions. It can be done sitting in a chair “with feet on the floor” and “backs balanced” (Gallehr 24), standing, lying down, or even walking with awareness of “the experience of walking itself” (Kabat-Zinn 124). While the meditating mind is most typically focused on the breath, it can have as its focus a posture (as with yoga), a significant object, or “thoughts and feelings as they arise” (Gallehr 26). It can be practiced as an activity unto itself or usefully combined with other physical activities, including writing, as long as those activities enhance the ability to “witness,” direct, or silence the mind (Moffett, “Writing” 246), or, perhaps, more accurately, to detach from thoughts or “let go” (Gallehr 27). In fact, engaging in what Moffett describes as a gamut of activities, including “focusing, meditation, yogic stretching, fasting, breathing, and chanting . . . alternating abruptly with talking, thinking, reading, and writing,” can, according to him, be especially valuable by “tend[ing] to rearrange the inner furniture and . . . reconnect thoughts and feelings in new ways” (Moffett, “Women’s Ways” 260).

A similarly transformative practice—and one often productively combined with meditation, as suggested above—is yoga. As Jennifer Musial outlines, the practice of yoga can enhance understanding of basic mindfulness precepts which, for her, are foundational to a “feminist heart-centered pedagogy” (224). These include presence, “sitting with” discomfort, mutual trust and respect, compassion, and “letting go” (223–26). Though yoga, like meditation, calls to mind unhelpful stereotypes (e.g., spandex-clad bodies in intense pretzel-like poses), the type of yoga most often incorporated into classrooms is typically limited to breath-focused balancing and stretching exercises—what yoga studios often label as restorative yoga.

All of these embodied practices are adaptable to a WPA mentoring context, particularly a professional development workshop, where they can be introduced through assigned readings or brief presentations; discussed as part of a continuum (i.e, from basic to more advanced); and, most importantly, practiced. Harvard’s Mindfulness for Educators institute, which I recently attended, provides a helpful model. Over eighty teachers and administrators, from across the country and representing all educational levels, read and discussed current research on the benefits of mindfulness and then engaged together in various forms of meditation, focused in multiple ways—on breathing, but also on projected quotes and images,

self-composed short mantras (e.g., “I am peaceful, I am kind”), and on emotional changes prompted by first imagining a sad experience and then dancing to “Rock around the Clock.” These meditative moments were interspersed with both seated and standing neck rolls, arm and shoulder stretches, and gentle torso twists. While there was recognition among the regular meditators and yoga practitioners in the group that deeper, more sustained practice leads to more obvious results, all participants noted in a final reflective session how the brief embodied activities helped minimize distractions from “the outside world” and enhance their sense of well-being. Additionally, those new to such practices echoed a sentiment captured by Sheryl Fontaine in her discussion of learning karate as an adult: that the “beginners mind” required for fully engaging in an unfamiliar “art and tradition” raises awareness of how our students feel, especially at the beginning of a new semester. “From the beginner’s mind,” she explains, “I have seen my respect for students grow, my understanding of their feelings deepen” (221). Such a perspective is invaluable for WPAs, whose success depends on mutual respect and empathy not just for students but for faculty, staff, and administrative colleagues faced with unfamiliar problems.

CONSIDERING THE CHALLENGES

Beyond the obvious conceptual obstacles to mindfulness mentoring, negotiating logistics—the how, when, and where of engaging WPAs in awareness-building practices—can seem difficult. Is mindfulness best invited by slipping an article on self-awareness under an office door? By demonstrating focused breathing in a one-to-one meeting? Through group meditation at a professional development workshop? Having myself experienced all of these methods, as either the mentor or mentee, I have concluded that, as with effective teaching, the answer depends on what’s needed and what’s possible, given levels of openness and trust as well as personal and professional resources (e.g., time, money for faculty development workshops, etc.). Mindful mentoring, like all good mentoring, requires an awareness that one size definitely does not fit all.

With respect to specific elements of mindfulness practice, there are numerous potential challenges. First, pausing at all, let alone pausing to fully consider the present moment, is tough. As Belanoff reminds us, our teaching and administrative contexts are part of “a society that values getting from one place to another in as straight a line as possible with no pauses in liminal spaces and no wonderings along the way” (417). Our notions of success, within and outside academia, are based on a concept of agency that emphasizes doing (over being) and quick decision making (over

thoughtful deliberation). Few academics experience both the expectations and stresses of nonstop doing as much as administrators. With respect to writing program administrators, in particular, Laura Micciche argues that “attentiveness to the moment requires a kind of pacing and ethos that . . . seem largely unavailable to WPAs on a daily basis” (75). The “felt experience of being physically and mentally over-taken by the enormity of the job” has become so normative that those who attempt a “slow agency,” allowing time for “thinking, being still, and processing,” can experience uneasiness and even guilt in contexts where deferred action is interpreted as inaction or “dereliction of duty” (73–74). Kabat-Zinn frames this guilt in terms of the legacy of “the Puritan ethic” in the United States—a mindset which sees self-care as selfish or undeserved (35).

Additionally, common awareness-enhancing practices bring with them their own challenges. Practices that incorporate purposeful silence, like wait time, require both a willingness to rest in the discomfort of silence which, as a culture, we are “fearful of” (Belanoff 400) as well as a surrendering of control over what might be said or proposed by others if space is allowed. Administrators from historically marginalized groups also must negotiate the benefits of purposeful silence with various forms of cultural silencing—what, with respect to women, O’Reilly calls “the Tillie Olsen silence, when you don’t have a voice, when you are discounted, marginalized, standing there ironing” (7). Further, while observation and reflection are now standard pedagogical fare, encouraging attention to feelings still pushes the boundaries of academic appropriateness, particularly when enhanced by meditation and yoga, which, for many, call up additional and sometimes-problematic religious associations as well as the notion of a “‘deep’ self, so often sought” by meditators but seemingly at odds with postmodern theory (Campbell 249). JoAnn Campbell’s worries, as an untenured faculty member, about bringing meditation from “the fringes of our discipline” and the margins of academia into her writing classroom in the early 1990s seem as relevant today as they did then.

Carefully framing activities and defining terminology are key to increasing openness to mindfulness practice and its many benefits. Suhor offers a helpful way of approaching the use of purposeful silence, specifically, by acknowledging that “the systematic suppression of language” is never good and highlighting the importance of “a dynamic interaction . . . between talk and silence” to teaching and learning (24). Similarly, O’Reilly offers silence as the space within which we make potentially life-altering choices about how we will respond to students and colleagues:

In academic culture most listening is critical listening. We tend to pay attention only long enough to develop a counterargument; we critique the student's or the colleague's ideas; we mentally grade and pigeonhole each other. . . . Seldom is there a deep, openhearted, unjudging reception of the other. And so we all talk louder and more stridently and with a terrible desperation. By contrast, if someone truly listens to me, my spirit begins to expand. (19)

In terms of alleviating discomfort with unfamiliar activities like focused breathing, meditation, or yoga, recent mindfulness-oriented pedagogical literature can be most helpful. Composition and rhetoric colleagues who write about integrating mindfulness practices into their classrooms can now support empirical claims of the many benefits with mounting scientific evidence (see, for example, Mathieu). Also, since Moffett published his foundational and oft-cited "Writing, Inner Speech, and Meditation" in 1982, much thought has been devoted to making such practices less threatening to both students and teachers alike. In terms of meditation, in particular, those who mentor WPAs can follow the lead of O'Reilly and Belanoff in demonstrating the ways in which practices typically associated with Eastern religions, like Buddhism, are actually apparent in all religions. One of the most instructive aspects of O'Reilly's *Radical Presence*, for instance, is the manner in which she makes her case for contemplative classroom practice by weaving together aspects of multiple spiritual traditions within Christianity (e.g., Catholicism, Quakerism) as well as Judaism and Buddhism. Against a similar spiritual backdrop, Belanoff uses the *Oxford English Dictionary* to trace an etymological path from *reflect* to *meditate* and then to *contemplation* (405–06), through the acts of *studying* or *pondering* (407), and then, from there, notes the similarities with *metacognition*, thus further broadening the scope of the practice, its associations, and potential for action (411).

Our mindful teaching colleagues also offer methods for negotiating the privileging of mind over body in academia by embracing "both/and" thinking and redefining narrowly conceived terms. As Angela Woodward describes the contemplative pedagogy she uses with basic writers, it is "concerned with ways of being, for both students and teacher" (78) and allows for integration of "clarity, logic, and reasons" with "insight, intuition, and awareness" (81, 80). Along the same lines, Alexandra Peary and Erec Smith reconceive *kairos* in ways that require attention to both intellectual and physical experiences (Peary 31), to both "cognitive and spiritual faculties" (Smith 36), and a sense of self-actualization that enhances, rather than conflicts with, the "ability to understand and construct appropriate subject positions" for the benefit of effective argument (38).

Even when ready solutions to challenges posed by mindful teaching seem unavailable, the scholarship uniformly suggests that the potential personal and professional benefits are well worth negotiating possible obstacles. Mindful teachers generally agree that awareness-building activities reduce anxiety, improve focus and creativity, enhance feelings of empathy, and increase (physical, intellectual, and emotional) stamina—not just for students but for themselves. As students become more comfortable with uncertainty and more aware of who they are and what they are doing in the present moment, so, too, do their teachers, who often gain new professional and personal insights. When transferred to an administrative context, mindful practice promises similar results for WPAs and the people with whom they work. As Micciche found, for example, simply slowing down the administrative decision-making process engendered a range of “regenerative returns” (74), from new opportunities for productive collaboration to reduced stress levels. Perhaps even more important, within the mandate-driven context of higher education, where it’s easy to feel our “professional agency erode” (Scott and Welch 5), stopping to “be in the moment [and] puzzling through” challenges with enhanced awareness (Micciche 83) can expand a WPA’s sense of where and how she might effect change. As Wenger explains, mindfulness

better positions WPAs . . . to be aware of the emotional and physical management of writing programs and people, to resist our construction as an exploitable presence and to carve out new possibilities for how we might become effective change agents within our programs and campuses. (122)

Far from just serving the WPA’s own interests, mindful practice is, at its base, a practice of considered compassion for both self and community—a purposeful attention to the part of oneself and others that when really listened to, without judgment, inspires bolder, braver, stronger (and less stressful) personal and professional commitments (O’Reilly 20–21).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the thoughtful, generous feedback provided by Paula Mathieu and Amy Ferdinandt Stolley on an earlier version of this article and to my long-time collaborator and friend, Peggy O’Neill, for encouraging me to write it in the first place.

WORKS CITED

Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Elizabeth Wardle, editors. *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*. Utah State UP, 2016.

- . “Naming What We Know: The Project of This Book.” Adler-Kassner and Wardle, pp. 1–11.
- Belanoff, Pat. “Silence: Reflection, Literacy, Learning, and Teaching.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 52, no. 3, Feb. 2001, pp. 399–428.
- Bizzell, Patricia. “Forward: On Good Administrators.” George, pp. vii–ix.
- Campbell, JoAnn. “Writing to Heal: Using Meditation in the Writing Process.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 45, no. 2, May 1994, pp. 246–51.
- Crow, Angela, Letizia Guglielmo, Cindy Moore, Peggy O’Neill, Annette Powell, and Elizabeth Wardle. “Cultivating Feminist Leadership in Writing Programs and Beyond.” Conference on College Composition and Communication, 16 Mar. 2017, Portland, OR.
- de Mello, Anthony. *Awareness: The Perils and Opportunities of Reality*. Doubleday, 1990.
- Fontaine, Sheryl I. “Teaching with the Beginner’s Mind: Notes from My Karate Journal.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 54, no. 2, Dec. 2002, pp. 208–21.
- Gallehr, Donald R. “Wait, and the Writing Will Come: Meditation and the Composing Process.” *Presence of Mind: Writing and the Domain Beyond the Cognitive*, edited by Alice Glarden Brand and Richard L. Graves, Heinemann, 1994, pp. 21–29.
- George, Diana, editor. *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers, and Troubadours: Writing Program Administrators Tell Their Stories*. Boynton/Cook, 1999.
- Goleman, Daniel. “What Makes a Leader?” 1998. *Harvard Business Review*, Jan. 2004, pp. 2–10.
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness, Revised and Updated Edition*. Bantam, 2013.
- Kroll, Keith. “On Paying Attention: Flagpoles, Mindfulness, and Teaching Writing.” *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2008, pp. 69–78.
- Mathieu, Paula. “Being There: Mindfulness as Ethical Classroom Practice.” *The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, vol. 21, 2015–16, pp. 14–20.
- Micciche, Laura R. “For Slow Agency.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2011, pp. 73–90.
- Miller, Richard. “Critique’s the Easy Part: Choice and the Scale of Relative Oppression.” George, pp. 3–13.
- Moffett, James. “Reading and Writing as Meditation.” *Language Arts*, vol. 60, no. 3, Mar. 1983, pp. 315+.
- . “Women’s Ways of Writing, or, Images, Self-Images, and Graven Images: Responses.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 45, no. 2, May 1994, pp. 258–63.
- . “Writing, Inner Speech, and Meditation.” *College English*, vol. 44, no. 3, Mar. 1982, pp. 231–46.
- Murray, Donald. “One Writer’s Curriculum.” *English Journal*, vol. 80, no. 4, Apr. 1991, pp. 16–20.

- Musial, Jennifer. "Engaged Pedagogy in the Feminist Classroom and Yoga Studio." *Feminist Teacher*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2011, pp. 212–28.
- Nicolas, Melissa, Anna Sicari, Roxanne Mountford, and Beth Boquet. "Feminist Action for Women Writing Program Administrators: Movements for Change in the Academy." Conference on College Composition and Communication, 8 Apr. 2016, Houston, TX, Apr. 2016.
- O'Reilly, Mary Rose. *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice*. Boynton/Cook, 1998.
- Peary, Alexandria. "The Role of Mindfulness in Kairos." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2016, pp. 22–34.
- Pinard, Mary. "Surviving the Honeymoon: Bliss and Anxiety in a WPA's First Year, or Appreciating the Plate Twirler's Art." *George*, pp. 56–62.
- Rubin, Gretchen. *The Happiness Project*. Harper, 2009.
- Scott, Tony, and Nancy Welch. "Introduction: Composition in the Age of Austerity." *Composition in the Age of Austerity*, edited by Nancy Welch and Tony Scott, Utah State UP, 2016, pp. 3–17.
- Schmidt, Jan Z. "The Use and Value of the Meditation in an Advanced Composition Course: A Meditation on Meditations." *JAC*, vol. 6, 1985–1986, pp. 65–77.
- Smith, Erec. "Buddhism's Pedagogical Contribution to Mindfulness." *The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, vol. 21, 2015–16, pp. 36–46.
- Suhor, Charles. "Surprised by Bird, Bard, and Bach." *The English Journal*, vol. 80, no. 2, Feb. 1991, pp. 21–26.
- Sullivan, Patrick. *A New Writing Classroom: Listening, Motivation, and Habits of Mind*. Utah State UP, 2014.
- Taczak, Kara. "Reflection is Critical for Writers' Development." Adler-Kassner and Wardle, pp. 78–79.
- Tolle, Eckhart. *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*. New World Library / Namaste, 1999.
- Tremmel, Robert. "Beyond Self-Criticism: Reflecting on Teacher Research and TA Education." *Composition Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1994, pp. 44–64.
- Wenger, Christy. "Feminism, Mindfulness and the Small University jWPA." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2014, pp. 117–40.
- Woodward, Angela. "Contemplating Silence in a Basic Writing Classroom." *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2010, pp. 77–81.

Cindy Moore is professor of writing and associate vice president of Academic Student Affairs at Loyola University Maryland. Her scholarship has focused on professional development, assessment, and voice as expressed and experienced through writing.



Plenary Address

Innovation through Intentional Administration: Or, How to Lead a Writing Program Without Losing Your Soul

Susan Miller-Cochran

ABSTRACT

Writing program administrators work in a conflicted, liminal space. For example, they sometimes are asked to enforce language norming that they don't support, and they often must facilitate labor practices that they also fight. In spite of the transformations they advocate for, the long histories and stubborn practices of writing programs reflect and enact privilege. WPAs often have little control over the fiscal decision-making that impacts the instructors and students in their programs. Yet that conflicted space is also complex, for even as these issues likely sound familiar to many program directors, they manifest in vastly different ways in the broad range of institutional contexts and job titles that WPAs work in. Our rhetorical training, however, prepares us well for the spaces in which we work, especially when we continually allow clear, consistent principles and values to guide us. When we understand our institutional contexts and remain focused on our guiding principles and values, we can intentionally, strategically move toward change. In this plenary address, I argue for the importance of knowing our guiding principles to shape decision-making in the conflicted spaces where we work, and I describe my approach of compassionate administration.

I know this isn't news to anyone, but writing program administrators work in a conflicted, liminal space. We're (often, but not always) in multiple roles. In my case, I am both administrator and faculty. Some WPAs are both students and administrators, and others are both staff and administrators. Some of us wear more than two hats, and many of us work in more

than one unit. That means that we answer to multiple groups, and those groups often have conflicting goals. When I encounter these kinds of conflicts, sometimes they're minor; at other times, they are so intense that I am left feeling angry, sad, guilty, and confused. I would like to illustrate a few examples of how those conflicts have manifested in my own administrative experience.

Conflict 1. Even though I've explained many times to people across campus that first-year writing is not an inoculation against what many faculty and administrators see as writing "error," I have struggled for over twenty years now with an existential sort of crisis: trying to understand how to reconcile that I spent six and a half years in graduate school studying, writing about, and celebrating the importance of language variation, yet I work in a system that often expects me to enforce language norming. As the director of a writing program, I am now the default figurehead of language norming on my campus, regardless of how nuanced I may try to make the goals of a writing course.

Conflict 2. In one of my WPA positions, we had a potential budget reduction nearly every year. Even if it wasn't certain that we would actually receive a budget reduction, the dean asked us to participate in the "exercise" of coming up with possible scenarios to deal with different percentage decreases in our budgets. Since our writing program budget was 98% personnel, that meant that I was expected to do the unthinkable—go through a list of faculty and determine who would be let go if our funding was reduced by, say, 3%, 5%, or 7%. And nearly every year, I would avoid answering the question of what to cut by coming up with various alternative solutions for saving money without cutting faculty lines. Or, if I had no alternative ideas, I would argue for why we couldn't cut anything. My blood pressure would rise and I would feel indignant as I responded. And as I wrote those emails and made those arguments, I felt the very personal conflict that one of the people who has consistently helped me think through the ethics of labor issues—my husband, Stacey—is also one of the faculty members off the tenure-track. Yet even though I struggled each year to find new, airtight ways to make untenured faculty positions stable, I couldn't escape the fact that the unethical hierarchy of the university had put one person (me) in a position to make decisions that affected so many others. It was unconscionable that colleagues with decades of teaching experience and multiple degrees beside their names (in some cases the exact same degrees I had) were in such precarious positions while I enjoyed security. The guilt and shame that accompanied those moments were intense.

Conflict 3. As a WPA, one of my primary goals is to be as transparent, democratic, and inclusive as I possibly can be with the teachers in our writing program, even with some of the kinds of situations I've just mentioned. Yet there are times when I have to decide how much to share. It is these moments where I feel the internal conflict of being both a faculty member and an administrator most, and I have to decide where my alliances fall and where the lines are drawn between being wise, being compassionate, and being transparent. Most often, the crisis isn't resolved, but I still have to figure out how to move forward.

While my observation that WPAs work in conflicted, liminal spaces is fairly obvious, it's one of the primary lessons that I've learned as a WPA. Indeed, one of the first lessons I learned about being a WPA might have been when I read Laura Micciche's (2002) article in *College English*, "More than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work." In that article, Micciche wrote that from the outside, "the WPA seems to occupy a powerful location. The truth, however, is that the WPA's authority and power are challenged, belittled, and seriously compromised every step of the way" (p. 434). I've found that often those challenges to power and authority come from the conflicted spaces in which we work, and at least for me, I find I am challenging my own decision-making and positionality. The challenge is not just external—it is also internal. And sometimes those conflicts can hit very close to home—in my own experience, they can be personal, and they can be extraordinarily challenging as I weigh options with aspirations, reality with hope. I've just finished my 11th year of directing a writing program (at two different institutions), and the implications of this lesson are always becoming at the same time clearer and also more complicated. It's how to navigate (and perhaps not only survive but thrive in) this conflicted space that I want to talk about this evening.

I also want to acknowledge that I don't claim to have all of the answers. The title of my talk, which seemed both amusing and an act of administrative desperation at the time that I wrote it, makes the grandiose claim that I am going to give definitive answers. But I am fully aware that my experiences are not identical to anyone else's, and that we all live and work in unique institutional contexts. With that said, and with humility, I want to share some of what I have found that grounds me in the moments when those competing interests and demands seem more than I can handle. How do we innovate in the midst of conflict and move from where we are to something new and better?

INTENTIONALITY

I find that much of the conflict we deal with comes from the fact that WPAs are in unique administrative positions. Our positionality is an intersection of interests and commitments, based on the liminal space in which we live. Yet we are also uniquely prepared for the administrative work that we do. As Doug Hesse (2005) pointed out, “No other administrative position so commingles agency with disciplinary knowledge” (p. 503). Ostensibly, we do our administrative work in programs where we can focus exclusively on the kinds of things that we studied as graduate students and that we research and write about as faculty. But it is also this personal and scholarly investment that we have in our administrative work that can make dealing with the conflicts so challenging. What we decide and how we solve problems can have implications on our scholarly work and our relationship to the work of our colleagues in the discipline. These are, at the same time, some of the reasons why the CWPA conference has always felt like a home to me; it’s the one place where I know other people understand the conflicts and challenges that I’m dealing with. It’s a safe space to vent, seek advice, and understand that you’re not alone. It’s also a space where I can think through how I want to respond to some of the bigger challenges I know I will be facing in the coming academic year.

This brings me to what I see as perhaps the most important word in my title: *intentional*. What does it mean to respond to administrative challenges with intentionality and to engage in what I am calling “intentional administration”?

Let me start with an example of what I mean. In February 2017, I met virtually with Elizabeth Wardle’s WPA graduate seminar at Miami University of Ohio. In preparation for the conversation, Liz sent me some notes about what the class had been reading and what she hoped I would share with the students. Specifically, she asked me to share any guiding principles that inform my decision-making as a WPA. Liz’s prompt was an important one, and it points to one of the most important things I believe a WPA needs to know: What are your guiding principles? This is the key to intentional administration and to navigating the conflicts that we inevitably experience. To determine how to move forward, we have to know our guiding principles.

One of the ways that I encourage the students in my own WPA graduate seminars to identify their guiding principles is to start with a related question: What is your metaphor for administrative work? One of my former colleagues at North Carolina State University, Casie Fedukovich, uses the metaphor question when she teaches pedagogy courses for graduate stu-

dents (Fedukovich, 2013). I learned by adapting her activity that starting with metaphors can help us dig beneath the surface to understand what our own guiding principles are.

Another powerful example of metaphors in composition comes from Jay Dolmage's (2007) chapter "Mapping Composition: Inviting Disability in the Front Door." In that chapter, Dolmage introduces the metaphors of steep steps, the retrofit, and universal design to help readers understand how composition excludes, how it can be redesigned, and how it can be more inclusively conceived from the beginning. Metaphors can help us understand concepts—and ourselves—on deeper levels.

So what is your metaphor for administrative work?

COMPASSIONATE ADMINISTRATION

My administrative metaphor shifts over time, but the one that I often come back to is a rocking chair. Some of you have heard the story of how I inherited a rocking chair for my first WPA office from Michael Carter at NC State, and I used to joke that I would offer the rocking chair to people when they would come to my office to vent—about a grade, about a classmate, about a teacher, about a policy. Rocking chairs are soothing. But the rocking chair really had meaning to me. Perhaps part of its meaning originated in the fact that it was given to me by one of the kindest, most generous colleagues I've ever worked with. The rocking chair reminded me that one of my biggest responsibilities as an administrator is to listen to others while they share with me their thoughts, ideas, and concerns. When I listen, I understand more. And as I listen, I might see possibilities for convergence that I hadn't seen originally. I grow, change, and innovate by listening. And sometimes I need to just sit with the discomfort that I'm feeling and think through how to respond—quietly, and sometimes slowly—which can be a difficult thing for a generally impulsive extrovert like me to do. Rocking chairs are good for that, too. And that metaphor connects with one of my guiding principles as an administrator: to act with compassion. The only way I can act with compassion is if I am listening to and paying attention to a range of perspectives.

Ultimately, I believe it is important to know your guiding principles and to set strategic plans and make decisions accordingly. Our rhetorical training prepares us well for the conflicted spaces in which we work—we know how to pay attention to context, audience, and to focus on our purpose. And that rhetorical training really pays off if we allow clear, consistent principles to guide us. When you are in the midst of a moment where

competing interests make it difficult to figure out how to move forward, your guiding principles can point the way.

When we understand our context and remain focused on our guiding principles, we can intentionally, strategically, move toward change.

Saying that my guiding principle is compassion isn't really sexy or dramatic. But then again, my favorite movie so far this year has been the documentary about Mr. Rogers (Neville, 2018). I find that compassion provides a compelling way to move forward—to work toward equity and understanding. As a teacher, I have also been drawn recently to instructional approaches that showcase compassion, or what Carson and Johnston (2000), Jansen (2008), Patel (2016), and others call a “pedagogy of compassion.” Compassionate administration also aligns with how Linda Adler-Kassner (2008) described the “activist WPA” as having

a commitment to changing things for the better here and now through consensus-based, systematic, thoughtful processes that take into consideration the material contexts and concerns of all involved . . . and a constant commitment to ongoing, loud, sometimes messy dialogue (p. 33).

Compassionate administration doesn't mean always seeking easy consensus or avoiding conflict. The conflict and discomfort are sometimes essential to figure out how to move forward. And compassionate administration doesn't mean being quiet or taking a back seat. Sometimes it means being the squeaky wheel and making people uncomfortable. It means listening, but it also means acting.

Acting on what is compassionate, fair, and equitable is part of how I address the subtitle of my talk. I invoke the soul, and I imply that doing administrative work can potentially put you at risk of losing yours. Talking about the soul is far more touchy-feely than I usually get in my own scholarly writing, but I'm learning that it is something that is incredibly important for me to address. I have to align what I say I *believe* as a WPA with what I *do* as a WPA. When these are in conflict, I experience cognitive dissonance, and I am uneasy. But when I can align them, I can move forward.

ONE EXAMPLE OF INTENTIONALITY

It might help if I provide an example of the kind of conflicted space I'm talking about. Our writing program is housed in a large department of English, and one of the conflicts that has circulated for a long time—and that is likely unsurprising to many of you—is what the content of the first-year writing course should be and how to prepare graduate students to teach that course when rhet-comp is not their area of interest. I myself was

a graduate student who was assigned to teach first-year writing without ever having taken it, and I came to graduate school to study applied linguistics, not rhet-comp. I empathize with multiple sides in the conflict.

Yet as the director of the writing program, I have fairly well-formed (and what I believe are well-*in*formed) ideas about what the content of the class should include, what the goals of the course should be, and how to prepare new teachers of writing. We have a large administrative team and faculty in the writing program with a wealth of experience in teaching and studying writing, and I'm following in the footsteps of a line of writing program administrators in the same program who have been active in the field of rhet-comp. Yet one of the first conflicts I dealt with on campus was the question of whether graduate students could teach literature in their classes (in other words, teaching what they had come to the University of Arizona to study) and why they had to read composition theory when this was not what they were interested in. Part of what puzzled me was that I had not banned literature from writing classes; rather, we had begun to move toward a much more open approach in the curriculum that focused on outcomes and allowed instructors to use a multitude of ways to reach those outcomes. Yet while I firmly believe that a range of different kinds of literature can be used to teach students principles of writing and meet the outcomes of our courses, I would have protested a class that had essentially turned into an introduction to literature.

The conflict came to a climax in the spring of 2017, when I and one of our associate directors were called to a meeting with the literature faculty in the department to discuss the writing program. At first I refused to attend the meeting, but I was convinced by my department head that it would be in the best interests of resolving the conflict if we were willing to respond to questions and explain our perspective.

When we arrived at the meeting, we found a standing-room only crowd of faculty and graduate students. We were given seats at a conference table in the middle of the room, surrounded on all sides in what felt—to me—like an antagonistic space. The director of the program began the meeting by saying that the literature and writing programs had long enjoyed a good relationship under the direction of the four former WPAs (whom he named), but for the past two years (which incidentally coincided with my arrival on campus) GTAs were reporting more distress in their work with the writing program and that faculty find their distress understandable and justifiable.

I was, to put it mildly, caught off guard.

We had just conducted a CWPA consultant-evaluator visit the semester before, and we had made a point of having a time when GTAs could

meet with the consultant-evaluators to share their perspectives. I had to work very hard not to be reactionary and defensive in that moment. Instead, after very briefly highlighting some of the things we had accomplished to support teachers in the program, I responded that the associate director and I would listen carefully and take notes.

Among other things, we were told at the meeting that:

- We should fire any faculty mentoring GTAs who seemed to be anti-literature.
- The writing program should be designing its curriculum to recruit students into the major.
- The writing program needs to get back to basics, to include more of an emphasis on grammar and on literary texts.
- Graduate students shouldn't have to take a rhet-comp theory course when their workload is already too high.
- The writing program requires too much in the annual self-assessment and review of GTAs.
- Any change in the writing program's curriculum must be approved by the Department Council (which at the time had no mandatory representation from the writing program, but did from the four graduate programs).
- And ultimately, administrators in the writing program were anti-literature.

After an hour and a half of listening to complaints and being asked almost no questions, the meeting was dismissed. I felt as if we had just survived an ambush. I was angry following that meeting. Indignant. My emotional response was intense. But how was I going to respond?

I can't say I was 100% consistent, but compassion compelled me to try—as best I could—to understand the perspectives of my colleagues and their students. Granted, the compassionate response wasn't my first impulse, and my fellow administrators in the program can certainly attest to that. But when I tried to look at the issues through the lens of empathy, I could see that:

1. the numbers in the major were dwindling;
2. the faculty who were retiring in their program weren't consistently being replaced;
3. the workload for GTAs was far too high; and
4. the department wasn't offering literature courses for GTAs to teach (for a range of complicated reasons) and they desperately wanted some experience teaching what they were studying.

To be fair, I was very clear with my department head and upper administration that the way the concerns were brought to me and the associate director was inappropriate and unproductive. But ultimately, what could we do to respond to the actual issues?

Personally, I had to figure out how to resolve how I felt about what had happened and what I could learn from it. So in an effort to experience more alignment between what I believe and what I do—in essence, to be mindful and pay attention to my soul—I made a set of “Academic New Year’s Resolutions as a WPA” at the beginning of the following school year (2017–18). I wanted to set specific intentions for my administrative work. They were to:

1. Practice radical transparency.
2. Demonstrate strategic incompetence. You really can’t do more with less, and sometimes that needs to be visible.
3. Practice self-care.
4. Be proactive, not reactive.
5. Listen more than I speak because I’ve got a lot to learn.

During the following academic year, following that spring 2017 meeting, our administrative team tried to focus on what we saw as the causes of the problems instead of the symptoms (which seemed to be primarily the things being voiced at the meeting). We worked on streamlining the GTA self-evaluation process and reducing teacher workload (both for GTAs and our faculty). We reduced GTA teaching loads during their first semester, and we reduced course caps across the board to 19. We also tried to communicate more clearly the ways that disciplinary and scholarly interests could be incorporated into the curriculum, and we paid a small group of graduate students (with equal representation from each program in the department) over the summer of 2017 to develop curricular outlines using all of the textbooks on our lists that provided examples of how to meet the outcomes through a range of approaches. I conducted a workshop with those graduate students at the beginning of that effort to talk to them about constructive alignment and reinforce that we wanted to provide them the space to innovate in the classroom. The undergraduate program director has also worked to find ways to provide teaching opportunities for GTAs outside of the writing program, so it has certainly been a team effort.

I wish I could report that we all lived happily ever after, but that is never reality. What I can say is that there have been no conflict-driven follow-up meetings about these issues, and the new graduate literature program director has reached out to me with specific ideas about how she would like to work together in the coming year to help graduate students see the value of

the work they are doing in the writing program. In that last example, she is also extending compassion, and I honor that.

There have certainly been other conflicts that have come up over the past year, primarily dealing with issues of labor in the writing program and the rights of faculty off the tenure-track. In many ways, 2017 and the spring of 2018 were the most challenging, heart-wrenching semesters I've ever experienced professionally. Did identifying my intentions through those resolutions make the year easier? No. Did it matter that I set intentions ahead of time? Absolutely. I am convinced that, as I had named in my resolutions, being intentional in administration means being proactive, rather than just reactive.

INNOVATION THROUGH COMPASSIONATE ADMINISTRATION

But what might (in my case) being an intentional, compassionate administrator look like on a day-to-day basis? If I pay attention to the research in our field and listen wholeheartedly to voices such as Sharon Crowley, Seth Kahn, Tony Scott, and others about the problematic and often unethical hiring practices in writing programs; to Asao Inoue, Collin L. Craig and Staci M. Perryman-Clark, and others about racism in writing programs, curricula, and CWPA itself; and to Melanie Yergeau, Jay Dolmage, Margaret Price, and Amy Vidali about ableism in WPA work, then how do I respond in my day-to-day decision-making as a WPA?

In my experience, I have identified three broad approaches to administrative work that are grounded in compassion and that are intentional and proactive. I have found that they can help shift the atmosphere of a writing program to be intentionally inclusive and open, laying the groundwork for solving some of the big challenges we face.

First, I advocate letting instructors and students lead and guide as much as possible, facilitating their leadership and supporting their ideas. In a publication I co-authored with Maria Conti and Rachel LaMance (2017), we called such initiatives “grassroots efforts,” specifically in the context of developing an assessment plan. Most recently, we have tried to provide more autonomy to instructors in our curriculum at the University of Arizona, and we have taken a hard look at the opportunities that we provide for instructors at different ranks (both faculty and graduate students) to participate in decision making. We have included an undergraduate student on our writing program advisory and policy-making committee. These kinds of initiatives aren't necessarily efficient; it's much more expedient to just make decisions in a hierarchical manner, following the authoritative WPA model. But the payoff of a grassroots approach is incalculable. The

ideas circulating around the program are better because more perspectives are included, and instructors and students are naturally more invested in the work that they do when they know their voices and experience matter.

A second strategy that I rely on is related to the first, and that is following a model of collaborative, distributed administration. Many scholars have both advocated for and critiqued a range of collaborative administrative models, perhaps most notably Jeanne Gunner (1994; 2002). Eileen E. Schell (1998) also complicates the responsibilities and roles in a collaborative administrative structure for untenured faculty and graduate students in her article about the “possibilities and pitfalls” of collaborative administrative structures. These critiques offer important guidelines for embarking on collaborative administration, and I remain convinced that a truly collaborative model that distributes authority instead of merely flattening a hierarchy or rotating the “boss compositionist” (Sledd, 2000) can be a compassionate move. Similar to grassroots initiatives, collaborative administration incorporates a range of perspectives, histories, and experiences, leading to more informed decision making and leadership. And if we think about self-care, the collaborative structure also gives everyone the opportunity to take space to breathe and recharge, something that is impossible to do if you are always the one on call.

A final strategy that is essential to compassionate administration is having clear boundaries. Compassion does not mean an absence of boundaries; rather, it involves at least two kinds of clear boundaries: boundaries that preserve time and energy for the things that are important instead of always bowing to “the tyranny of the urgent” (a phrase I first heard from David Schwalm) and boundaries that maintain integrity by standing up to practices that are unreasonable and unethical. Sometimes it means setting protective boundaries necessary for the program itself, for the curriculum, for the teachers, or for the students. And at other times the boundaries need to be for the WPA, to self-preserve and continue on. Sometimes I have to verbally remind myself not to jump into an issue or initiative and not to take responsibility for problems, initiatives, or challenges that are not mine.

I am convinced that we can work toward innovative approaches that can transform our programmatic spaces. But compassionate administration also means that the conflict that I mentioned at the beginning of my talk doesn’t necessarily go away just by listening, or by being inclusive and collaborative, or by setting boundaries. Even though you may work toward equity, social justice, and well-being, being a compassionate administrator also means that you will recognize—vividly and clearly—the moments when those values are *not* realized, especially when it seems there is nothing you can do to change the circumstances. Those realizations are painful,

and they can be disheartening. I have found, though, that they can also be galvanizing.

SETTING YOUR ADMINISTRATIVE INTENTION

So perhaps my own answers to Dominic DelliCarpini's engaging conference theme are these:

- What if we tried leading not just with our heads, but also with our hearts?
- What if we were guided not just by our research but also by compassion?
- What if we could find ways to bring research and compassion together to come up with answers to questions that we have not yet been able to answer in writing program administration?
- In other words, what if we engaged in compassionate administration?

Administering with compassion and intentionality is not simple, though. What does it mean, for example, to be a compassionate administrator in a context where so many faculty are treated as second-class citizens? Where students are subjected to deficit-based models of instruction, even when we teach with the best of intentions? When faculty and student well-being come second to an administrative bottom line, especially when those faculty and students are people of color; or have physical, mental, or neurological differences; or speak varieties of English that have been marginalized; or are faculty who have not been offered the security of being on the tenure track? Although I certainly don't have all of the answers to these questions, I am convinced that a focus on compassion can help us do better than we have been. And being a compassionate WPA also means recognizing that, while our power and authority may be compromised in the kinds of ways that I referenced from Micciche (2002) at the beginning of this talk, we also have a position of influence that compels us to speak out for equity, even when it is uncomfortable and painful.

This past week, I was taking a hike in the Colorado mountains with my husband, Stacey. I kept rewriting parts of this plenary in my head and talking through ideas with him to seek his feedback. During that hike, I came across a cluster of wildflowers in the middle of the trail somewhere above 12,000 feet of elevation (see figure 1).



Figure 1. A cluster of Colorado wildflowers. (Courtesy of the author)

I was struck by them—by how they are at the same time vulnerable and fragile yet also tough survivors. People who are compassionate are sometimes mistaken for being weak or fragile, but the opposite is often true of them: they possess a quiet, enduring strength that comes from a clear sense

of who they are and what they value. Opening yourself up to compassion, and to compassionate administration, requires equal parts vulnerability and resilience. What I am calling for is at odds with a system of academic capitalism that does not generally reward selflessness and service.

Some of the most effective examples I have seen of academic leadership, though, have reinforced this guiding principle for me. I can't help but wonder what kind of a difference it could make if our programs, departments, universities, and professional organizations were consistently guided by compassion and by a concern for the well-being of others. In our current political climate, and given the current state of higher education, it seems downright revolutionary. How might compassionate administration help us think through solutions to some of the big, persistent challenges we face in writing programs? Continuing to work through this question has been my way to continue to do administrative work without losing my soul.

For me, intentional administration is compassionate administration. So, I invite you to set your intention as you think about and listen to innovative approaches at the conference over the next few days. What matters most to you? And what does intentional administration look like for you?

REFERENCES

- Adler-Kassner, Linda. (2008). *The activist WPA: Changing stories about writing and writers*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.
- Carson, Terry, & Johnston, Ingrid. (2000). The difficulty with difference in teacher education: Toward a pedagogy of compassion. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 46(1), 75–83.
- Conti, Maria, LaMance, Rachel, & Miller-Cochran, Susan. (2017). Cultivating change from the ground up: Developing a grassroots programmatic assessment. *Composition Forum*, 37. Retrieved from <http://www.compositionforum.com/issue/37/arizona.php>
- Craig, Collin L., & Perryman-Clark, Staci M. (2011). Troubling the boundaries: (De)constructing WPA identities at the intersection of race and gender. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 34(2), 37–58.
- Crowley, Sharon. (1998). *Composition in the university: Historical and polemical essays*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Dolmage, Jay. (2007). Mapping composition: Inviting disability in the front door. In Brenda Jo Brueggeman & Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson (Eds.), *Disability and the teaching of writing: A critical sourcebook* (pp. 14–27). Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's.
- Fedukovich, Casie. (2013). This is not bootcamp: Radicalizing the teacher preparation seminar. *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, 28(2), 55–60. doi:10.9707/2168-149X.1960
- Gunner, Jeanne. (1994). Decentering the WPA. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 18(1–2), 8–15.

- Gunner, Jeanne. (2002). Collaborative administration. In Stuart C. Brown & Theresa Enos (Eds.), *The writing program administrator's resource: A guide to reflective institutional practice* (pp. 252–262). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hesse, Douglas D. (2005). Not even joint custody: Notes from an ex-WPA. *College Composition and Communication*, 56(3), 501–507.
- Inoue, Asao. (2016). Friday plenary address: Racism in writing programs and the CWPA. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 40(1), 134–154.
- Jansen, Jonathan D. (2008). Bearing whiteness: A pedagogy of compassion in a time of troubles. *Education as Change*, 12(2), 59–75.
- Kath, Seth. (2015). Friday plenary address: Towards an Ecology of Sustainable Labor in Writing Programs (and Other Places). *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 39(1), 109–121.
- Micciche, Laura R. (2002). More than a feeling: Disappointment and WPA work. *College English* 64(4), 432–458.
- Patel, Natasha. (2016). Pedagogy of compassion. *The Cutting Edge: The Stanford Undergraduate Journal of Education Research*, 1(1), 46–64.
- Price, Margaret. (2011). *Mad at school: Rhetorics of mental disability and academic life*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Schell, Eileen E. (1998). Who's the boss?: The possibilities and pitfalls of collaborative administration for untenured WPAs. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 21(2–3), 65–80.
- Scott, Tony. (2009). *Dangerous writing: Understanding the political economy of composition*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.
- Sledd, James. (2000). Return to service. *Composition Studies*, 28(2), 11–32.
- Vidali, Amy. (2015). Disabling writing program administration. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 38(2), 32–55.
- Neville, Morgan (Director). (2018). *Won't You Me My Neighbor?* USA: Focus Features.
- Yergeau, Melanie. (2016). Saturday plenary address: Creating a culture of access in writing program administration. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 40(1), 155–165.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank Stacey Cochran for his careful reading of and feedback on this manuscript. His comments and support helped shape its direction and clarify its message. In addition, the author thanks Shelley Rodrigo for her helpful comments on an early draft of the manuscript as well as Dominic DelliCarpini and Mark Blaauw-Hara for their encouragement about the overall theme of the talk.

Susan Miller-Cochran is professor of English and director of the writing program at the University of Arizona, where her research focuses on the intersections of technology, multilingual writing, labor issues, and writing program administration. Her work has appeared in several journals, and she is also a co-editor of

Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity (Utah State University Press, 2018); *Rhetorically Rethinking Usability* (Hampton Press, 2009); and *Strategies for Teaching First-Year Composition* (NCTE, 2002). Additionally, she is a co-author of *An Insider's Guide to Academic Writing* (Macmillan, 2019), *The Cengage Guide to Research* (Cengage, 2017), and *Keys for Writers* (Cengage, 2016). She currently serves as Immediate Past President of the CWPA.



Review

Languages and Literacies in Motion: Transnationalism and Mobility Matters in Writing Studies

Nancy Bou Ayash

Fraiberg, Steven, Xiqiao Wang, and Xiaoye You. *Inventing the World Grant University: Chinese International Students' Mobilities, Literacies, and Identities*. Utah State UP, 2017. 279 pages.

Lorimer Leonard, Rebecca. *Writing on the Move: Migrant Women and the Value of Literacy*. Pittsburgh UP, 2018. 182 pages.

Writing teacher-scholars and WPAs have recently centered their attention on the nature and implications of a nascent *trans* turn (translinguality, transliteracy, transmodality, transculturalism, and transnationalism, to name a few), which pushes the field into sustained, perpetual questioning and rethinking of the ontologies and epistemologies on which its definitions of and normalized assumptions about core constructs, such as language, literacy, modality, culture, and nation-state rest. At heart, this move in writing studies toward the various terms with the “trans” prefix signals a fundamental shift away from the commonly taken-for-granted stabilities and boundedness of these social categories and instead draws attention to their dynamic making and remaking as deeply entangled with ever-changing contexts, physical bodies, subjectivities, resources, and ecologies without losing sight of historical relations of domination and difference. As these emerging “trans” orientations continue to gain momentum and visibility in the field, there is an exigent need to come to terms with what Adey has referred to as the “relational politics” (82) of mobilities and immobilities, which takes into account the variability, contingency, and inconsistency of movement within and across categories of “nations and cultures, spaces and places, modes and semiotic resources, and autonomous named languages”

and academic literacies in them (Hawkins and Mori 1). In its theme of “Mobility Work in Composition,” the 2016 Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition has brought the concept, theories, and practices of mobility—the defining feature of contemporary literate life—to the forefront of scholarly deliberations over potential consequences for teaching, scholarship, service, and program administration. Anis Bawarshi, in a response essay to the conference theme and keynote papers, has urged us to approach mobility and the concrete labor it demands in writing studies as “not only boundary crossing but also boundary marking and boundary moving,” always organized, regulated, and brokered through global-local economies, histories, “affordances, politics, materialities, embodiments, tools, media, technologies, and affective factors” (2).

Though explored in unique ways, from diverse standpoints and based on different research designs and methods, the complex negotiation, transgression and reinvention of (national, social, cultural, and language) borders and boundaries in light of macro- and micro-regimes of language and literate mobility is a common and consistent theme taken up and further developed by the two engaging transnational ethnographies I review here. Taken together, *Inventing the World Grant University* by Steven Fraiberg, Xiqiao Wang, and Xiaoye You and *Writing on the Move* by Rebecca Lorimer Leonard successfully bring into life the material, social and historical situatedness of transnational writers’ language and literate resources and practices and the “profoundly relational and experiential” (Adey 83) nature of their mobility and immobility. While Fraiberg et al.’s study focuses on tracking and tracing the language and literate trajectories of Chinese international students as they shuttled back and forth between the US and mainland China, Leonard investigates the rich language and literate repertoires of twenty-five migrant women in the US Midwest and how the differential social and economic values attributed to them shape whether or not these move across real or imagined borders and boundaries.

Starting from the image on its cover with a multiplicity of language and semiotic resources as dynamic records of mobility and sociohistorical trajectories tattooed on bodyscapes to the several case studies unpacked throughout its pages, Fraiberg et al.’s book sets up a “transliteracy” approach to conceptualizing and studying language and literacy as mobile, deeply embodied, and performative. The opening chapter in this book does a very good job of foregrounding the combination of transliteracy, network, and mobility theories underpinning the structure and analyses across the individual chapters. Despite the continued use of the slippery, polysemous notion of multilingualism (and its variant “multilingual”), often interchangeably with the more heuristically powerful notion of translanguaging,

Inventing the World Grant University will be of interest to WPAs at small and large, public and private universities across the country who are constantly navigating the phenomenal influx of international students to their campuses, programs, and classrooms as a means at the upper administrative level “to offset decreased national and state funding in an era of neoliberal reforms and privatization” (5). In light of the internationalization of higher education, an overarching question regarding student (im)mobilities and literacy practices that drives the entire book and that the authors keep alluding to throughout the various chapters is one of what and/or “who is able to move, how they move, when they move, and to what effect” (4).

In this multi-sited, mixed methods ethnography, chapters one through four are situated at Michigan State University (MSU), and chapters five, six, and seven transport readers to the local sociolinguistic landscapes at Sinoway International Education (SIE), a private study-abroad program in Guangzhou, China designed mainly for Chinese students at US universities. At educational landscapes where, as Fraiberg et al. put it, the linguistically and culturally diverse “minority becomes the majority” (40), the first chapter unpacks the tensions and contradictions inherent in discourses of and responses to diversity and internationalization at US university campuses generally and MSU more specifically. According to Fraiberg et al., while dominant institutional discourses and inventions of a world grant ideal at MSU seemed to nurture diversity and foregrounded a global outlook, those clashed starkly with actual efforts at administrative and structural levels to “fully tame” (49) and quarantine Chinese international students’ “underground literacy practices,” activities, identities, and mobilities. Despite various official policies and practices of containment, the unofficial language and literate mobilities of the Chinese-speaking students participating in this study are, as depicted by the authors, constantly and strategically dis-inventing and reinventing the very economies of language and writing at the university designed to “regulate and contain” them in the first place (39). Further attending to students’ active resistance to and transformation of wider institutional hierarchies and structures, subsequent chapters unpack a set of interlocking *guanxi* networks of social relationships and activities within the Chinese student community through which multiple practices, ideas, meanings, texts, and knowledges get unevenly exchanged, taken up, and reconstituted at the world grant university in relation to time and space. We are specifically offered a detailed description of this complex constellation of literate transactions and movements within and across transnational social fields—largely overlooked by and “less visible to administrators and instructors” (55)—through the telling cases of two transnational entrepreneurs in the second chapter who nimbly mobilized a

wide array of sociocultural and material resources at their disposal and of an avid English major in chapter three whose in-school and out-of-school linguistic, disciplinary literacies and identities were deeply intertwined and complexly negotiated. Chapter four uniquely features how these unofficial networks and economies contingently shaped, both enabling and constraining, student mobilities and the development of their academic and disciplinary literacies and identities as they traversed digital and physical spaces of composing.

The second half of the book takes readers on a journey into the heart of the sociocultural, linguistic, and politico-economic landscapes at SIE summer school, which is uniquely positioned at the intersection of US and Chinese higher education culture and deeply entangled in struggles over its status, legitimacy and recognition in the globalized educational market. A detailed analysis of the specific configurations of the administrative and curricular infrastructure at this US style business-oriented program is offered throughout chapter five. In chapter six, we get a glimpse of the challenges both SIE students and teachers faced in cultivating cosmopolitan dispositions and relationships amid ideological and social class differences while deliberately negotiating the defining principles of socialism sponsored by the Chinese government and those of Western capitalist regimes. Like much of the ethnographic perspectives from MSU, the complex interaction between students' academic, classed, and national identities both inside and beyond the classroom at SIE remains a common thread that runs throughout chapter seven with its primary focus on transmodal literacies in gaming and other online activities.

In their concluding chapter, Fraiberg et al. bring together the results of their ethnographic work across multiple transnational sites and social actors. With an eye toward the complex politics of negotiating official and unofficial "ways of thinking, doing, and being at the university" in the twenty-first century (238), their mobile literacies and languages approach emphasizes the need to be mindful of not only the exponential language and sociocultural differences in local educational landscapes, but, more importantly, to the unequal relations of power that are entangled with such differences and often render them invisible, hence inconsequential, to international students' language and literacy education. For that matter, the key question for WPAs and writing teacher-scholars, according to Fraiberg et al., should no longer be "whether to change or not" (244) since the "complex flow of students, pedagogies, ideologies, policies, and practices" (239) at a local, regional, national, and international level, have made "such changes largely inevitable" (244) and much more urgent now than ever.

Lorimer Leonard's work similarly provides insights into the complexity, messiness, and contradiction inherent in transnational writing in light of shifting social, cultural, economic, (geo)political and institutional contexts. Her study contributes to our growing understanding of the varied perspectives and lived experiences of female migrant writers constantly on the move and on the front lines of transnational and translocal processes and of what exactly becomes of the totality of the language and literate practices and resources they have accumulated over the course of a lifetime. Focusing on the hows and whys of language and literate movement among her participants, Lorimer Leonard explores "the ways in which literacies move, the agents of that movement, and the fluctuating values that mediate it" (5). Chapter one introduces the fieldwork methodologies informing this book and describes some of the unique potentialities and challenges of studying literate mobilities variously located in and mediated across time, place, and space. Rather than over-romanticize and subsequently fetishize the fluidic, free-flowing character of transnational language and literate work, Lorimer Leonard's study is of great significance in that it makes more visible the complicated realities of meaning negotiation and construction as transnational migrant writers navigate their ways through the simultaneity of fluid, fixed, and frictive mobilities (correspondingly addressed in chapters two, three, and four).

Drawing on extensive ethnographic interviews, chapter two offers a fine-grained account of how migrant writers in her study moved fluidly and meaningfully when the socioeconomic values they covertly or overtly ascribed to their language and literate resources and practices closely aligned with the actual value of those in the global linguistic market. From Nimet's back and forth translations across Azerbaijan, Russian, and English with the assistance of dictionaries to ESL teacher Alicia's messy reworking of Hebrew, Spanish, English, Arabic, basic French, and Portuguese, these are all important reminders of transnational writers' fluid and dynamic movement within, between, and across the language and literate resources within their reach. However, coexisting side-by-side with such literate fluidities and successes, as Leonard so aptly reminds us, were contrastive patterns and types of literate movement, i.e. "stalled movement" (67), that also deserve much of our attention. In this sense, the extended accounts in chapter three highlight transnational literate experiences of being "lost", "stuck" (67), and "frozen" (84) as previously valued and respected language and literate repertoires — both socially and professionally — became denigrated and marginalized after migration to the US. In chapter four, Leonard addresses a third and final feature of transnational literate movement, that of "friction", which she describes, quoting anthropologist Anna Tsing,

as “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (92). More specifically, Lorimer Leonard explores the degree to which her participants experienced the uneasy dissonance of having to make sense of “the simultaneous mobilizing and fixing” (115) of their language and literate repertoires as they moved within and across the literate contexts of “work, community, school, and family” (93). Attending to both the successes and struggles of the transnational female migrant writers in this study as they dynamically negotiate the fluctuating, often conflicting, valuation of literacy, chapter five concludes with some potential implications for designing and redesigning more responsive pedagogies and policies.

Ultimately, Fraiberg et al.’s and Lorimer Leonard’s contributions demonstrate that there is a lot of work still to be done when it comes to understanding the politics of mobility in language and literacy learning and development among the increasing numbers of international and (im)migrant writers in our institutions, programs, and classes and subsequently deciding on how to most effectively address the linguistic and “literate speed-ups and slow-downs” (Leonard 68) they will encounter along the way in their academic, professional, and civic lives. Destabilizing and rewriting our usual views and treatments of language(s) and literacy/ies as neutral, autonomous, and self-contained entities “ontologically distinct from mobility,” these rich transnational ethnographies prompt much needed and sustained reflections on what it means to consistently reimagine and engage written English, including its study and teaching, “as *of* mobility . . . constituted *by* mobility and as a *construct of* mobility” (Stroud and Prinsloo xi), for whom, toward what effects, at what cost, and under what conditions. Such a mobility-oriented shift in language and literacy research and education will without doubt add considerable messiness and unpredictability to already over-worked WPAs, contingent writing faculty and graduate students who continue to staff writing courses. However, addressing the increasing complexity of the role and labor of the transnational WPA in response to the changing realities of higher education both nationally and internationally, Martins has emphasized the significance of emic, locally-driven knowledge and awareness beginning with increased, sustained “interactions of students and faculty across normally conceived borders . . . between languages, cultures, economies, and institutions” (15–16). Following this line of thought, “thinking big” in relation to mobile languages and literacies while “acting small” through making local and gradual changes to policies and practices in writing programs and individual writing classrooms—changes which are within the scope of our own power and attentive to the affordances of

our local material realities—seems to be a viable and productive way to approach the challenging yet necessary mobility work ahead of us.

WORKS CITED

- Adey, Peter. "If Mobility is Everything Then it is Nothing: Towards a Relational Politics of (Im)mobilities." *Mobilities*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2006, pp. 75–94.
- Bawarshi, Anis. "The Work of Mobility." The Thomas R. Watson Conference on Rhetoric and Composition Working Paper Series. U of Louisville, 2016.
- Hawkins, Margaret, and Junko Mori. "Considering 'Trans-' Perspectives in Language Theories and Practices" *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1–8. doi:10.1093/applin/amx056.
- Martins, David. *Transnational Writing Program Administration*. Utah State UP, 2015.
- Stroud, Christopher, and Mastin Prinsloo. *Language, Literacy, and Diversity: Moving Words*. Routledge, 2015.
- Tsing, Anna. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton UP, 2004.

Nancy Bou Ayash is assistant professor of language and rhetoric at the University of Washington. Her research interests are in academic writing research and instruction, particularly translingual writing theory and pedagogy. Her current research focuses on the complex ways in which language ideologies of dominant monolingualism, conventional multilingualism, and incipient translingualism operate and coexist in tension in transnational writing contexts. Her work has appeared in *College English* and various edited collections. Her monograph, *Toward Translingual Realities in Composition: (Re)Working Local Language Representations and Practices*, is forthcoming from Utah State University Press.



Rewriting Labor in Composition

Meridith Reed

McClure, Randall, Dayna V. Goldstein, and Michael A. Pemberton, eds. *Labored: The State(ment) and Future of Work in Composition*. Parlor Press, 2017. 344 pages.

Labor issues are integral to composition as a field. In many ways, the practice of teaching writing has been defined by the labor conditions in which the practice occurs. In her 1991 book, *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition*, Susan Miller traces the ways in which composition's origins as a female-dominated "service" discipline have shaped composition's attempts to re-identify itself as masculine and scientific. The field has worked to move past the image of the "sad women in the basement" (Miller 121) to a new image of professionalized, tenured, research-focused scholars who are shaping a serious academic discipline. And yet, the general trend in higher education towards more and more contingent faculty and composition's ongoing need to staff many sections of writing courses means that exploited contingent laborers still permeate the field of composition. Randall McClure, Dayna V. Goldstein, and Michael A. Pemberton's edited collection *Labored: The State(ment) and Future of Work in Composition* addresses these concerns directly and proposes ways to update our field's professional statements to respond to current trends like adjunct online teaching, diverse institution types and student bodies, and fewer tenured and tenure-track lines.

The chapters in this collection are all built around the 1989 *Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing*, which argued for improved labor conditions for college writing instructors, particularly contingent faculty and graduate instructors. The *Statement* was a response to the 1986 Wyoming Conference on English, where a graduate student stood and described the ways she and her first-year students were oppressed; then, she asked, "Why aren't you all talking about this?" (8). Her emotional question struck a chord, and soon attendees of the confer-

ence had drafted the Wyoming Resolution, a statement advocating for fair pay and working conditions for contingent faculty, avenues for exploited instructors to share grievances, and censures for noncompliant institutions. Three years later, CCCC developed their 1989 *Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing*, a statement which was immediately met with controversy. As Jeanne Gunner writes in her chapter, “Elegy for a *Statement*,” many “whose voices the *Resolution* represented” were angered by the *Statement* which they felt was “a revisionist document—already, in fact, a recension—that served the professional self-interest of the academically privileged” (54).

Although the *Statement* was updated in 2013, McClure, Goldstein, and Pemberton argue the update “deemphasizes labor issues and focuses instead on pedagogical best practices” (xix), thus moving away from the purpose of the original statement and the *Wyoming Resolution* which sparked it. The hope of their collection is to “open up this discussion” and “lead to improved working conditions for all writing teachers” (xix). And, indeed, this collection is not timid about addressing the ongoing labor issues in composition, including working conditions for contingent faculty, the lack of recognition of writing center professionals (see chapter 3 “My War on the CCCC *Statement*” by Valerie Balester), and the challenges inherent in being a junior writing program administrator (see chapter 6 “The jWPA: Caught Between the Promises of Portland and Laramie” by Timothy R. Dougherty).

The book is divided in three sections: the first recounts and reflects on the creation of the *Statement*, the second explores how the *Statement* measures up (or not) with current labor conditions in the field, and the third explicitly examines ways to revisit and revise the *Statement* now. The collection contains a variety of perspectives on composition’s complicated labor issues, creating a productive tension that is perhaps best exemplified in an early chapter by Chris Anson, entitled “I Stand Here Ironing.”¹ He writes an imaginary dialogue formatted as an exchange between two competing voices as the speaker “stands here ironing.” Both voices are Anson’s in the sense that they draw on his personal knowledge and experience of the field, but the tormented and often sharp dialogue makes clear just how complex the issues of labor are in composition and emphasizes the professional divide between tenured and non-tenure track faculty’s concerns, situations, and identities.

The competing voices of the collection are also apparent in two chapters that appear side-by-side in the section on current labor conditions in the field. In their chapter, “A State of Permanent Contingency: Writing Programs, Hiring Practices, and a Persistent Breach of Ethics,” Casie J. Fedukovich, Susan Miller-Cochran, Brent Simoneaux, and Robin Snead argue

that the CCCC Writing Program Certificate of Excellence, by “awarding the status of ‘Program of Excellence’ to schools that still rely overwhelmingly on underpaid, time-poor contingent labor,” ultimately “normalizes and promotes practices against which many in the discipline are stringently fighting” (139). For Fedukovich et al., the solution may be a “path to tenure for faculty with a focus on teaching” (143) and “a move away from a state of permanent contingency” (144). In contrast, in “Contingency, Access, and the Material Conditions of Teaching and Learning in the Statement,” Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano believe that “the *Statement* is out of line with the practical realities of modern American writing instruction” (147–48). They propose that the field recognize the reality that most graduates of MA and PhD programs in English who stay in academia will end up teaching writing courses in the two-year college system where contingency is the norm. Rather than emphasizing the unlikely and idealized standards of wide-spread tenure lines, Hassel and Giordano argue that the field’s organizations should instead create standards that professionalize non-tenure-track and part-time positions and address the realities of the working conditions of most of the field’s writing instructors. They also note the importance of effective graduate pedagogy education and ongoing professional development for writing instructors. Since most graduate students, whether their emphasis is in American literature, creative writing, film, or folklore, will end up teaching writing courses in their academic careers, Hassel and Giordano encourage us to ask how well our field is preparing them for the work they will actually do. It is an important and underexplored question.

One of the most compelling pieces in the collection is the first chapter by Susan Wyche, the anonymous graduate student who stood at the Wyoming Conference and shared her powerful tale of exploitation at her institution. In this chapter, Wyche recounts the difficult labor conditions that drove her to tearfully share her experiences in Wyoming, including low pay, a course overload without appropriate compensation, lack of resources and support, and unhelpful administration. After existing in the field’s consciousness for so long as the “anonymous graduate student,” Wyche’s perspective and voice are a welcome addition to the conversation. She writes that working conditions “must be re-engaged as a mainstream issue for all campuses, and all disciplines” (12) and notes that it may be “time for the ‘anonymous’ teachers of institutions today to speak out about the new realities of teaching and learning in postsecondary writing, in league with their fellow workers in other disciplines” (13). Her call for composition teachers to speak out about the realities of their teaching environments is an important one in a scholarly discipline whose published scholarship and administrative decision-making come primarily from tenure-line faculty.

A key theme that emerges across the collection is the need for professional development for writing faculty, including adequate training in the teaching of writing for graduate students and ongoing engagement in the field's research and conversations for experienced writing faculty. As Barry Maid and Barbara D'Angelo write in their chapter, "Recognizing Realities," writing teacher "expertise must be dynamic" and involve a "continuous cycle of professional development" as well as "regular review" (197). They propose an accreditation approach that articulates outcomes for working conditions that can be externally evaluated and assessed (206). Alice S. Horning, in "A Focus on Reading as an Essential Component of the Next *Statement*," argues that composition instructors are reading teachers as well as writing teachers, and, as such, even "graduate students, part-timers, and untenured faculty who teach writing need professional development equivalent to that provided for full-time faculty" (220), especially in teaching reading skills. In the afterword to the collection, Joseph Harris emphasizes that "sweeping calls for tenure are less realistic than nostalgic" and that writing programs must acknowledge that they "depend on the good work of teachers who will never be considered for tenure" (286). This means fair wages, appropriate resources, and ongoing professional development for the instructors who provide the bulk of undergraduate writing instruction in the US.

Importantly, several authors also point to the changes in labor conditions wrought by technological advancement. In her chapter, "Rethinking the 'Legitimate' Reasons for Hiring Adjunct Faculty," Evelyn Beck points out that online courses have allowed online adjunct faculty to adopt a more entrepreneurial and independent spirit, having the freedom to choose when and where to work. The growing demand for online writing instruction also presents some of these faculty with the ability to negotiate some aspects of their working conditions. Beck acknowledges that there are still unresolved labor issues for online adjunct faculty (including institutional isolation) but suggests that revisions to the *Statement* should recognize that "some adjunct faculty view themselves as entrepreneurs and have fashioned a flexible professional life worthy of respect" (183). Beck's argument is reinforced by another chapter in the collection: in "Going Digital" James P. Purdy notes that digital scholarship and digital pedagogy constitute an important subfield of composition, and yet online writing instruction itself is often marginalized and seen as "peripheral to the field." He proposes that a revised *Statement* account for "how digital technologies have changed and enhanced opportunities for widespread, instantaneous, and global written communication" (239), and that both students and instructors be adequately prepared and supported for learning and teaching in digital environments.

One weakness of this collection is also a weakness of research throughout our field: although some of the authors here come from the ranks of contingent faculty and graduate students, the majority of the essays are authored by tenured faculty. The *Statement* came to be because a graduate student shared publicly how she was being exploited by her institution; in the spirit of that original exigence, this collection would have benefited from more research, stories, and arguments by contingent faculty and graduate instructors. At the same time, *Labored* does acknowledge the difficulty inherent in marginalized faculty speaking out on labor conditions. Susan Wyche emphasizes that her identification as an “anonymous graduate student” in the original discussions swirling around the *Wyoming Resolution* and the *Statement* was an attempt to protect her from facing negative consequences from her institution if she were identified by name. Fedukovich et al. also acknowledge the risk that contingent faculty may face by participating in “Explicit, public, detailed discussions of salaries and working conditions” and that “Anonymity is crucial in situations where employment can be terminated at-will” (140). Besides this risk, there may be other reasons why more contingent voices are not present in the current volume, including the fact that contingent faculty often face lack of time and resources for research writing, carry heavy teaching loads, and have a sense of not being a professional in the field (see Penrose). Whatever the reason, the absence of their individual voices is felt as contingent faculty again become primarily a group that is written about rather than a strong voice in their own conversation.

Despite this flaw, the collection is a significant and needed contribution to the literature on labor issues in composition. Perhaps the greatest contribution of this collection comes in the closing chapter and appendix by the editors, McClure, Goldstein, and Pemberton, who examine why a long history of conversations and statements in the field about labor conditions have not, by and large, resulted in improved working conditions for contingent faculty. They propose that the problem lies in composition’s reliance on qualitative research and resistance to quantitative research, a problem that has been identified by many other scholars in the field (see Anson; Haswell; Howard). This preference for the qualitative over the quantitative “has left the discipline vulnerable to legislative and administrative decisions that tend to be based largely on quantitative data” (McClure, Goldstein, and Pemberton 271). Writing as a discipline must use the most persuasive means and data to enact the working conditions that we know lead to better outcomes for both instructors and students. McClure, Goldstein, and Pemberton demonstrate with exhaustive annotations to the *Statement* that much valuable quantitative data already exists: data that could help make arguments

in favor of improved working conditions. But they note that further quantitative work, especially work on the relationship between contingent labor working conditions and quality of instruction, remains to be done.

Another valuable contribution of this book is its clear call to action. In addition to the editors' call for more quantitative data that can be used to argue for better working conditions, nearly every chapter makes specific recommendations for changes to the wording and content of the *Statement* (some even drafting sample paragraphs of what these revisions might look like). At the end of an early chapter, one voice in Chris Anson's dialogue asks another to "stop reflecting, back and forth with the iron, and do something!" This collection is a clear call to *do something* about the pressing labor issues that continue to haunt our work as researchers and teachers of writing. One hopes that this fine collection will result in the kind of changes to labor conditions for marginalized faculty that have so far largely eluded composition as a field.

NOTE

1. The title is a reference to the Tillie Olsen short story, "I Stand Here Ironing," about a mother grappling with her guilt over whether she could have been a better parent to her oldest daughter. The story ends on a hopeful note that the daughter will find her way despite the mistakes and regrets of her mother.

WORKS CITED

- Anson, Chris M. "The Intelligent Design of Writing Programs: Reliance on Belief or a Future of Evidence." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2008, pp. 11–36.
- Haswell, Richard H. "NCTE/CCCC's Recent War on Scholarship." *Written Communication*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2005, pp. 198–223.
- Howard, Rebecca Moore. "Why this Humanist Codes." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2014, pp. 75–81.
- Miller, Susan. "The Sad Women in the Basement." *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition*. Southern Illinois UP, 1991, pp. 121–41.
- Penrose, Ann M. "Professional Identity in a Contingent-Labor Profession: Expertise, Autonomy, Community in Composition Teaching." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2012, pp. 108–26.
- Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing*. CCCC. *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1989, pp. 329–36.

Meridith Reed is assistant professor of English at Brigham Young University. Her research interests include writing program administration and writing pedagogy education.

Review

Viewing Directed Self-Placement Through a Multilingual, Multicultural, Transdisciplinary, and Ethical Lens

Marie Webb

Saenkhum, Tanita. *Decisions, Agency, and Advising: Key Issues in The Placement of Multilingual Writers*. UP of Colorado / Utah State UP, 2016. Available in ebook, PDF, and paperback editions. 168 pages.

In 2001, the *CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers* was released; it was revised in 2009 and reaffirmed in 2014. The newest additions to the statement address the placement of multilingual students in first-year composition (FYC) with a specific section supporting directed self-placement (DSP). Even with substantial calls in the past two decades to address the needs of multilingual writers, at many institutions little has changed with regard to placement of multilingual writers. *Decisions, Agency, and Advising* by Tanita Saenkhum addresses the 2009 CCCC position statement and fills a void in empirical research by offering a microanalysis of seven multilingual writers' FYC placement experiences at Arizona State University (ASU). Saenkhum focuses on students' perspectives, which are often neglected in placement research.

The book is intended for first-year English (FYE) directors and writing across the curriculum (WAC) directors who are curious to learn more about modified DSP. Teachers of all disciplines who have little knowledge or training about the diverse backgrounds and identities of multilingual writers will also want to read Saenkhum's piece. Many writing program administrators (WPAs) "find themselves in unfamiliar territory when it comes to assessment work," and they may have even more unfamiliarity with anti-racist and ethical placement agendas (167). Extending Miller's argument,

many WPAs and writing instructors do not have sufficient understanding of assessment and placement of multilingual writers. *Decisions, Agency, and Advising* explicitly addresses the 2009 Second Language Writing (SLW) statement's call for instructors who are sensitive to the needs of multilingual writers. The statement reads:

Any writing course, including basic writing, first-year composition, advanced writing, and professional writing, as well as any writing-intensive course that enrolls any second language writers should be taught by an instructor who is able to identify and is prepared to address the linguistic and cultural needs of second language writers.

Saenkhum extends the SLW Statement's call for teacher preparation to not only writing instructors and WPAs, but also to placement advisors. Interviews demonstrated that most ASU placement advisors were not prepared to address the rich linguistic and cultural backgrounds of multilingual advisees.

Therefore, *Decisions, Agency, and Advising* is one of the most current resources for advisors, WPAs, and teachers who need additional training working with multilingual students. The book is also one of the first extensive, qualitative documentations of DSP's viability among multilingual writers. The 2009 SLW Position Statement states that writing programs need to provide resources for teachers who are working with second language writers, and that teachers also need encouragement and incentives for additional training. Saenkhum's book is a resource that teachers and WPAs can be excited about; there is no longer an expansive gap in research surrounding the effectiveness of DSP among multilingual students.

Additionally, the 2009 SLW Statement recognizes the need for long-term support via WAC and graduate student writing support. Although no graduate students were interviewed, multilingual students in the study reported wanting further writing support after FYC. Furthermore, a host of unique questions about writing support are raised concerning students entering or returning to the U.S. from other undergraduate and graduate level programs with English medium instruction. One student in the study graduated from an English medium high school in Dubai, Jasim. He is a proficient speaker of Arabic and English, and received an A+ in multilingual composition. Struggling to maintain enthusiasm for the course, Jasim perceived his classmates as being unmotivated and the course as fairly easy (66). He might have had more satisfaction in a non-multilingual writing course; he mentioned that he was considering a mainstream second-semester FYE course. Yet, as Saenkhum noted in her interview with him, Jasim believed international students could take only the multilingual sec-

tion of composition in their first semester (66). Jasim's case represents a nuanced perspective of the challenges that multilingual writers from English medium international high schools face in the United States.

Several important reviews of the literature on multilingual writers are highlighted in Chapter One. For readers who may be unfamiliar with ethical terminology for multilingual students, Saenkhum provides a detailed list of resources and reasons to support using the term multilingual to describe the diversity of her participants, who include United States citizens, permanent United States residents, and international visa students.¹

Chapter one frames the book around Saenkhum's prior experiences as a graduate teaching assistant at ASU who knew very little about the placement processes of her multilingual student writers. The study grew out of her teaching experiences as she discovered that her students also knew very little about why they were taking a particular writing course. Seeking to fix the problem of a lack of shared knowledge among multilingual students and teachers regarding writing placement, Saenkhum traveled back to ASU to conduct the study after receiving a tenure-track position at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Seven student placement experiences are presented via detailed portraits in which direct quotes are utilized. Saenkhum shifts between descriptive content and quotes with her analytical discussion because she wants the voices of multilingual writers in her study to prevail (25). Each portrait spans a period of time over one year and captures student's experiences before, during and after placement. Not only does Saenkhum intertwine her critique and discussion with direct quotes from students, but she also provides a section at the end of each portrait outlining students' recommendations for placement changes.

For readers who may be unfamiliar with placement methods involving student agency, Saenkhum consolidates placement processes into two categories in chapter one: methods that "interfere" with student agency such as standardized test scores, timed writing samples, and portfolios (unless students retake tests or have a placement choice offered to them) and methods that "are designed to maximize student agency" such as DSP and the Writers Profile (16). Royer and Gilles' founding philosophy of DSP is that students have the ability to take an active role in selecting FYC courses. Therefore, it is ethical to honor student's autonomy, as they often know far more about their writing experiences and needs than administrators.

Student agency is realized when students act on their own terms and beliefs about their writing. A drastic departure from traditional placement requires a change in attitude among placement committees and requires students to think critically about their writing experiences and skills in relation to specific course offerings (61). Saenkhum describes her theory

of agency in chapter two as “acts of agency” comprised of five conditions: entailing students’ negotiation of placement, choosing to accept or deny an original placement decision, self-assessment of proficiency upon choosing a writing course, questioning placement, and planning for placement (37).

Chapter three presents detailed portraits of two students’ placement experiences with the ultimate argument that more detailed placement information better equips students to “exercise agency” (40). One of the major findings in chapter three reveals that a type of modified directed self-placement option that still incorporates the use of standardized test scores can be very promising for large universities. At the time of the study, ASU was using test scores to help guide students with placement options while highlighting a student’s freedom to make the final placement decision. Students were able to take another placement test if they were not happy with their previous test scores, and the alternative was to be provided to students by advisors.

The modified DSP option at ASU seems to have worked successfully in Saenkhum’s accounts because of the combination of test scores and self-assessment practices as compared to a recent online, pilot DSP project at large university in California. Ferris, Evans, and Kurzer report that multilingual writers voices may play a role in placement, but that self-assessment alone is not enough for accurate placement into a complex sequence of four courses (1). Several students interviewed in Saenkhum’s study believed they made successful placement decisions based upon not only their test scores, but also other information provided to them by the program, advisors, friends, and family. The major differences between both studies are the humanistic and nuanced reports from Saenkhum in addition to her consideration of student’s long-term success rather than a comparison of students’ initial self-assessment questionnaires and test scores.

However, not all students felt so positively about the modified DSP system. In chapter four, Saenkhum presents portraits of two students who were less satisfied with their placement decisions, and therefore she argues that self-assessing as a crucial aspect of placement. One of the students in chapter four, Pascal, claimed that his advisor had told him that taking multilingual composition would help him avoid extra work (53). Saenkhum highlights that Pascal and another student named Jonas both did not receive accurate information from placement advisors.

Regardless of their positive or negative placement experiences, students reported a desire for additional placement information. During an interview, two students explained to Saenkhum that the university should have provided models of writing assignments. The students also wanted to see more details about activities and assignments in each course level.

Several students discussed in chapters three and four also noted that they were unaware that they had a choice in their placement decision, which Saenkhum explains was a major program failure as the program had intended for them to have a choice.

Chapter five provides evidence of students' second-semester placement decisions as being heavily influenced by other outside factors. Students' exercised agency by questioning various second-semester placement options, and by planning whether or not to postpone a multilingual second-semester placement course. The key finding in chapter five is that students had an "emerging condition" such as a change in major or decision to transfer to another institution that initiated what they deemed as a successful negotiation of placement.

After discussing the nuances of students in her study, Saenkhum moves on to discuss her interviews with advisors in the program in chapter six. One of the major findings of the study is that students are heavily influenced by academic advisors' recommendations and that academic advisors were the worst source of quality placement information (37). If academic advisors were not clear that students had a placement choice, then students lacked agency. Saenkhum defines *acts of agency* as the ability for students to negotiate placement, make an informed choice to accept or deny placement (being aware that they have a choice), self-assess in relation to a course, question placement, or plan for placement (37). For example, Jasim reported that he wished his advisor had been clearer after finding out from Saenkhum during an interview that he should have been given a choice in his course placement. Not receiving accurate and informed placement information from advisors was an additional major finding that was confirmed with interviews from advisors. Some advisors focused more on discussing courses required for students' majors rather than English placement. Saenkhum explains that while some advisors were generally concerned with students' understanding of the English placement process and the many placement options available, most advisors needed more training on working with multilingual students; she discovered that advisors falsely viewed multilingual students as international visa students via their accents or TOEFL scores, and such views may have led to less satisfactory advising (78–79).

In chapters seven and eight, Saenkhum provides recommendations for writing teachers' roles in placement as well as practical recommendations regarding the role of student agency in placement decisions. Saenkhum's final recommendation is for writing instructors to have more training and involvement in student placement. Her recommendation aligns with the advice and experiences of students in the study. My only critique of the methodology is that future researchers may be wise to observe academic

advisors during their placement conversations with students and obtain e-mail or recorded phone conversations for further data analysis and validity. Saenkhum offers some short comparisons among advisors and teachers perspectives with student experiences in chapters six through eight, but she solely relies on reported information.

For researchers seeking to operationalize the variable of student agency, Saenkhum's detailed description of her coding process in appendix C is relevant to scholars in many fields. Saenkhum establishes her own credibility as well as the study's reliability by providing examples of codes that were combined and collapsed. She also shared coding negotiations that took place with her trained coding partner. In addition, Saenkhum outlines the failures of her original coding process that ultimately led to well-justified coding changes for successful operationalization of student agency. Additional tools are the interview guides for students, writing teachers, and academic advisors provided in appendix B.

One of the most interesting recommendations Saenkhum makes is for required L2 writing courses. I feel her statement on teacher training seems like a hidden treasure in the book. She states that programs "in rhetoric and composition, applied linguistics, and TESOL, among others, should offer a course in teaching L2 writing and make it a requirement for graduate students" (62–63). There will likely be substantial changes in program evaluation and placement in coming years as a result of the nuanced findings presented in Saenkhum's work, but changes can and should take place in the realm of writing teacher education.

Although it is not an explicitly stated intention of the book, there are also connections between Saenkhum's focus on student agency that strike a very similar resemblance to discussions among current writing transfer theorists and researchers. One of the major tenants of DSP is to help foster and utilize students' self-efficacy for long-term academic success. Similarly, one of the major influences of writing transfer success stories is a student's self-efficacy. Driscoll and Wells write about the important role of the individual for long-term writing success (9). Wells found that students with a positive self-efficacy were able to write with persistence in various unfamiliar genres (165). Some of the students interviewed in Saenkhum's book show powerful examples of how promoting student self-efficacy starting directly during the placement process can lead to positive experiences with writing placement. Perhaps future FYC researchers should pay critical attention to how DSP may impact writing transfer among their students.

As the field of second language writing (SLW) continues to grow, it is clear that writing teachers are more frequently engaged with transdisciplinary work. Paul Kei Matsuda characterized the field of SLW as being

transdisciplinary because the field “transcends various disciplinary and institutional structures addressing issues surrounding second language writing and writers” (448). *Decisions, Agency, and Advising* is one recent example of a transdisciplinary study concerning the long-term effects of student writing placement. Writing teachers, FYC directors, writing program administrators, and professors alike in a variety of educational contexts and disciplines will benefit from having read this well-crafted, empirically informed book.

NOTE

1. I use the term multilingual because it most accurately represents the diversity and fluidity of identities among multicultural, multilingual, and multidialectal students.

WORKS CITED

- CCCC *Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers*. Conference on College Composition and Communication, Nov. 2014, cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/secondlangwriting.
- Driscoll, Dana L., and Jennifer Wells. “Beyond Knowledge and Skills: Writing Transfer and the Role of Student Dispositions.” *Composition Forum*, no. 26, 2012, compositionforum.com/issue/26/beyond-knowledge-skills.php.
- Ferris, Dana R., Katherine Evans, and Kendon Kurzer. “Placement of Multilingual Writers: Is There a Role For Student Voices?” *Assessing Writing*, vol. 32, 2017, pp. 1–11.
- Matsuda, Paul K., “Response: What *Is* Second Language Writing—And Why Does it Matter?” *Journal of Second Language Writing*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2013, pp. 448–50. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2013.08.011.
- Miller, Katrina L. “Thinking Ecologically and Ethically About Assessment.” *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2016, pp. 166–80.
- Royer, Daniel J., and Roger Gilles. “Directed Self-Placement: An Attitude of Orientation.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1998, pp. 54–70.
- Wells, Jennifer Marie Holcomb. *Millennials Strike Back: Students’ Reports of Knowledge Transfer from High School to College*. PhD dissertation, Indiana U of Pennsylvania, 2011.

Marie Webb is a doctoral candidate in English composition and applied linguistics at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and is interested in writing teacher identity in composition and TESOL. She has been teaching since 2010 in a wide range of settings including California community colleges and universities and has international teaching experience in Seoul, South Korea, Tokyo, Japan, and Macau, China. In addition to her English language and writing teaching, Marie has also taught Master’s level coursework at the University of San Diego’s Master of Education in TESOL program and teaches online TESOL education courses at Anaheim University.



**Do you want to quickly identify which students need help?
How early in a term would you like to know that?**

Writers show their strengths and struggles long before the final draft. Their engagement in feedback and reflection indicates if they are on track to revise well. Instructors who tune in early can intervene sooner and more effectively.

Eli Review is a peer learning app for revision and feedback that helps instructors coach students' engagement in write-review-revise cycles. Because Eli's focus is on formative feedback, the system offers student engagement data relevant to:

- Noticing at-risk students earlier
- Identifying ways to coach students who most need your help
- Finding students who need to be challenged
- Finding students who can help others learn

Eli provides formative information for student success.

In addition to what we provide instantly, we also offer research support for instructors and programs. All data in the system can be exported, either by instructors inside the app or through custom queries, which we provide as part of our data services for institutional subscribers.

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY MA RHETORIC & COMPOSITION

- Explore minority rhetorics, digital literacies, writing centers, writing and empathy, and more
 - Work with nationally recognized faculty
 - Teach writing in high schools and universities
 - Develop and lead writing initiatives
 - Write professionally
 - Pursue the PhD in Rhetoric and Composition
- “My experience in the program has been invaluable to me as a composition instructor and to my development as a PhD student.” —Casie Moreland
- Graduate Assistantships,
Scholarships, and Financial
Aid available

CONTACT: MARC@TXSTATE.EDU 512-245-7684
MARC.ENGLISH.TXSTATE.EDU

UNR Graduate Programs in Rhetoric, Writing, and Public Engagement

MA in English: Emphasis in Rhetoric and Writing Studies
Explores scholarly and professional contexts for writing

MA in English: Emphasis in Public Engagement
Bridges activism and rhetorical education

PhD in English: Emphasis in Rhetoric & Composition
Features graduate faculty specializing in rhetorics of disability, political economy, science policy, complex systems, higher education, student agency, and publics and prisons

Visit www.unr.edu/english/graduates/ for more information.



University of Nevada, Reno

Photo courtesy of CuterCommuter.com | Attribution, Share Alike

DEPARTMENT OF

WRITING, RHETORIC, & DISCOURSE

Master of Arts Degree in

WRITING, RHETORIC, & DISCOURSE

with concentrations in

PROFESSIONAL & DIGITAL WRITING

TEACHING WRITING & LANGUAGE

Graduate Certificate in TESOL

Combined BA/MA in

Writing, Rhetoric, & Discourse

GRADUATE FACULTY

Julie Bokser

Antonio Ceraso

Lisa Dush

Timothy Elliott

Jason Kalin

Jason Schneider

Peter Vandenberg

Erin Workman

WRD.DEPAUL.EDU

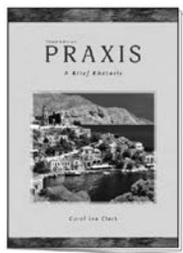
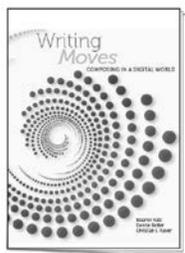




FOUNTAINHEAD
PRESS

Fountainhead Press is a unique, independent publisher concerned with producing innovative, low-cost textbooks and custom products. Our mission focuses on working with universities to create ideal, program-specific texts. Importantly, we prioritize sustainable printing practices, using only FSC certified printers and printing on 30% post-consumer waste, recycled paper.

Fountainhead Press content represents the most recent conversations in teaching Composition.



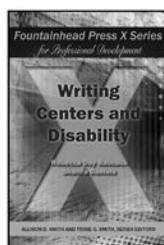
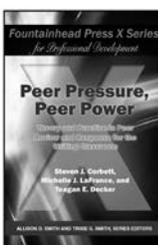
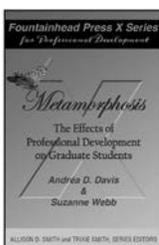
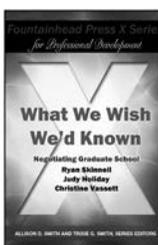
Writing in Transit focuses on transfer-based learning and includes cross-disciplinary, scholarly readings.

Writing Moves constitutes a sustained inquiry into what it means to become a writer who is rhetorically aware and who can deploy a variety of strategies to compose effectively in print and digital contexts.

Our best-selling **Praxis** offers the principles of historical rhetoric and the writing process while maintaining maximum flexibility for instructors.

Active Voices seeks to provide student agency through insights into the structure and language of academia. AV's primary goal is to support the efficacy of writing instruction and help students move from passive recipients of instruction to active voices in their own educational careers.

Our X-Series for Professional Development offers peer-reviewed scholarly articles regarding the most pressing issues facing Composition faculty.



Four popular titles in our 12 title series

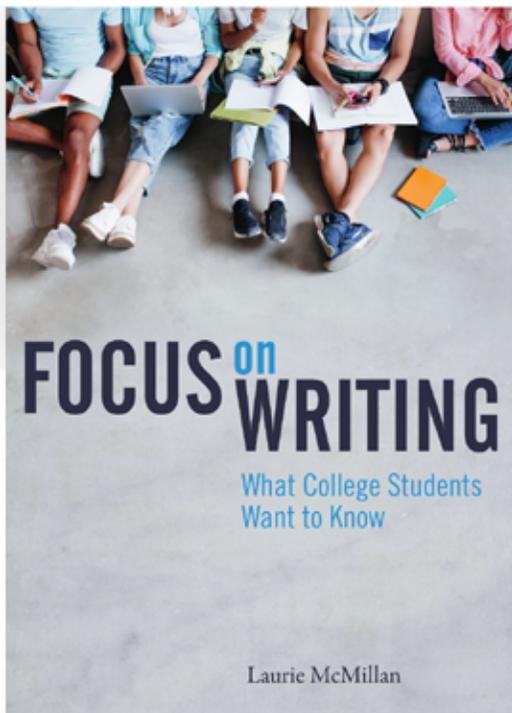
www.fountainheadpress.com

Focus on Writing

What College Students Want to Know



NEW FROM
BROADVIEW PRESS
Laurie McMillan
382 pages | \$49.95
978-1-55481-388-9



"Though the named audience is college students, teachers will benefit from McMillan's example: reading the book is like sharing an office with an especially thoughtful and knowledgeable colleague, learning from them how to work with students."

— Benjamin Miller,
University of Pittsburgh

Key Features



Accessible and engaging for students



Inquiry-based, with each chapter title asking a key question in writing studies



User-friendly for new teachers, flexible for experienced teachers



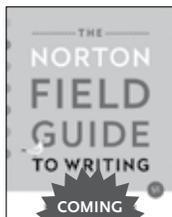
Attentive to both threshold concepts and practical strategies

For more information, or to order a book online, please visit www.broadviewpress.com.
To consider a text for course use, please contact examcopies@broadviewpress.com.



W. W. NORTON & COMPANY

INDEPENDENT AND EMPLOYEE-OWNED • WWNORTON.COM



COMING
JANUARY
2019

The Norton Field Guide to Writing

FIFTH EDITION

RICHARD BULLOCK,
MAUREEN DALY GOGGIN,
FRANCINE WEINBERG

The best-selling, most flexible rhetoric that lets you teach the way you want to teach. With new

readings, advice for identifying false news, and help for writing across disciplines. Available with a handbook, additional readings, or both. Package InQuizitive for Writers with any version at no additional charge.

DIGITAL.WWNORTON.COM/FIELDGUIDE5

EBOOK AVAILABLE



"They Say/I Say": The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing

FOURTH EDITION

GERALD GRAFF,
CATHY BIRKENSTEIN

"They Say/I Say" shows students how to engage

with the ideas of others—in sciences, social sciences, and literature. With new guidelines for Disagreeing Respectfully and Entering Online Conversations. Just \$22 net or \$5 when bundled with most other texts.

DIGITAL.WWNORTON.COM/THEYSAY4

EBOOK AVAILABLE



The Little Seagull Handbook

THIRD EDITION

RICHARD BULLOCK,
MICHAL BRODY,
FRANCINE WEINBERG

The pocket-sized handbook that does the work of a full-sized one.

Covers the kinds of writing college students need to do in an easy-to-use format. Only \$10 when packaged with any other Norton book. \$15 digital, with 4 years of access.

DIGITAL.WWNORTON.COM/LITTLESEAGULL3

EBOOK AVAILABLE



Everyone's an Author

SECOND EDITION,
MLA UPDATE

ANDREA LUNSFORD,
MICHAL BRODY, LISA EDE,
BEVERLY MOSS,
CAROLE CLARK PAPPER,
KEITH WALTERS

The rhetoric that shows students that the rhetorical skills they already use in social media and in other contexts are the same ones they'll need to succeed in college. Available in a version with additional readings and with a companion Tumblr site that is updated monthly.

DIGITAL.WWNORTON.COM/EVERYONE2

EBOOK AVAILABLE



THE NORTON WRITER'S PRIZE

Nominate your students' best writing for a chance to win an award of \$1,500 (first place) or \$1,000

(second place). Deadline for submission is June 15, 2019.

WWNORTON.COM/NORTONWRITERSPRIZE

INQUIZITIVE FOR WRITERS

An adaptive and game-like tool that helps students learn to edit what they write.

Assign as homework, use for group work, or inserts links to InQuizitive in students' papers for "just in time" help with the errors they're making. **NEW for Fall 2019:** Activities to help students work with sources

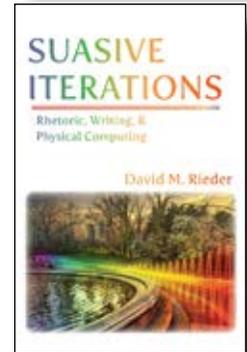
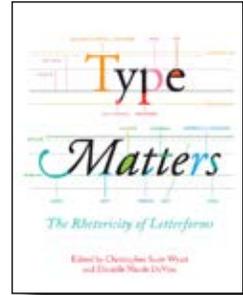
INQUIZITIVE.WWNORTON.COM

NEW, IN LIVING COLOR!

Type Matters: The Rhetoricity of Letterforms ed. Christopher Scott Wyatt and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss (BEST DESIGN AWARD-Ingram)

Rhetoric and Experience Architecture ed. Liza Potts & Michael J. Salvo

Suasive Iterations: Rhetoric, Writing, and Physical Computing
David M. Rieder



NEW RELEASES

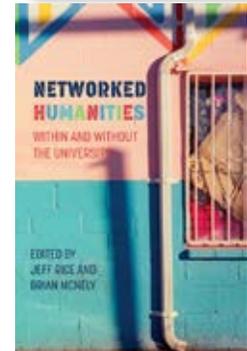
Networked Humanities: Within and Without the University edited by Brian McNely and Jeff Rice

The Internet as a Game by Jill Anne Morris

Identity and Collaboration in World of Warcraft by Phillip Michael Alexander

Best of the Journals in Rhetoric and Composition 2017

Rhetorics Change / Rhetoric's Change edited by Jenny Rice, Chelsea Graham, & Eric Detweiler (Rhetoric Society of America)



CONGRATULATIONS, AWARD WINNERS!

Strategies for Writing Center Research by Jackie Grutsch McKinnie.
Best Book Award, International Writing Centers Association (2017)

Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future by Asao Inoue, **BEST BOOK AWARD, CCCC, BEST BOOK, COUNCIL OF WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS (2017)**

The WPA Outcomes Statement—A Decade Later edited by Nicholas N. Behm, Gregory R. Glau, Deborah H. Holdstein, Duane Roen, & Edward M. White, **Best Book Award, Council of Writing Program Administrators (2015)**



www.parlorpress.com



Council of Writing Program Administrators

University of Delaware
Department of English
212 Memorial Hall
Newark, DE 19716

Change Service Requested

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
Paid
Newark, Delaware
Permit No. 26