

Please Take Care

Lori Ostergaard, Jacob Babb, and Jim Nugent

We need an embodied discourse, one that interprets body as neither a passive tabula rasa on which meanings are inscribed nor an inescapable animal that must be subdued before pure knowing can be achieved.

—Kristie S. Fleckenstein, “Writing Bodies: Somatic Mind in Composition Studies” (281)

In her introduction to *College English*'s recent special issue on scholarly editing, Melissa Ianetta writes about the effect an illness had on her work with the journal. Specifically, she describes

one of the many unseen relationships in editing: that between the body of the editor and the body of a journal. That is, editors are often invisible figures in the scholarship of our field, rarely discernible in our scholarly conversation. When they do appear, it's often as a disembodied spirit . . . (267)

As editors, our own attempts to remain disembodied and invisible have admittedly failed; our physical and psychic selves have recently made themselves stubbornly apparent. Like Ianetta, we have been reminded that bodies of scholarship (like *WPA*) and professional bodies (like *CWPA*) are constituted by an interconnected network of quite literal bodies—bodies that are susceptible in all the usual ways.

In the course of a few weeks, the three of us experienced a sprained ankle, a house fire, a broken leg, and a surgery. One of the editors has been working through depression and another through anxiety. All of us are dealing with the fatigue and frustration that attends our work as teachers, scholars, administrators, and editors and that affects our (attempted) lives beyond such work. We write this introduction for a scholarly community of *WPAs*, knowing that our readers, writers, and reviewers are experienc-

ing varying levels of stress and exhaustion—but hopefully, too, the pride and exhilaration that comes with work well done. A recent tragedy, however, makes us especially mindful of the need to share with one another the hardships we face in our professional and personal lives.

On September 16, Katie McWain, an assistant professor and WPA at Texas Woman’s University, took her life. Katie was one of the first assistant editors to work with us on the journal. We do not pretend to understand Katie’s struggles with the disease of depression, but her death has profoundly affected all who knew her. We feel keenly the loss of this promising young scholar and administrator. We are pained by the loss of a future marveling at Katie’s accomplishments, catching up with her at the annual WPA breakfast, and witnessing her broadening influence in the field. We grieve the loss of someone who entered our lives only too briefly, but who left us indelibly changed.

To honor Katie and acknowledge her passing, we asked a few of her friends and collaborators to share words in celebration of her life.

After learning of Katie’s death, I wrote to my colleague Rachel to share how important her mentorship was to Katie. She assured me she already knew: “Katie was generous with her appreciation.” Indeed, generosity was Katie’s way of being. In her classroom, she ensured each student felt invited to speak. In her brilliant dissertation on teacher preparation, she treated her subjects with graciousness and care. In our department, she served in order to better the community, to improve how we live and work together. We have lost a bright light.

—Shari Stenberg, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

It’s hard for me to separate the work Katie and I did together from our friendship because, for me, our work was an extension of our friendship. She brought the same comforting and encouraging spirit to both so I never felt like I let her down when I didn’t get my drafting done or forgot to read something. Toiling away on the fourth draft of a manuscript just felt like hanging out with my friend because she’d make a joke and laugh because she knew it wasn’t funny, which made it funny so I’d laugh, and we’d forget what we were doing. Katie made it so easy to love her, which is why so many feel the loss so deeply.

—Marcus Meade, University of Virginia

I find myself still reaching for my phone to text Katie. She and I were gWPAs together, and in our first faculty jobs we talked almost daily about the difficult, mundane, and sometimes absurd aspects of being junior-faculty WPAs. Katie was the type of friend and colleague who eagerly listened, offered perspectives, and shared resources. She believed in acknowledging the relational and emotional aspects of this work, in celebrating joy and accomplishment, and in making sure others knew they weren't alone in their experiences of frustration and disappointment. She was brilliant and kind and funny. I miss her dearly.

—Zachary Beare, North Carolina State University

Katie and I met through our work as assistant editors for WPA. Our collaboration quickly blossomed into a wonderful peer mentorship and friendship. My favorite memories of Katie are when we sat out in the sun in Pittsburgh after our Cs presentation to celebrate and when we had dinner together at the CWPA conference in Baltimore this summer, where she offered me all her job market wisdom. Katie's camaraderie has demonstrated what it means to be a supportive and compassionate person and WPA, and I will never forget that.

—Molly Ubbesen, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

*Katie was more than just a brilliant scholar and administrator. For me, her legacy lives in 100,000 moments and memories. She was a graduate student who kept a community literacy organization afloat, spending her afternoons devising literacy activities for a group of recalcitrant youth in the juvenile justice system. She was a scholar who could write a compelling critical theory blog post about *The Bachelor* in the morning and spend her afternoon melding her writing with yours on a conference proposal. She was the kind of friend who knew you better than you know yourself. Ultimately, the best way to honor Katie's memory is to earnestly remind a friend or colleague that, in spite of what they hear in the world or in this profession, they are working hard enough, trying hard enough, doing enough: we are all simply enough.*

—Nicole E. Green, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

These words remind us of everything we valued about our work with Katie when she was an assistant editor for the journal. We find it difficult to articulate our sense of loss, and we know that is true of many who have felt the impact of her passing. We thank everyone who contributed these thoughts and memories about Katie. She will be missed.

As we think about the challenges of being embodied in professional and discursive roles that demand we pretend otherwise, we are grateful for the field's growing attention to emotional labor and affect. And we especially appreciate the good work presented by many WPAs this past July as part of the self-care strand at the CWPA conference in Baltimore. As we all continue to heal and rebuild, we remain mindful that everyone involved in the production of this journal and everyone who reads it are human beings who sometimes need to reach out for help or to offer help to others. We may be united through our investment in program administration, but our real strength lies in the very human support that we offer to one another. Please take care, friends.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We close this introduction by acknowledging the contributions of our editorial board and our assistant editors. We are pleased to welcome Collie Fulford and Teresa Grettano to the editorial board. We look forward to the journal benefitting from their insight in the coming years. We are also pleased to officially make David Blakesley a member of the editorial board; his work on the production side of the journal has been invaluable for many years, and we wanted to add him to the board both to recognize his important contributions and to draw on his wisdom and experience.

With this issue we pause to thank our outgoing assistant editors, Amy Cicchino and Kelly Moreland. We are grateful to these two amazing scholars for their contributions to the journal over the past year. In turn, we are delighted to welcome Rebecca Pettiti and Katelyn Stark, who join Kendra Andrews to round out our team of assistant editors for 2019–20. We're also excited to welcome Eric D. Brown as our new advertising manager. We appreciate the contributions these team members have made to this issue of the journal, and we look forward to a productive and exciting year working with them.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the assistance of our undergraduate editorial assistants who worked with us to bring this issue to production: Elizabeth Bihary, Rachel Esarey, and Jaclyn Tockstein. It is an honor to mentor these students and offer them the opportunity to gain some important professional experience.

To all who subscribe and read the journal, we thank you for your continued support. We close by inviting you to join CWPA if you haven't yet done so, or to renew your membership at <http://www.wpacouncil.org/aws/CWPA/pt/sp/Join>.

WORKS CITED

- Fleckenstein, Kristie S. "Writing Bodies: Somatic Mind in Composition Studies." *College English*, vol. 61, no. 3, 1999, pp. 281–306.
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