



# WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

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## **Visibility, Ways of Knowing, and Sustainability in Two-Year College Writing Programs**

*Edited by Cheri Lemieux Spiegel, Darin Jensen, and Sarah Z. Johnson*

Don't Call It a Comeback: Two-Year College WPA, Tactics,  
Collaboration, Flexibility, Sustainability

Am I a WPA? Embracing the Multiverse of WPA Labor in  
Community College Contexts

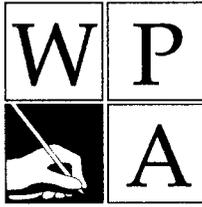
Departmental Democracy and Invention in Two-Year College  
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Interinstitutional Collaboration in an Era of  
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Preparing to Become a Two-Year College  
Writing Program Administrator



# Writing Program Administration

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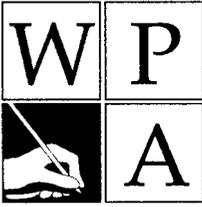
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# Don't Call It a Comeback: Two-Year College WPA, Tactics, Collaboration, Flexibility, Sustainability

Cheri Lemieux Spiegel, Darin Jensen, and Sarah Z. Johnson

While R. T. Farrell was the editor of volume 1, issue 1 of the newsletter that would become *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, it was produced and distributed by Michael Joyce, working from the offices of Jackson Community College. And although Harvey Wiener, first president of the CWPA, was at Pennsylvania State University when that issue was published, by the third issue he was on faculty at LaGuardia Community College. The secretary of the organization at the time was Lawrence Kasden of J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, who took on the production and distribution of the third volume of the newsletter. We might say that, like many students in this country, both *WPA* and the CWPA, got their start at a community college.

That first issue of the newsletter noted that it was designed “to serve the needs of all those directly concerned with the administration of writing programs in the field of postsecondary education” (p. 2). It went on to state: “Whether we teach at two or four year colleges, at technical institutes or at schools for the liberal arts, we are faced with common problems” (p. 2). Being inclusive was an intentional part of the ethos of that founding issue. The issue’s “Statement of Purpose” noted that the newsletter’s house style purposefully elected to avoid titles whenever possible as a means of emphasizing shared concerns over differences in positionality.

As the publication shifted into a refereed journal, two-year college presence eventually receded. Somehow over the time since its founding, the emphasis on our common problems became less central to conversations regarding two-year college programs. Instead, a trend emerged wherein two-year college writing programs had to argue themselves back into existence. This work, we might suggest, echoes the moves that both rhetoric and composition and writing program administration writ-large had to make to professionalize their own respective standings as distinct disciplines within the field. It will be the work of another investigation to trace this evolution from shared ownership to arguments for inclusion and visibility, but as the pieces in this volume will demonstrate time and again, this evolution has had profound impacts on the work of two-year college writing program administration. We suggest here that it is high time that the field examine and elevate the writing program work taking place in two-year contexts.

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To begin, there are more than 1,000 associate's colleges and special interest two-year colleges in the United States and they teach and are responsible for the majority of writing instruction—especially first-year and developmental writing (Hassel and Giordano, 2013). Therefore, the work of two-year writing programs is important because of how many students they affect. Just as important as that number though are who we affect at the two-year college. A quick look at the American Association of Community Colleges' annual "Fact Sheet" shows that two-year colleges teach a large number of historically oppressed and underrepresented students, including Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students (AACC, 2019). Two-year colleges teach the majority of Hispanic and Native American students. Four in ten Black students and Asian students attend these institutions. And two-year colleges serve perhaps the largest number of first-generation students; 39% of first-time students and 3 in 10 first-generation students are in our classrooms; we teach adult learners and students who identify as having a disability in high numbers as well.(AACC, 2019) Further, the reach of community college programs extends to many dual and concurrent enrollment students who complete their first-year writing courses before going on to four-year institutions. Writing courses and writing programs at two-year colleges therefore take on an outsize role, especially if we consider Duffy's recent claim that first-year writing is a site where students can learn the tools of ethical discourse which gird them to be able to wade through the toxic discourse in our culture (Duffy, 2019). So, what we do and who we serve make the stakes of two-year college writing programs high—we would argue essential—to American higher education.

In addition to the essential nature of first-year writing and writing programs, the mission of the community college as an institution makes programs there worth investigation and research. The community college is an access intensive institution meant to serve communities. The mission of two-year colleges is complex and contested. In our current environment, and really the environment that has developed during the conservative restoration over the last four decades (Shor, 1992), community colleges are positioned as sites of job preparation and entry into the economy. The current president of the United States has argued that the institution should be called vocational schools rather than community colleges—rejecting the notion of community altogether (Strauss, 2018). Meanwhile, the previous three presidents each highlighted the neoliberal function of the community college, thus narrowing and instrumentalizing the function of education for many of our most vulnerable students (Jensen, 2017). Recent schemes and initiatives aimed at student success and often led by foundations and envisioned by faculty at education departments at elite universities have

only helped strengthen that narrative. These “reform” initiatives fit the waves of the conservative restoration of education and are merely the most recent instantiation.

However, that isn't the only narrative for the community college. Many teacher-scholar-activists (Andelora, 2013; Sullivan, 2015) at two-year colleges take the 1947 Truman Commission on Higher Education as their rallying cry and ideological underpinning for their work in the two-year college. The Truman Commission argued that two-year colleges were meant to have a democratic purpose and were there to help develop an educated citizenry (Zook, 1947). The vocational and transfer functions of the community college are meant to be part of the development of people so that they can act as change agents in their community—an idea that is more than becoming a mere economic cog in the late capitalist system

This tension plays out in writing classrooms and in our interactions with other academic disciplines and (unfortunately) some misguided and unknowing administrators. We don't know many community college English faculty who haven't been asked by a colleague or an administrator at their institution about how we are to ensure the correctness and grammar of students' writing. And we have seen writing situations and tasks dangerously narrowed—do students only need to know how to write a resume? And even more distressing is the constant refrain calling for standardized English, even though decades of research shows this frame to be racist and classist. Many English faculty trained in writing studies in their graduate programs or who have become aficionados of writing studies in the two-year college classroom work against these reductive and damaging notions to help students begin to understand the cognitive and social nature of writing using pedagogical strategies ranging from post-post-process to genre based teaching. At the same time, these faculty work to center critical and ethical thinking in their courses through deep engagement with reading and writing (Sullivan et al., 2017). Many engage in the teaching of critical literacy and anti-racist pedagogy. Obviously we're describing extremes, but we argue that each of these curricular models can be found on almost every two-year college campus.

Two-year college faculty are often characterized as practitioners who apply knowledge rather than as knowledge producers (Griffiths & Jensen, 2019). This idea has been challenged by those examining the contributions of two-year college faculty to the field of writing studies over the last two decades (Reynolds & Holladay, 2005; Rodrigo & Miller-Cochran, 2018; Jensen, 2019; Sullivan, 2020). Holly Larson (2018) asked how we can better recognize and value the epistemic authority of two-year college faculty and their role as makers of knowledge within the field. This special issue seeks

to extend this conversation into the domain of writing program administration. Echoing the approach taken up by Jonathan Alexander (2017) in “Queer ways of knowing,” where he explored the perceived “relative irreconcilability” of queerness and WPA work, these articles examine “the relative irreconcilability” of the two-year college context and WPA “while also, perversely, maintaining an eye on both for any generative tensions that might yield useful insights” (p. 137). The authors in this issue push beyond lore about two-year college writing programs, applying theory and presenting thoughtful case studies to highlight careful research examining how two-year college writing programs make meaning and shape knowledge within and beyond the WPA community.

More than the context, professional status, and institutional identity of the two-year college is at play here. In particular, how does writing studies work within that context? Louise Wetherbee Phelps and John M. Ackerman (2010) argued that writing studies is a field “that practices alterity”; in other words, we have developed a tradition of defining ourselves by how we are different from or “other” than other fields, particularly literary studies (p. 201). This contrastive frame is especially prevalent within the domain of two-year college writing program administration. While much of the discussion regarding two-year college writing program administration has emphasized how such programs differ from conventions often observed in research institution programs (Holmsten, 2002; Klausman, 2008; Calhoon-Dillahunt, 2011), fewer contributions seek to make the writing program work in these contexts visible or to understand best practices within them.

In Klausman’s (2013) work on defining a two-year college writing program, he made the argument that a pattern is emerging in these programs; they are: “collaborative, needs based, and decentered” (259). He also used the word flexible. And, to an extent, that is exactly what this issue demonstrates—the continued development of writing programs in an *ad hoc* fashion manifesting a continued flexibility. The articles in this issue form an important cluster of praxis—the bringing together of theory and practice—alongside case studies presenting the lived strategies and tactics faculty undertake to create programs which reach for the higher ideals of the community college mission and which serve to empower students to move their lives and their communities forward.

The collaborative, decentered, flexible and, ultimately, tactical (à la de Certeau) negotiations exhibited by the authors in this volume, in many ways, reflect the call Spiegel (2020) made for teacher-scholar-activists to take up the guerrilla moniker. From her own position at an institution without a centralized writing program, Spiegel argues for home-grown

guerrilla practice within writing programs. She notes that, “Teacher-scholar-activists can have influence, but our approach must pivot away from the strategies most recognized as driving the future of education. We need our own tactics. We need our own metaphors” (p. 10). Knowing that more classic models for writing program leadership tend to fall short within our two-year college settings, this issue aims to present exactly that which Spiegel has called for: the articles provide sustained insight into the tactics and metaphors that have proven generative to programmatic theorizing, development, and implementation within two-year college writing program contexts.

In “Am I a WPA? Embracing the Multiverse of WPA Labor in Community College Contexts,” Nicole Hancock and Casey Reid examine the identity of two-year college WPAs. The authors offer a reimagined version of an old metaphor from WPA scholarship: that of the hero. They engage and play with the metaphor of the superhero to problematize the idea of the hero. Even though the identity of the WPA is problematic, tension filled, and split, the authors work to examine the power and agency in that identity. They note “the liminal nature of two-year writing program administration makes distinguishing boundaries between roles particularly difficult . . . While these decentralized labor models facilitate doing the labor, those performing it have to navigate fulfilling their official responsibilities along with performing the tricky dance of collegial collaboration without having formal claim to being a writing program administrator.” For the authors, the split identity of faculty and administrator may afford a kind of resilience. In fact, this resilience, which comes from a conscious use of tactics and guerrilla rhetoric (Spiegel, 2014) may offer a kind of sustainability in the two-year college writing program context.

Rather than directly arguing for structural change as Steve Accardi and Jillian Grauman do later in this issue, Hancock and Reid embrace the conflicts and affordances of the double identity of two-year faculty-administrators. Like many of the authors in this issue, they emphasize the shared, decentered nature of WPA labor in two-year contexts and argue the work of ordinary faculty encompasses and embodies the heroic. However, they push back against the invisibility of the work and warn against burnout, arguing faculty-administrators can build sustainability through rejection of the lone hero title of WPA and instead jump into the multiverse, where many parallel (super)heroes make use of their individual skills, backgrounds, and institutional roles to do the work and make it more visible within their own institutions and the field of writing program administration. In essence, the authors provide an important corollary and nuance to Klausman’s definitional work.

Next, Allia Abdullah-Matta, Jaqueline M. Jones, Neil Meyer, and Dominique Zino's "Departmental Democracy and Invention in Two-Year College Writing Programs" builds upon their experiences re-inventing their writing program. They ground their understanding of program building in Louise Wetherbee Phelps' concept of "institutional invention," blending both conceptual work as well as the practical work necessary to re-see the needs within their context. They frame their own experiences and advocate that other programs might discover new ways to build and reimagine their own programs by using similar tactics.

Specifically, they narrate the ways in which the faculty at LaGuardia Community College harnessed the powers of assessment and reimagined their leadership structure through taking advantage of the "climate of invention" present at their institution. Taking advantage of top-down initiatives, they effectively employ tactics to bring research-based professional practices to bear. They describe methods they took to foster a culture of a writing program with a cohesive professional development plan, and intentional efforts to build bridges between their program and other institutions.

Annie Del Principe's article "Cultivating a Sustainable Two-Year College Writing Program" makes two important thinking moves—examining a strength in two-year college writing programs, namely collaboration, and a challenge, the disparate disciplinary identities that make up two-year college English studies. First, she offers readers a retrospective on a special WPA issue on collaborative work from 1998—written almost entirely by four-year-college and university WPAs (only one author was at a TYC college and they had the role of dean). She examines the particular conditions of one TYC writing program to argue that collaboration is equally valuable and vital in TYC programs but for different reasons than it is in other types of institutions. The specific material conditions of TYC writing programs—including the diversity of disciplinary expertise among the faculty, and complex power dynamics—create a setting in which WPAs must build deep and wide collaborative structures that are both strong and radically inclusive. Her work helps to flesh out the definition of the two-year college writing program and the issues with designing resilience and "buy-in" from fellow faculty. She argues that "the combination of the diversity and ambiguity of disciplinary expertise plus a relatively flattened hierarchy of power" in two-year college writing programs "create an environment in which consensus is not easily reached" and wherein "collaborative decision making is simply necessary to create what might be recognized as a 'writing program.'"

The second move is a sustained examination of the transdisciplinary knowledge base of two-year college English departments. She finds that, in

contrast to the writing programs in the 1998 issue where “the faculty and teaching staff share the same (or close to the same) knowledge base and disciplinary identity” that her two-year colleagues do not “share the national, scholarly knowledge base of the field of writing studies.” She finds that lack of shared disciplinary knowledge creates difficult situations within departments which impede communication and a cohesive pedagogy. Faculty are often quietly doing their own thing in their own classrooms, and seek out other faculty who share their teaching philosophies, thus creating factions within the department that undermine true collaboration. This research resonates with other recent work on resilience and professional identity in writing studies (see Griffiths & Jensen, 2019; Suh & Jensen, in press). Del Principe hypothesizes that “deep disagreement” in her department might stem from the fact that they do not share a homogenous disciplinary home or knowledge base. This article concludes with a list of design principles to guide the ongoing work of creating sustainable collaborative TYC writing programs which take into account the transdisciplinary identity of two-year college English faculty, the particular circumstances of the institution, and notions of resilience.

Accardi and Grauman’s article “Structural Barriers and Knowledge Production at the Two-Year College” takes up similar issues as both Hancock and Reid and Del Principe’s articles. Rather than seeking to reframe the identity of two-year college English faculty, the authors push against “those identity-defining structures to enable scholarly knowledge production about their writing programs.” Here again, we see work that seeks to recreate or redesign the material conditions of the two-year college and two-year college English programs so that resilient structures which support professionalization and disciplinary knowledge become normalized. The authors provide a case study of their own work which details how they managed an internal promotion structure, “which requires curriculum development and committee work, to remake English at College of DuPage” to create a “space for academic projects and scholarly work, allowing for the production of knowledge and contribution to the field of Writing Program Administration and Writing Studies.” We see the authors deploying tactics within extant structures here as they collaborated with one another and made their work feasible.

Their example demonstrates how using located agency (Jensen & Suh, 2020) and tactics can create change. The authors “manage up” to have agency in how faculty job descriptions are written—which forms an interesting baseline for how disciplinary knowledge in two-year colleges is created and valued. They take advantage of a coordinator role—a kind of faculty administrator role that isn’t a WPA, but which has some of the

functions and power of one. The authors manage to tactically co-opt the language of Guided Pathways—one of the most recent reforms in the conservative restoration and one that can significantly narrow curriculum and student choice—to create a professional writing pathway for students. The moves in this article provide a model for flexible adaptive management of material and ideological conditions in the two-year college to create and sustain writing programs. It is a theme that continues in other articles.

Brett M. Griffiths’ “Reinventing the Spiel: The Context and Case for Interinstitutional Collaboration in an Era of Education Austerity” is striking as it significantly reimagines the role of WPA as a Writing Instruction Administrator. Her article shows how the scope of WPA work can intersect faculty development, inter-institutional collaboration, and the sustaining funding of a reading and writing center all while serving students. This article is important because it demonstrates the breadth of the institutional hustle (see Kynard, 2017) required to have an extant program in two-year colleges.

The second important argument in Griffiths’ article is one for visibility through institutional tactics, adaptation, and flexibility. She asserts, that faculty work for “disciplinary validity” by advocating and negotiating with and within “professional and institutional boundaries”. While acknowledging austerity and other external pressures, Griffiths concludes that real progress cannot be made in addressing deprofessionalization if we do not “attend” to “self-imposed barriers to communication, collaboration, and advocacy, even within our discipline.” Her vision of transprofessional and interinstitutional collaboration along with rhetorical tactics to achieve visibility present a powerful lesson in our exigent moment, especially as our institutions deal with pandemic austerity and other new and continuing pressures.

Finally, Sarah Snyder’s article is a response to her experience of becoming a WPA at a two-year college. This article is especially important as a call to action to graduate programs. New WPAs must be prepared to enter two-year colleges. The author’s examination of the TYCA guidelines and other literature is a response to the guidelines themselves and a specific call for the kinds of knowledge WPAs at four-year institutions need to begin conversations about two-year college work with their graduate populations. Snyder’s experience of being dramatically unprepared for two-year college WPA work, despite the well-developed body of literature, shows an ethical failing on the part of graduate programs (Calhoon-Dilhunt et al., 2016; Jensen & Toth, 2017). This article is a much needed synthesis and reframing of a vision for graduate education. We see this piece as a “must-add” starting-place selection for WPA course syllabi that aim to represent two-

year college labor, help students begin exploring two-year literature more fully, and investigate career paths within these contexts.

This symposium makes a sustained case for the continued development of writing programs in the two-year college. Together, the authors in this issue make a case for the collaborative and broad nature of writing program work in this institutional context. In particular, they address the transdisciplinary nature of two-year college English programs, the tension in their missions, as well as the external pressures, and incomplete professionalization many two-year college faculty face. These case studies provide a set of specific and discrete tactics where faculty members and writing instruction administrators engage in tactics to adjust the strategies of their institution so that writing instruction is research-based and serves to provide students with powerful rather than domesticating literacies (see Finn, 2010). None of the authors claim perfect success. However, they are asserting their epistemic authority (Larson, 2018) and are working to create professional autonomy (Griffiths, 2017) under exigent circumstances—circumstances which are likely only to become more difficult as we reimagine education in the age of a pandemic and continue to wrestle with anti-racist pedagogies and how to make our institutions and the work they do more just and equitable.

Klausman (2013) claims that we can offer a definition of a writing program at two-year colleges. These articles continue to define and bring that definition into focus. We offer these to our colleagues in solidarity and hope as we continue to build sustainable resilient writing programs which enact the best of what we know for our students. Yagelski (2011) asked, “How can we teach writing so that we stop destroying ourselves?” (p. 32). To that, we add this question: how do we build and support programs wherein colleagues can “sustainably teach and profess in the associated disciplines of English,” especially in environments which instrumentalize education and take up the neoliberal logics of education (Griffiths & Jensen, 2019, p. 302)? There is a need to ensure that two-year college writing instruction, writing program administration, and field-facing work are all driven by sustainable practices. These articles attempt to define that sustainable work—it is work that is collaborative, flexible, and tactically agile.

We wish to make a final argument for the importance of the articles in this issue. As we said early in this piece, two-year colleges are important for what they do and for who they serve. The two-year college is a site for social justice. Carter et al. (2019) make the claim in *Writing Democracy: The Political Turn in and Beyond the Trump Era* that composition and rhetoric needs a political turn. This political turn is part of the social turn (Jensen, 2019) and makes the students served at community colleges a nexus for our

attention as teacher-scholar-activists (Andelora, 2013). The public facing activism of two-year college WPA work as it negotiates the institutional and political contexts necessary to serve our students should not be invisible, especially to graduate programs in writing studies who are often steeped in the rhetoric of social justice. Attention to two-year college writing programs is an ethical issue. The practical and material concerns of these programs and the students they serve cannot wait.

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# Am I a WPA? Embracing the Multiverse of WPA Labor in Community College Contexts

Nicole Hancock and Casey Reid

*Co-opting hero metaphors within WPA scholarship, this article explores the (in)visibility issues of two-year college writing program administration. Highlighting the decentralized nature of much two-year WPA labor, the authors argue for reframing scholarly attention on the ordinary faculty who undertake WPA labor—rather than on the hero writing program administrator—to bring visibility to less acknowledged forms of writing program administration. As the authors explore the affordances and constraints of this reframed, expanded conceptualization of WPA labor, they highlight the power dynamics of decentralized WPA labor structures and propose exploring the multiverse as a more inclusive framework.*

In the movie *Sky High*, superheroes-in-training attend a special high school where their first task is familiar: a “power placement” test that determines if a student will be labeled a hero or sidekick (a.k.a. “hero support”) (Mitchell). This lifelong placement tracks students as either the highly visible superhero—a special, centrally-positioned person who earns recognition when all goes well and blowback when things do not—or the largely invisible sidekick, destined to toil in relative anonymity while playing a vital supporting role. *Sky High* and its characters subvert what one character calls “the whole hero-sidekick dichotomy,” as the sidekicks become the heroes: individually, they develop and find their superpowers, while collectively, the sidekick-turned-heroes save the day.

Writing from our experiences as two-year English/writing faculty who have worked in a variety of hero-centric and de-centralized WPA labor structures, we seek to increase the visibility of this labor as it is undertaken by two-year faculty—individuals Taylor refers to as “ghosts in the machine” due to their invisibility (133)—and propose an expanded conceptualization of WPA labor in two-year contexts. As we explore the question, “Am I a WPA?” we will discuss the nature of our labor and WPA labor structures, the power dynamics involved in two-year WPA labor, the relative invisibility of much of our labor, and the implications of reframing two-year college WPA labor if we do what the sidekick-turned-superheroes of *Sky High* did and work on “breaking down barriers [so that] We’re not sidekicks and superheroes . . . we’re just people, super people” (Mitchell 44:30–44:36).

## THE PROBLEM OF THE HERO METAPHOR

Writing program administration scholarship is saturated with hero stories, as well as their counterpart, victim narratives, with the writing program administrator typically embodying the role of hero (Gaillet 172; Desmet 44; Charlton et al. 38–40; Vidali 134; Reid 132). Desmet centers the composition teacher as hero, arguing that composition theory “exacerbated . . . the myth of the composition teacher as ‘heroic individual’” (44). In her analysis of 40 years of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* articles, Reid analyzes the writing program administrator as hero and notes, “these tropes of WPA identity—the victim and the hero—are recognizable to anyone familiar with disciplinary discourse in writing program administration” (132).

Before we co-opt and present a re-framed, re-envisioned hero narrative for two-year writing program administration labor, we need to recognize the problems inherent in its use. One issue is the perpetuation of reductive conceptions of power dynamics that often leads to a hero-victim dichotomy within WPA scholarship—a trope we fell prey to in earlier drafts of this article in leaning too heavily into a *Sky High*-influenced hero-sidekick dichotomy for four-year and two-year WPA labor. Charlton et al. point out the way these stories can strip agency from WPAs through their reliance on “a heroic or victimized stance foisted on us by beliefs, decisions, or actions of others” (50). Though Reid deconstructs these narratives in a manner that suggests more agency on the part of WPAs (134), Charlton et al. caution against overly simplistic conceptions of power within hero narratives and ask WPA scholars to consider the ways “these narratives shape the understanding of the field,” restrict “new opportunities for thinking about administrative work,” and “include and exclude, liberate and oppress” (38)—issues we attempt to take up in this article. Highlighting the often hyper-masculine and hyper-ableist nature of hero stories, Vidali critiques the problematic expectations these stories establish for writing program administrators with their emphasis on “triumph-over-adversity tales” (41) that “provide little room to reflect upon and grieve the failures that are inevitable” (42). She emphasizes that “hero narratives are particularly dangerous for disabled WPAs because they intersect with existing expectations to overcome disability, creating a double-overcoming bind for the disabled WPA” (41). Additionally, she notes how these narratives position writing program administrators as one-person solution generators, alone in their labor.

Given the problems inherent in writing program administration hero narratives, we recognize the risks and potential pitfalls in coopting such a

narrative, especially as career community college professionals whose WPA labor has been rendered largely invisible. To center our goal of increased visibility for two-year faculty WPA labor, though, we decided to tap into the heroic narrative tradition within WPA scholarship as a means of creating social recognition between four-year writing program administrators and the two-year faculty who undertake WPA labor. As Toth et al. highlight, studies suggest that “social recognition” is a significant factor in “shaping how faculty identified as professionals and how they recognized other members of their professional community” (111). In our bid to have the WPA labor of two-year faculty recognized within our institutions, the WPA scholarly community, and the communities where we perform this labor, we use this narrative tradition to claim space for what we call ordinary (super)hero narratives that coincide with Reid’s analysis of hero narratives: “rather than aligning heroism with overcoming the odds, this heroic WPA is able to establish positive relationships and work well within institutional structures to negotiate for the interests of the writing program” (135).

Because of the often untitled, shared nature of two-year faculty writing program administration, we are also choosing to reframe the hero narrative onto the WPA labor rather than the hero themselves as much as possible and to embrace a collaborative organization of this labor in response to Desmet’s call:

to get beyond the heroic narrative that pits individuals against a faceless collective, a narrative that unhelpfully constructs any given writing program as a monolith rather than a bricolage of attitudes and practices that enjoys a long and rich—if often obscure—history. (44)

Until the professionalization of the writing program administration discipline in the 1970s, university WPA labor had quite a bit in common with community college WPA labor in terms of how it was framed “as a ‘task rather than a position’” (Charlton et al. 64). L’Eplattenier and Mastrangelo observe that administrative labor was either not recognized in administrative terms or was seen “as a tangential component in their career and not worthy of notice or reward” (xx) and “administrative decision-making often occurs in ways that are never recorded” (xx).

Similar claims could be made about the visibility issues and material conditions of two-year faculty WPA labor today. Two-year faculty may describe facets of our WPA labor as part of our teacher-scholar-activist identities as Patrick Sullivan often does—not in administrative terms but “as a . . . component” in our career (L’Eplattenier and Mastrangelo xx). Vidali’s 2015 proposal for a “disabled model of WPA work that honors productive delegation of tasks to a support team, encourages reliance on communica-

tion modes that work best for the WPA and her program . . . and broadly imagines WPAs as embodied, but not the embodiment of their programs” (43) is not far removed from our experience of community college writing program administration. We propose that because community college writing program administration is accomplished through a dispersed labor structure of multiple faculty colleagues rather than a single position or heroic individual, it already enacts the decentralized power dynamic called for by WPA scholars like Gunner, Desmet, and Reid even as it suffers from lack of visibility within the writing program administration scholarly community.

The labor structures and contextual factors of an open-admissions institution impact every facet of writing program administration in two-year contexts, from whether a writing program is labeled as such, to whom the program serves, its mission and goals, and who does the labor. Like Blaauw-Hara and Spiegel, we recognize that “all WPA work is contextually driven and differences are apparent even within various kinds of four-year institutions” (246). That said, to help us demonstrate some of the differences between the more visible labor in WPA scholarship and the less visible decentralized contexts, we offer a more well-known hero figure than those of *Sky High*: Tony Stark/Iron Man, an example of a central hero type Desmet and Vidali resist as the representation of all writing program administration. Tony Stark is a person of action: he thinks, plans, creates, acts, reacts. He has a support system he can count on in the form of Pepper Potts, who often handles day-to-day minutiae; JARVIS and FRIDAY, computer network systems that remind him of his current limitations and affordances; and Rhodes, a friend and sidekick. In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Tony Stark and Iron Man are perceived as one and the same, no need for an alter ego. Stark exemplifies a solitary writing program administration figure: faculty assist him in various ways, but they are ancillaries who remain largely invisible when the work is recognized or challenged. The hero acts alone, even when that is not entirely the case, and even as others around him are also capable. Most community college faculty cannot relate to his bold declaration, “I am Iron Man”/“I am a WPA,” as our professional experience of writing program administration differs from the positioning of those who have intentionally chosen the profession.

#### HERO IDENTIFICATIONS: DECENTRALIZED LABOR IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CONTEXT

We ground our discussion of two-year college writing program administration (WPA) labor in our experiences as two-year practitioners: Nicole

has worked at the same midwestern two-year college for 17 years, where she began as a part-time faculty member who earned tenure over a decade ago. She has served the department in multiple roles that are writing program administration-adjacent, never holding the title of WPA but always situated within the labor of writing program administration. Casey brings her experience as a part- and full-time faculty member at a multi-campus community college system in the Midwest, a staff director of developmental education programs at a small rural midwestern community college, and faculty writing center coordinator at a midsized community college in the Pacific Northwest. She has worked in three positions she calls “facu-ministrator” roles where, regardless of how the institution categorizes her, teaching and service have been integral to her administration responsibilities. Although writing center administrators are often counted within the less-recognized ranks of writing program administrators, Casey focuses on her positionality and experience as a faculty member and on her coordinator roles second because of how essential this positionality is for undertaking WPA labor in two-year contexts (Janetta et al. 13). Neither of us would say we are the writing program administrator for our institutions, but we both prioritize WPA labor to a degree that often positions us as key participants and stakeholders.

Even were we the writing program administrator for our institutions, that labor would be significantly different from university writing program administrators, a recognition that Calhoun-Dillahunt, Blaauw-Hara and Spiegel, Klausman, Ostman, and others also highlight. This difference “is often further complicated by not being labeled as writing program administration: WPAs are frequently department chairs, associate deans, or coordinators” (Blaauw-Hara and Spiegel 246), a point that was inscribed into CWPA’s 1992 *Portland Resolution*. Ostman explains that “Several titles reflect writing program work as the primary responsibilities of the WPA, and several simply reflect a general distinction for the administration of writing courses under the umbrella of other administrative duties” (100). The variety of titles—or non-titles—afforded to two-year faculty performing WPA labor contributes to the invisible nature of this labor (Taylor). This invisibility and lack of a title means “some two-year college leaders might not readily self-identify as WPAs despite the fact that their work is deeply situated in the coordination of writing courses and the faculty who teach those courses” (Blaauw-Hara and Spiegel 246).

Not only is the hero of WPA labor (if there is one) positioned differently in two-year contexts than in four-year contexts; the labor is distributed differently. Scholars like Calhoun-Dillahunt, Nist and Raines, Taylor, and Janangelo and Klausman indicate that unlike in four-year institutions

where the traditional writing program hero tends to be highly visible in the departmental labor, in many two-year contexts, the work is distributed among several less visible people, working on their own or in partnership. For instance, Calhoun-Dillahunt describes programs like hers, where responsibilities rotate without compensation as part of faculty service, highlighting that these programs “are models of how, even without the benefit of a WPA position, writing program work can get done collaboratively” (129). She emphasizes “that much good work is being done in community college writing programs, often without the coordination of a WPA. It’s not just possible; it’s fairly common” (130).

In light of the less hero-centric, more amorphous nature of two-year college writing program administration, we offer Peter Parker/Spider-Man as a metaphor for how intertwined two-year writing program administration is with faculty perspectives. Unlike Tony Stark, who is able to be Tony and Iron Man because the two identities overlap, in each new version of *Spider-Man*, Peter Parker’s liminality causes him to negotiate an impossible balance between his “real life” and its relationships when he is Peter Parker, and the risks/rewards he faces as Spider-Man. He cannot retreat from being Peter Parker without losing a core part of himself, but that also makes him a better hero in his local context. Similarly, community college faculty who engage in WPA labor benefit from remaining true to their faculty identities, using the passions they had/have as faculty members to inform their WPA labor, often because they continue to teach writing courses while participating in that labor, something Holly Larson emphasizes as the “immediacy of our teaching world” to our professional lives (123). At Nicole’s institution, the writing program administrator is a faculty member first and foremost. He or she has more release time than teaching time per semester for the WPA position, but the facu-ministrator mask is temporary, something done after teaching, *while* teaching, and before presumably returning to a 5/5 load of teaching. This blended, simultaneous, yet also separate labor is not often represented in the WPA scholarship, so two-year administrators feel marginalized from those who clearly identify their WPAship as their primary identity, yet also feel isolated from their fellow faculty members by their administrative role. So for some of us, the question isn’t, “Am I a WPA?” but rather “Am I enough of a WPA?”

Louise Wetherbee Phelps envisioned the WPA position as a “densely tangled knot, a node of entwined filaments whose relationships pose a multitude of dangers and opportunities. . . . Perhaps because of the emotional intensity this knottiness generates, the WPA is peculiarly vulnerable to being overidentified (by herself and others) with the role, unleashing a series of seductive and lethal metonymies” in which the WPA cannot sepa-

rate herself from identification with individual strands of the knot (263). For the community college facu-ministrator, the knottiness may become more entangled because of the faculty-first identification: choking and marginalizing at times when other faculty are upset with a decision associated with the facu-ministrator, seductive when they are called upon to represent faculty voices in a tokenizing way, and easily discarded in circumstances where it is more rhetorically necessary or convenient to identify primarily as faculty. While other entities at the institution may more closely associate the facu-ministrator with the writing program, that association morphs when the two-year writing program administrator returns to their department, where all of the strands are potentially immediate concerns of each faculty member who teaches any level of composition (which is the majority of the administrator's colleagues). The power dynamic is also vastly different, as the person in the administrative position wields no particular power over colleagues, especially in departments with department chairs who are responsible for staffing and evaluation while the writing program administrator is mostly responsible for curriculum and assessment matters (Taylor 121; Calhoun-Dillahunt 125–26; Janagelo and Klausman 139–40).

The liminal nature of two-year writing program administration makes distinguishing boundaries between roles particularly difficult. In the writing program's administration, some responsibilities of Casey's writing center coordinator role and the officially designated composition coordinator role have shifted and become intermingled. During Casey's first year on the job, the composition coordinator resigned partway through the year, and some of that position's labor was redistributed to Casey. Even after the composition coordinator role resumed, Casey's labor remained intertwined with much of the program's labor. Yet, Casey was and continues to be labeled as the writing center coordinator first, faculty first or second depending upon the context, and never as a writing program administrator or as part of a WPA team—even after a team model was incorporated into a recent faculty job description. While these decentralized labor models facilitate doing the labor, those performing it have to navigate fulfilling their official responsibilities along with performing the tricky dance of collegial collaboration without having formal claim to being a writing program administrator.

#### AGENTS OF ACTION: THE EXTRAORDINARY ORDINARY OF SHARED AUTHORITY

Hassel and Cole indicate that faculty leadership tends to be “conceptualized as something that happens among and between other faculty,” where

faculty are identified as “‘thought leaders’ . . . whose primary claim to leadership is making other faculty do things” (3). They further suggest that this faculty leader paradigm “relegates the role of faculty to facilitation and integration, rather than change or policy work” and positions faculty mostly as influencers and master persuaders of their colleagues in support of others (3). Higher education leadership publications position faculty “as needing persuasion to manage change through a ‘team effort,’ to be part of a ‘climate of trust’” (5). In other words, “Faculty require managing, motivating, and surveilling” by administration and their appointed faculty leader colleagues who act as middle-level herders (4–5).

Hassel and Cole advocate for a different model of faculty leadership: service activism, which asks faculty “how, where, and with whom can you leverage the service you do to capture, create, and realize the impact of our values as educators?” (14). They urge faculty “to become engaged actors in their institutions, with the intention of energizing the faculty in higher education to participate in, reimagine, and transform their institutional and professional work” (15). Janangelo and Klausman call for a similar reframing of two-year WPA labor, one that avoids

the easy temptation to imitate four-year college models of writing program “administration.” Instead, we recommend focusing on the evolving nature and demands of the important and variegated leadership work itself, rather than on the concept of a writing program “administrator.” If we can articulate the intricacies of these leadership practices beyond that particular and perhaps limiting enunciation, category, and label, we stand a better chance of rendering new and valuable ideas rather than purveying celebrated ideals, or worse, sedimented ideations. (142)

In short, rather than focus on a hero—the title, person, the position—focus on the labor.

This labor focus affirms the Two-Year College English Association’s (TYCA) positioning of the role of two-year college English faculty. TYCA’s 2012 *Characteristics of the Highly Effective Two-Year Instructor in English* designates two-year college English faculty as being part teacher and part administrator, effectively incorporating WPA labor into two-year faculty roles when it stipulates that faculty “are flexible and supportive in accepting varied teaching assignments and administrative responsibilities as needed in an effort to meet department and program needs” (1). By folding administrative responsibilities like those associated with writing program administration into the essential functions of a two-year faculty member, TYCA and two-year colleges across the country have, in some senses, substantiated

the visibility issues surrounding WPA labor by hiding the work in plain sight: right in the job description and service expectation of everyday, ordinary faculty members.

Focused as they are on faculty leadership through service, Hassel and Cole's emphasis on service activism aligns with Warnke and Higgins's invitation to two-year faculty to embrace the role of "critical reformer." Warnke and Higgins build upon Sullivan's teacher-scholar-activist identity by specifically positioning "critical reformers between forces for reform—often administrators and corporate-funded nonprofits such as the Gates Foundation—and reform resisters—often faculty who see themselves as doing inherently good work beyond reproach, the 'good intentions' model" (365). Within their critical reform framework, they acknowledge the competing discourses, interests, values, and beliefs that these stakeholders bring, staking out the position of critical reformer as one where "we are tasked with linking what we know empirically with our values and vision for the community college" (368). Like Hassel and Cole, Warnke and Higgins do not limit this influencing, change-oriented role to faculty in more visible, traditional, and official leadership positions like the hero role of writing program administrator. Rather, they leave open the possibility that many, perhaps even most, faculty have the potential to be critical reformers through their everyday, ordinary work, including the WPA labor that many two-year faculty engage in—and they position critical reformers as the everyday, ordinary sidekick-turned-heroes of their institutions. So do we.

Critical reform-oriented faculty doing the work of writing program activism reifies the Peter Parker metaphor, as he represents many core facets of the ordinary community college faculty hero. Parker (and later, Miles Morales) is an ordinary teen who is bitten by a radioactive spider to receive the call-to-action; although far less dramatic, two-year faculty who engage in WPA labor have historically heeded the call of their contexts, not because they felt any great ability but because they were tapped as the person who was most likely to do the work of the department at that given moment. The community college WPAs retain an "I'm just a kid from Queens" ethos as they join the fray, learning to be WPAs as they do the labor of writing program administration (although this entrée into the labor is shifting as graduate programs become more adept at providing coursework in writing program administration). In describing Spider-Man—and the two-year critical reformers undertaking writing program administration more generally—as "ordinary," we echo Nancy Chick's use of "ordinary" to describe the faculty and stories of faculty-powered change within Hassel and Cole's edited collection, *Academic Labor Beyond the College Classroom* (ix). Much like our article, Hassel and Cole's collection eschews hero-centric narra-

tives of a relatively small collection of specially-focused individuals in favor of “ordinary faculty who ask and answer important questions via research; organize and participate in groups, programs, and partnerships designed to learn and act on what they learn; and participate in shared governance within the institutions” (Chick ix). These ordinary faculty are similar to Warnke and Higgins’ critical reformers and much like many of the two-year faculty who perform WPA labor.

Whether receiving release time or not and regardless of titles, Casey and Nicole have enacted critical reform as part of their service activism. As English faculty at a midwestern multi-campus community college system, Casey was on the board of the regional chapter of what was then the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE), a role that allowed her to help coordinate and provide professional development to two-year faculty across a five-state region. The group brought nationally recognized scholars to a regionally-accessible location in an affordable format for two-year faculty who often have little financial support for professional development. When her state became one of the many enacting developmental education reform legislation, she was part of a group of ordinary faculty with different skill sets from institutions across the state who teamed up to initiate the legislative response and call for formalization of a largely faculty-driven statewide developmental education consortium in a similar vein as the statewide policy team described by Estrem, Shepherd, and Duman (88–90).

These groups of ordinary faculty fulfilling WPA labor are helpful for countering some of the constraints of the hero-centric writing program administrator model that upper administration may find more useful so they only have one or two liaisons for writing class needs and issues. These liaisons may become marginalized, depending upon campus climate and relationships between faculty and administration. When Casey was asked to work with the composition coordinator to deliver professional development to part-time faculty, the workshops were not well received in part because of the contentious context: the department had moved to hiring more external candidates like Casey with degrees in rhetoric and composition, the department had experienced recent conflict between faculty with administrative release and those without—and her dean emphasized workshop attendance. Casey was perceived as a less experienced newcomer in a WPA role helping impose an administratively-enforced professional development directive, a situation that exacerbated tensions related to faculty in coordinator roles.

Nicole’s program has valued grassroots innovation, so she has regarded herself as more of a critical reformer than a writing program administra-

tor; she served in two release time positions, but because she has never been the elected writing program administrator or the department chair, she has never considered herself as a WPA, even while doing writing program administration labor. As the computer-assisted instruction coordinator, she oversaw the computer labs (home to all of the college's writing classes), led technology pedagogy workshops, and served as a liaison between faculty and those who maintain the networks, course management systems, and hardware. To prepare for and perform this faculty-administrator labor, she synthesized what she gleaned from conference attendance, scholarship, and classroom experimentation, as well as what Holly Larson refers to as the "kitchen-table-conversation" amongst colleagues in reciprocal sharing of their needs and classroom experiences (121). Similar additional labor was performed in the even less visible preparation for serving as a pilot teacher for learning communities and then the Accelerated Learning Program model of basic writing. As a critical reformer who has used what she has learned in the immediate praxis of her classroom and then shared it with colleagues, she has participated in this labor as *ordinary* faculty. This voluntary writing program administration labor may be much more common in two-year settings where the need for faculty-led professional development is greater: according to Heather Ostman, "an institution that shifts as much as its student body" has more frequent last-minute hires of part-time faculty and all faculty benefit from in-house faculty development to learn more about the ever-changing student demographics (151). As a last-minute part-time hire when she started, Nicole found the faculty development and camaraderie in the department to be so foundational to her teaching that she gives back by helping to sustain that work, alongside a good portion of her colleagues who are similarly committed to a collaborative, egalitarian workplace.

Nicole's department serves as a healthy model of a decentralized team where labor is visible; the writing committee is guided by the WPA and the department chair with an expectation that invested faculty will attend regularly, and all who teach or tutor writing are invited to attend. After a hiring initiative to increase the number of full-time faculty in the department, term limits for chair and WPA were instated, so the roles would be more likely to rotate amongst capable faculty members. Rotate, they have. Not only are faculty able to transition into new roles with the benefit of their predecessors' knowledge, but they serve people who have been in the same service roles: faculty members who understand the particulars of running a writing program. The department functions as a group of once and future writing program administrators (chair, WPA, and other release

time positions), which helps facilitate the labor of the program while reducing burnout.

When the labor of the writing program is invisible, it has the micro-level consequence of exhaustion and burnout for those who repeatedly do the labor without acknowledgment and the macro-level consequence of invisibility at the institutional level—where release time or other departmental benefits may be challenged or reduced if the administration cannot see the work that transpires behind the scenes. In a thriving program, the work of innovating and assessing is a perpetual cycle where the labor is ideally shared by many instead of few in the department. When all of that labor is represented by one person, department members can contribute less and less, presuming that someone else, someone with release time and a title, can shoulder the burden, and then the labor of the department can become too much for one individual. Or, faculty members will continue to contribute but become wary that they are continually working above and beyond while others do the minimum service. These local visibility issues contribute to and exacerbate visibility issues within the profession.

#### SUPERHEROES UNITE UNDER COLLECTIVE BARGAINING: AN UNDEREXPLORED FACET OF SHARED AUTHORITY

One part of two-year contexts that often goes un- or underexplored in scholarship surrounding two-year WPA labor involves how labor is defined on an institutional and state level by right-to-work policies and unions. Nicole and Casey work in union environments where WPA labor visibility issues can be exacerbated or ameliorated by faculty unions. At Nicole's institution, the visibility of the department chair's labor across disciplines was vital to receiving contractual protection for release time, while the writing program administrator's labor has been primarily visible within one department and is not protected yet. The department chair is the public face of the department, interacting with a variety of power dynamics across stakeholders—and also managing programmatic paperwork that is visible across college divisions. The labor of the writing program administrator is much more behind-the-scenes, often being transacted with the chair and other faculty who are at the same level of authority as the WPA, but this less visible labor is only possible with course release time, which is subject to change without union protection. The previously mentioned computer-assisted instruction release time position Nicole once had was unceremoniously eliminated because its value could not be understood outside of the department. Other faculty release time has been provided to coordinate various initiatives—a trial placement reform, the learning communities

pilot, and service learning across the college—but it has fluctuated depending on grant funding or enrollment surges.

Casey's current institution has a long-established, powerful, NEA-associated faculty union that directly impacts all facets of labor, including the existence of, stability of, and individual agency associated with faculty coordination work. At the time of the writing of this article, the faculty contract differentiates between two faculty coordinator roles: roles like her writing center coordinator position where a person is hired into the position with a job description that includes a significant percentage of time for coordination work and roles like the current composition coordinator where the person is granted unguaranteed release time after being hired. Due to austerity measures, divisions are being consolidated under fewer deans, and the college is implementing a faculty department chair model that may result in losing the composition coordinator role and many of its key WPA labor functions. How administration, unions, departments, and individuals leverage the contractual positioning and framing of labor can lead to the erasure of WPA labor and associated positions.

#### WHEN FACULTY CRITICAL REFORMERS RESIST: HERO SERVICE ACTIVISM AMID CONSTANT CHANGE

While we value critical reform via service activism and seek to find new ways to frame, make visible, and advocate for adequate compensation and time for WPA labor in two-year contexts, two-year faculty across the country remain subject to institutional changes (Calhoon-Dillahunt et al. 4) as well as state and national education policy changes and trends that complicate our sense of agency and ability to collaborate and engage in the mindful manner we aspire to. The exacerbated changes and pressures within two-year colleges cause us to engage in WPA labor from a reactionary stance regardless of our “intellectual posturing towards the work” (Charlton et al. 4). For instance, over the last three years, placement-related reform labor has waxed and waned at Casey's institution due to the sudden stop of an Achieving the Dream committee that morphed into three waves of committees with varying faculty input. The most recent Guided Pathways reform committee assembled in a few weeks, partly in response to coronavirus-impacted placement disruptions. As they engage in, react to, enact, and/or resist placement-related reform efforts, the composition coordinator along with Casey—often as the background researcher, second reader, and/or sounding board—remain accountable for the labor and implications of placing students into a given class. The rapidly changing landscape of community colleges can open up opportunities for critical

reform to take place more quickly, as it did when Nicole's English department established Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) classes as a stable feature of their curriculum less than a year after hearing about it.

As we have worked to articulate our differently situated hero positioning and dynamics for this article, we seek to take up Desmet's call to "yield to another kind of epic, in which teachers, WPAs, students—and epic narratives themselves—are always *in medias res*" (58) in an effort to both acknowledge our material labor conditions while avoiding "a simplistic rendering of heroes and villains" (Charlton et al. 139). Yet placement reform at Nicole's institution provides an example of how a department's labor can be *in media res* and still ultimately lack agency. In 2015, when they learned that COMPASS, the placement exam they had been using to determine if students were prepared for transfer-level coursework, was being discontinued, the writing committee had already been investigating alternatives, and the upper administration readily acquiesced to considering a homegrown placement assessment that better matched the objectives of the English department. In spring 2016, Nicole was elected to 4 hours release time to implement and study beta testing of the new assessment in all sections of writing courses across three campuses; for two years, she developed additional versions and researched their effectiveness with smaller samples. In 2018, the placement reform committee of English and math program coordinators, their deans, and staff from enrollment services and information technology were only months away from implementing new placement methods. Then IT announced they would not implement a placement assessment that involved different systems for math, writing, and reading, halting reform. An institutional leadership change led to the continued use of purchased placement exams and a new committee that excludes faculty—removing critical reformers from the process.

The diffused, decentralized labor of two-year programs creates a problem of invisibility within their own institutions. These are not the only narratives of initiatives hastily assembled by writing program administrators and adjacent colleagues to respond to matters of urgency, whether those issues have arisen from state mandates, budgetary concerns, or shifts in administrative personnel. Because these narratives are only known to those who perform the labor, the work is not visible, and because our collective disciplinary expertise permits us to hastily manufacture multiple contingency plans of varying efficacy, there is a sense from upper administration that this work does not need to be valued, even as it would not be possible without a variety of people committing time and efforts to remaining current in the field while also continuing to complete the official myriad other tasks that constitute more visible program labor.

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THE WPA MULTIVERSE: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR INCREASED VISIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Because WPA labor differs across contexts, we cannot all achieve the same level of institutional recognition for WPA labor, so we propose exploring the multiverse as a healthier, more inclusive framework. Over the course of decades of different comic book authors, when superhero story lines became woefully inconsistent, “superhero comics made a virtue out of necessity and presented their storyworlds as part of a larger ‘multiverse,’ in which a variety of mutually incompatible narrative worlds existed as parallel realities” (Kukkonen 40). In *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse*, Miles Morales teams up with Peter B. Parker and other spidey characters from across the vast Spider-Man comic history to *collectively* do the work Spider-Man does best. In an essay about *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse*, Terrence Wandtke writes, “Like oral culture, superhero stories maintain a basic core for their characters but retell (or redraw) their stories over time and produce many variants.” Given the range of abilities, as well as the ethnic, racial, socio-economic, and gender identities of the Spider-People in the multiverse, the multiverse also represents a much more inclusive vision of who engages in WPA labor. We’re looking for a WPA scholarship multiverse where the narratives of two-year college faculty who engage in writing program administration labor are valued variants that are appreciated for the many heroes offered and also have crossover potential with narratives in other, more visible contexts.

Not unlike the Marvel Cinematic Universe, where audiences were able to see Iron Man, Captain America, and Thor in multiple movies years before a woman or person of color received a stand-alone movie, WPA scholarship is in need of greater representation of marginalized writing program administration narrative variants. The diffuse labor of community college writing program administration is but one dimension of the visibility, access, equity, and inclusion issues within the field. García de Müeller and Ruiz explain that scholarship “that focuses directly on race in WPA work or support systems for WPAs of color” is lacking (23). Sheila Carter-Tod found that *WPA: Writing Program Administration* has made conscious efforts to include articles on “race, gender, ability, language, and sexual orientation” (101) but we should as a discipline, “expand our focus and attention to embrace the full trajectory of scholarship (broadly defined) that honors the expanding multiplicities of identity affiliations that we have in our field” (102). A key mark of visibility for the variant narratives of individuals who engage in WPA labor is going to be when our work is cited outside of our individual disciplinary contexts (such as *TETYC*) and special

issues dedicated to a specific group, across the multiverse of scholarship. In this *Into the Spider-verse* metaphor, the multiverse is already here; the portal just has not been opened to it yet. Faculty and staff—with and without titles—are already performing the labor in a variety of ways; the professionalization of the discipline at the four-year level has created the appearance that there is only one model, but other models of labor toil in relative anonymity, furthering a cycle of underrepresentation.

There have been signs, however, that the multiverse is expanding and more visibility is being sought, including for those of us who identify as “just people, super people” (Mitchell 44:35–44:36). Recent calls for participation from open-access journals and national conferences have been inclusive of two-year writing contexts, but especially the 2019 “More Seats at the Table” Council of Writing Program Administrators national conference call, which was sent to the TYCA listserv and asked: “What writing programs currently exist that are understudied or marginalized in some way—for example, community-college programs, prison writing programs, community and adult-education writing programs, immigrant-focused and second-language programs, basic-writing programs” (Blauuw-Hara)? This call is a reminder that many writing programs—and individuals who perform WPA labor—fall outside the paradigm most frequently represented in WPA scholarship.

Because the individuals who perform the labor of these underrepresented writing programs tend to go unrecognized as part of the discipline’s professionalization, calls from within the *WPA: Writing Program Administration* to expand the repertoire of what it means to be a WPA have not necessarily been answered. As multiple articles in this special issue suggest: decentralized writing program administration labor is a valid way of doing the labor—these labor configurations are how the work is accomplished in many contexts. Calls like this issue suggest a willingness to (re)recognize these forms of labor and the individuals who engage in it. In taking up this call, we hope to have opened space for the invisible to push aside what Andelora refers to as the community college “crisis of confidence” to take a leap of faith into the community in which we want to engage, push back against, and belong (311).

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# Departmental Democracy and Invention in Two-Year College Writing Programs

Allia Abdullah-Matta, Jacqueline M. Jones, Neil Meyer, and  
Dominique Zino

*This article describes how a team of WPAs reinvented their decentered leadership structure to facilitate long-term, programmatic thinking and planning. Drawing on Louise Wetherbee Phelps' notion of institutional invention, we describe a range of conditions and activities that create and reinforce a "climate of invention" in two-year college writing programs.*

The English Department at LaGuardia Community College—part of the City University of New York—consists of approximately 130 faculty members, who teach over 250 sections of our composition courses every semester. Prior to the fall 2019 academic year, faculty members were elected to three-year terms as directors for the following courses: Basic Writing, Accelerated Composition I, Composition I, and Composition II. This approach to administration led to coordinators investing most of their time and energy into managing a single course rather than looking at pedagogy, learning outcomes, and student performance across the sequence. Scholarship on writing program administration, including some of the articles in this issue, illustrates that such “decentering” of writing program work is common in two-year college English departments (Nist and Raines; Taylor; Calhoun-Dillahunt; and Klausman). In fact, Tim Taylor called for the field to recognize the “flexibility, stability, and respect for differences in pedagogy” that such a collaborative WPA structure invite (121). In this article, we describe how we looked more closely at our own leadership structure, to move away from less effective elements, and to make space for long-term, programmatic thinking, and planning.

Building a writing program at a two-year college is a challenge. It is not an impossible proposition, but to create and construct a program from the ground up within a large English department, requires “Considerable work, both conceptual and practical” (Phelps 68). Moreover, it requires a vision that facilitates faculty buy-in and creates space for reinvention. In this case, the idea of “reinvention” refers to programmatic and “cultural changes that demand constant innovation and adaptation to new challenges” (Phelps 66). Louise Wetherbee Phelps proposes that institutions can be inventive, “like organisms or academic disciplines” (88), but asks *how* this invention might take shape. One way to invent within an existing

departmental structure involves “expanding traditional roles and functions for leaders and, perhaps, radically rethinking the concept of leadership . . . power, authority, and their relationship to institutions” (Phelps 80). This article presents our effort to revisit our leadership structure in order to build a writing program within a two-year college context.

Our process of reinvention reflects Phelps’ central questions such as: “What conditions enable or define a ‘climate of invention for those’ in a program or unit?” and “How stable can such a state be?” (89). We detail the ways that local and institutional assessment cycles and the term-limits of elected WPA positions foster an environment that encourages and supports more thoughtful and intentional decision-making. We model a practice of “knowing-in-action” and “reflection-in-action” (Schön qtd. in Rose and Weiser 187) that eventually produced tangible results, though moments of invention were simultaneously generative and unstable. Our success is rooted in our commitment to work through the less dynamic periods of reflection and critique in order to define our goals and move toward revision. If we layer Phelps’ attention to environment with David Bartholomae’s attention to discourse, inventing our writing program involved speaking our program into existence, and testing out the language of the WPA community, departmentally and college-wide. That is, we began using this terminology while actively working to reinvent ourselves; we called ourselves the writing program on college-wide assessment reports, in departmental memos, and renamed professional titles from “directors” of a course to writing program administrators.

In essence, this article offers concrete and strategic advice for two-year colleges looking to create cohesive, visible, and democratic writing programs. While we cannot prescribe the best approach for all writing programs, based on our experiences, we believe other institutions might benefit from ensuring their own programmatic work includes the following components in ways appropriate to their context:

- Assess the curriculum you already have and pay attention to the sequencing of writing courses
- Coordinate departmental leaders and (re)define roles within the administrative structure
- Intentionally foster a writing program culture (one will exist whether or not you create it)
- Create faculty professional development opportunities that align with the goals for your curriculum sequence
- Make connections to other institutions

In our department, these activities both preceded and led to meaningful changes. In the discussion that follows, we describe the revision of the directors of composition into three writing program administrators, with decision-making power for all facets of the program. The WPAs work collaboratively on all major decisions and are elected to three-year terms. This structure provides opportunities for program leadership changes and sustains departmental democracy; we regularly vote on important programmatic choices and the faculty members who will serve as the WPAs, which simultaneously holds these leaders accountable. It also honors the independent minds and voices of faculty members who value classroom autonomy. We could not take it upon ourselves to wholly invent and implement a programmatic structure without consent from our colleagues. For faculty development to resonate and stick across our department, we had to consider the similarities between past and future pedagogical methods and materials. In this respect, when revisiting learning objectives, pedagogical materials, and approaches to faculty development, alignment became an essential component of invention.

#### ASSESSMENT AS A CATALYST FOR PROGRAMMATIC INVENTION

The story of assessment at LaGuardia is rooted in the interplay between the demands of accrediting agencies and the college's commitment to providing students with a well-rounded, liberal arts education. LaGuardia is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, which requires general education and programmatic assessments. Nearly twenty years ago, the college defined its general education approach for all students, which at the time was considered by some to be "an unusual move for community colleges, where liberal arts may not integrate well into professional or vocational curricula" (Provezis 1–2). Yet as this approach took shape, the college was under pressure from Middle States to create a new plan that documented "how it used assessment evidence to improve student learning" (Provezis 2). At LaGuardia, general education courses are assessed based on how well students display proficiency in a series of core competencies and abilities: inquiry and problem solving, integrative learning, global learning, as well as written, oral, and digital communication. These college-wide priorities have shaped not only the way the college has conceptualized, communicated about, and implemented assessment practices, but also faculty members' attitudes towards assessment. Unfortunately, many faculty members have come to see assessment as disconnected from classroom practice and student outcomes.

In addition to general education assessments, the college has become increasingly focused on strengthening programmatic evaluations. Each academic program is charged with conducting a periodic program review (PPR) every five years. In a self-study report created by the program directors and faculty, PPRs assess achievement in the core and programmatic competences. The report responds to the following questions:

1. What competencies/knowledge do we want students in the program to graduate with? . . .
2. Are students in the program graduating with those competencies and knowledge sets? How do we know?
3. What changes do we need to make to improve student learning in these areas? What steps will we take to strengthen our curriculum and pedagogy to more effectively help students achieve these competencies? (Provezis 5)

As college administrators led faculty through assessment plans, faculty charged with this task were at a crossroads. The “writing program” at LaGuardia differs from other programs at the college in that it is accredited and does not grant formal degrees. Like many community colleges, we offer foundational composition courses (English 101: An Introduction to Composition and Research, English 102: Writing through Literature, and English 103: The Research Paper), which are general educational requirements for nearly all students enrolled in the college’s forty-four accredited programs. Even though this course sequence is more limited compared to other accredited programs, Middle States required that the writing program conduct its own PPR. Ironically, we were being asked to fill the official duties of a program, but did not yet self-identify as one. This placed us in a unique and challenging position: doing assessment was a way to be recognized by the college administration as a formal program and to start *talking about ourselves* as a formal program. However, it meant succumbing to a top-down process that increased our workload significantly; and the results of which might not find their way into the classroom. As other community college WPAs have described, an accreditation-focused push for assessment can become a “driving force” for localized, programmatic assessment (Chosed 131). If we did not take charge of assessment, these measures would be created for us.

The leaders of our program’s most recent PPR (2015–2016) queried the college’s Office of Institutional Research for data on grades, pass rates, and standardized remedial test scores, to analyze trends across English 101 and 102 (*Periodic Program Review*). A few faculty members conducted

interviews with students and faculty, and wrote writing case studies. Our analysis revealed that students were writing less successfully in English 102; that is, they were not meeting the rubric benchmarks the way they were in English 101. This, among other findings, led the PPR leaders to outline five clear programmatic goals. First, rather than focusing solely on individual courses, the composition directors and the faculty committees should communicate and share the concerns that had an impact on the program. This was connected to the second recommendation: to ensure a smoother transition for students moving through the composition courses, the program must identify common programmatic aims and determine the shared learning objectives across these courses. Third, the report highlighted the need “to develop a shared vision for the composition program, and to foster a departmental culture focused on student writing and composition pedagogy” (*Periodic Program Review* 88). Finally, creating a writing program culture required developing and maintaining lines of communication among full-time and part-time faculty (89). Given the emergent nature of our program, the PPR pushed us to take extensive action to align our curriculum. The significance of these broader actions to the development of the writing program is described in the “Culture Building and Professional Development” section of this article.

In short, our program’s most recent experience with programmatic assessment brought into sharper focus what we thought we knew, what we didn’t know, and what kinds of questions we could reasonably answer. Before we were in a position to do what Gregory Glau describes as the “hard work” of collecting “hard data,” this preliminary round of data collection (*Periodic Program Review*) forced us to circle back, revise course proposals, and align learning objectives across our writing sequence. Only after starting to present ourselves more consciously as a “program” did we begin to ask ourselves what statistical information would convince *us*—not just convince college administrators and Middle States—that we are running a successful program. Ultimately, the requirement to conduct programmatic assessments allowed us to ask and answer relevant questions and put us in control of the evaluative process. Multiple subsequent iterations of these local assessments have shown us that even basic attempts to collect data—specifically, figuring out what to collect, when, why, and from whom—provide meaningful opportunities to think and function as a program.

The college now requires more continuous programmatic assessment in between PPR cycles. Fortunately, they have given program directors local control to design and implement these small-scale assessment efforts. Thus, we have identified and developed programmatic learning objectives, which are annually assessed, and have facilitated our alignment with the val-

ues and objectives that emerged from the revised curriculum. During the 2019–20 academic year we chose to focus on a central learning objective in our Composition I course: “the evaluation and synthesis of sources using summary and/or paraphrase and/or quotation.” Eight faculty members read 60 artifacts in a double–blind assessment; we created our own rubric and normed against the rubric. This experience helped pinpoint our fundamental learning objectives and enabled us to have better conversations about how students use sources in their writing, as supported by these artifacts. Moreover, it allowed us to begin to evaluate whether our previous course revisions, which emphasized using low-stakes writing to give students more opportunities to practice the skills we wanted them to demonstrate in their essays, were producing the desired results.

### REDEFINING LEADERSHIP ROLES

During the spring 2019 semester, department leaders began drafting a new leadership structure for the writing program. Our primary objective was to omit the structure of administrators who focused on a single course. To develop a new structure, the directors listed their job descriptions. We then determined which tasks and responsibilities were outdated, could be completed by support staff, or assigned to faculty in other roles in the department. We identified emerging duties and considered university and college-wide changes to developmental writing, standardized testing, and assessment. As a result, we created a revised job description, which was both retroactively descriptive and aspirational:

#### WPA 1

- Work with Department staff to review placement into ALP and developmental writing to ensure that students are appropriately placed.
- Engage in grant writing to support paid professional development.
- Collect assessment data about ENA 101, working with IR, at the end of each semester & collate it into annual reports.
- Work with the Assessment Leadership Team of the college in guiding faculty to deposit artifacts for the appropriate courses to support the assessment goals of the college, department, and program.
- Supervise composition committees in creating/updating grade descriptors.
- Organize and run norming sessions to ensure grading consistency within the writing courses.

## WPA 2

- Attend periodic meetings with representatives from the Testing Office to schedule CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CATW) testing dates and to discuss testing concerns.
- As needed, advise faculty outside the English department about English department practices and policies.
- Serve as a representative to the CUNY-wide Writing Discipline Council.
- Consult with library faculty related to guidance about and scheduling of library orientations in writing courses.
- Meet with textbook representatives to communicate course needs and to provide composition committees with updated information related to blanket-text orders
- Communicate regularly with Writing Center faculty liaison.

## WPA 3

- Supervise creation/update of materials in new writing course handbooks and on ePortfolio. This work will be carried out by composition committees and supervised by WPAs.
- Provide New Faculty Orientation related to writing courses.
- Update faculty about writing program policies via email and hard copy.
- Establish one departmental digital calendar for all important writing program dates.
- Create and distribute the First Week Duties Memo containing information about English department policies and procedures and post the calendar on the English department bulletin boards and distribute the calendar electronically.
- Together with the relevant composition committee, review final exam directions and prompts throughout the semester
- Schedule professional development sessions for composition faculty, particularly focusing on those teaching a class for the first or second time.

The new WPAs had the opportunity to rethink and reorganize these responsibilities with programmatic cohesion as the central aim. In this three-person WPA model, administrators work collaboratively to create and implement a vision for the program. Further, they lead as a unified body to develop assessment goals for courses, to establish composition committee and subcommittee goals, and they contribute to the English Department Leadership Team. In our first year in these revised positions, we learned

that managing WPA responsibilities alongside the teaching and service demands required of LaGuardia faculty members necessitated that we “reflect in action” in order to further blend these roles. To communicate as a unit, we created a dedicated WPA email account rather than responding from our individual emails and regularly conversed about pressing issues in a text thread. This made responses to inquiries more transparent and allowed us to avoid duplicating our work. As a result, our leadership structure was stable yet flexible and fluid; it could bend with new challenges and demands, but did not break.

#### CULTURE BUILDING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Considering that faculty who teach writing courses at two-year colleges frequently are not specialists in composition and rhetoric, establishing a program culture should accompany curricular and structural changes. Program culture is developed by making space to conceptualize what a writing program looks like at your particular institution; brainstorming and formalizing collective values; researching, piloting, and implementing pedagogical methods and approaches; and creating opportunities for professional development. In many ways, culture building is a form of what Mark Blaauw-Hara and Cheri Lemieux Spiegel, and Judy Nagy and Tony Burch, describe as a community of practice (CoP), in which faculty are “bound together by shared practices and understandings” (Blaauw-Hara and Spiegel 245) to “negotiate identity, learning, and purpose in collaboration” (Nagy and Burch 227). Furthermore, building program culture accomplishes what Phelps describes as the two essential components for institutional invention: first, all members jointly working to “change or reinvent . . . its purposes and structures” (82); and second, the collective creativity of members “serve not only their personal intellectual goals but also its common purposes as an organization” (82).

In our department, culture building focused on establishing a set of shared values and practices as part of our local control (i.e., sharing of assignments and approaches to texts). As a large department with multiple voices, engaging in community practice can be messy and chaotic. However, inviting widespread faculty involvement fosters greater faculty buy-in (and commitment) when new program or course policies and practices are adopted. Two examples of collaborative culture building initiatives that occurred in our department were the creation of a writing program vision statement and our introductory course guides (which we refer to as “Intro to” sheets). The development of our vision statement and “Intro to” guides

are examples of faculty negotiating the identity of our program and developing and clarifying its collaborative goals and purposes.

The genesis of our shift from a department with faculty who teach composition to a department with a writing program is reflected in our vision statement. This statement was developed by the Composition Task Force, a two-year internal faculty committee formed to follow up on assessment recommendations. Our vision statement expresses the overall trajectory of the writing program and general student learning outcomes:

The Writing Program fosters a journey of transformation for students at all levels, aiming to support the college's mission to educate and graduate one of the most diverse student populations in the country to become critical thinkers and socially responsible citizens. Writing is a foundation for students' intellectual engagement in the humanities and their participation in a rapidly evolving democratic society. To strengthen this foundation, faculty employ inclusive pedagogies that address the diversity of our student population. Our writing courses aim to integrate reading and writing; by modeling how to read culturally diverse texts closely, we seek to help students identify and create interpretive, evidence-based claims. Students also gain a deeper understanding of the writing process by exploring the relationship between rhetoric and genre, and engaging with digital/multimodal writing practices and contexts. Courses emphasize revision and collaborative student learning. ("English Department Vision Statement")

Our vision statement integrates department values with aspects of our college's mission statement and core values. It articulates how we recognize and aim to balance the needs of our student population with disciplinary knowledge and the larger needs of society.

Constructing the vision statement was vital to the development of our program culture in that it provided opportunities for faculty to discuss, negotiate, and agree on a shared purpose for the writing program. While the initial drafting process involved a handful of faculty members, the draft was shared with the department and faculty were given an opportunity to offer feedback, which contributed to shaping the identity of our program. Our departmental vote on the vision statement prior to its adoption is an important example of building a collaborative and democratic culture. We continue to vote on all major program and curricula initiatives before they are adopted.

Similar to our vision statement, our "Intro to" sheets were a collaborative initiative that established our program culture and defined the identity, goals, and objectives of our writing program. Developed by our WPAs and

faculty members on our composition committees, the “Intro to” sheets provide clear information about course objectives and policies. We developed student and faculty sheets for each of our writing courses. With headings such as “What Will You Write?” and “How Will You Be Successful?” student “Intro to” sheets use accessible language that centers their likely experience in the course rather than listing course policies. The faculty “Intro to” sheets provide essential information including the catalog description, learning objectives, and grading standards; further, they serve to highlight course values and provide concrete pedagogical guidance. For example, the course rationale section of our faculty “Introduction to English 102” sheet addresses the following:

The main goals of the course are to improve students’ writing, help students evaluate and synthesize sources, and to avoid plagiarism through the appropriate use of MLA conventions and documentation. Pedagogy practices include coaching students through close readings of texts, and allowing students opportunities for editing and revising in order to understand writing as a process. Faculty are encouraged to learn about the linguistic diversity of the students in their classrooms and incorporate students’ language abilities into their classroom practices or activities. (“English 102 Faculty Information Sheet”)

Overall, our “Intro to” sheets are a key communication tool between the *department and students*, and the *department and faculty*. They set the tone for each of our writing courses. Similar to our vision statement, drafting the “Intro to” sheets provided an opportunity to create new identities for each of our courses.

In the midst of developing a program culture, two-year colleges simultaneously consider ways to maintain and eventually evolve as needed. At LaGuardia, the significance of what we learned about the effectiveness of our writing courses required that we rethink professional development. How would faculty development resonate and stick across such a large department? How would the WPAs successfully adapt to working as a solid unit and implement faculty review and development initiatives? What could we do to foster greater consistency across courses and engage a broad swath of our faculty? The short answer would be to align curricula and faculty development to produce consistency across all of the sections of our major writing courses. The desire for lasting change necessitated that the WPAs re-envision the ways in which we produced faculty development opportunities that supported our culture-building efforts.

Our professional development activities represented reflection-in-action. Opportunities to engage faculty more deeply in the scholarship of writing studies were provided, including research and data collection. These activities provided venues for faculty to develop learning objectives as well as a common language to describe the work of our courses. This is the kind of work a traditional WPA does; in our context, having voluntary and remunerated professional development sessions helped to diminish faculty resistance, and create classroom transparency (see Del Principe in this issue). Our WPAs were not imposing mandates on the courses (the kind of “impositions” that some faculty feel intrude on academic freedom); rather, they functioned as guides in a collaborative department-wide process.

In practice, our working groups are an example of the interplay between collaborative culture building and professional development. Revisions to our developmental writing courses, which were the central focus of the working groups, provided opportunities for faculty to improve their classroom practices, while collaboratively revising the course learning objectives and other curricular elements. Working groups researched best practices in accelerated learning and developmental pedagogy, reviewed other course models, and created materials to share with faculty. Ultimately, the working groups recommended curriculum changes and rewrote the course with new objectives. Next they collectively revised the learning objectives for the courses, which were voted on and approved by the department. Extending the collaborative nature of our culture building initiatives, our working groups are an example of collaborative writing program administration that helped increase faculty buy-in to pedagogical changes.

The WPAs still utilize aspects of traditional program oversight. For example, during the first academic year of our revised writing courses, the WPAs collected syllabi from all faculty members. The purpose was to document whether syllabi were in sync with the new requirements, and to ensure students were receiving the same course description, learning objectives, and number of assignments. It is important to note this review was not intended to function as an enforcement method; however, it allowed the WPAs to ascertain whether faculty were in compliance with the shifts in course requirements. The syllabi review revealed that reinforcement of the changes to course policies and pedagogies was necessary. The WPAs designed a professional development workshop to address some of the concerns of the syllabi review, and incorporated a session on low-high stakes assignment prompts and scaffolding practices. In the subsequent semester, the English department faculty guidelines were revised to remind faculty about course policies and to incorporate information from the “Intro to” sheet on their syllabi. Faculty were still free to exercise autonomy with

respect to text selection, course themes, and other teaching and pedagogical practices.

These examples of professional development illustrate the relationship between traditional program oversight and collaborative attempts at WPA work among faculty. This dance between the WPAs and our department colleagues' respects faculty autonomy, and reflects our commitment to democratic decision making within our writing program. Culture building and professional development are shaped by internal efforts as well as outside influences; thus, the next section discusses maintaining relationships with other programs and WPAs, to facilitate continued reflection, growth, and program reinvention.

### MAKING INSTITUTIONAL CONNECTIONS

As LaGuardia's English department sought to rethink and reshape its writing program, departments across CUNY were also seeking ways to better communicate and organize as a body of writing program scholars and educators. The significant changes to our stand-alone developmental course (English 099) were the result of university-wide policy changes, spearheaded by a coalition of writing program administrators. This university-wide concern required a collective response, and there were few venues available for composition faculty to discuss and organize. Faculty from LaGuardia and other campuses came together to re-form the Writing Discipline Council. This body was essential to changing CUNY policy and creating lines of communication across campuses. The council gatherings revealed information about other CUNY writing programs, reinforced and strengthened our disciplinary and institutional knowledge, and provided opportunities for informal WPA job training. Further, this work granted us disciplinary legitimacy in the eyes of our faculty and administration. Additionally, cross-campus collaboration provided us with the ability to address policy (in-process) at the university level.

One particularly telling example of this effective cross-campus collaboration was the council's response to the university-wide remediation policy. The council wrote a letter to the CUNY administration to address its dissatisfaction with remediation practices. At that time, the policy was in opposition to developmental learning best practices; students were assessed based on the same "do-or-die" exam, to determine their placement in and exit from developmental writing courses. Placement exams were not always administered or proctored on campus. The exams were graded at central locations by a hired staff that did not necessarily include local English department faculty. In addition, the on-campus exit exams were the single measure for successful course completion. The council was aware

of using multiple-measures rather than one exam, and the significance of local assessment (TYCA Research Committee 2015) to determine successful developmental course completion. The letter proposed a model of multiple-measures to assess writing that would accurately reflect the work of the student, minimize the punitive nature of timed-writing, and return faculty expertise to the assessment of student work. Initial responses to the letter and the council's continued advocacy were chilly. However, as the central administration acknowledged national remediation trends, specifically California (Hern, Hern and Snell), as well as non-profit organization influences (like Strong Start to Finish), the university adopted the council's remediation reform model. For two-year college writing programs that exist within larger systems, understanding the inner workings of your particular system, and fostering connections with possible allies, provide opportunities for WPAs to engage with and make university-wide policy changes, rather than merely responding to policy directives.

Campuses with less formal writing program administrative structures can benefit from inter-organizational knowledge sharing and support, to create a cohesive writing program. One less systematic collaborative effort was the CUNY-wide Composition Conference (May 2018) — “Critical Pedagogies at CUNY: Learning through Writing”— convened by LaGuardia's English department composition committee. The conference germinated based on the recommendation (*Periodic Program Review*) to facilitate workshops for English faculty that encouraged the exchange and development of multiple approaches to writing pedagogy. We created a forum to explore critical frameworks around teaching composition and writing studies, addressed national trends in writing pedagogy, modeled effective practices, and included adjunct, writing center tutor, and graduate student voices in this university-wide conversation. A year later, the conference “Restructuring First-Year Writing at CUNY: Access and Equity in the 21st Century” assembled faculty from multiple campuses to discuss how to reimagine first-year writing. We invited outside scholars to offer a disciplinary picture of national developmental education reform. This discussion went beyond pass rates and placement and focused instead on student “access and equity.” In short, these conferences enhanced cross institutional relationships, helped to provide cohesion in LaGuardia's writing program, and produced a feedback loop between our department and the CUNY system.

These examples highlight how cross-institutional professional networks were central to our department's ongoing reinvention as a writing program. Both conferences enabled the department to situate itself within scholarly conversations about two-year college writing programs. Our work with the Writing Discipline Council offered the chance to make university-wide

curricular changes that adequately reflect our department's developmental writing values. Perhaps most importantly, sharing spaces with other program directors provided effective and usable leadership models that partially shaped the construction of our writing program.

## CONCLUSION

Returning to Phelps' central questions, we have pinpointed the circumstances that have both enabled and defined a "climate of invention" within our program. As a result of our process, we discovered a series of activities around assessment, restructuring, and reinvention that could be adapted by two-year colleges interested in developing a writing program. Our program assessment began with a commitment to "knowing-in-action" and provided on-the-job training in assessment practices. Taking ownership of assessment as a catalyst for programmatic invention helped us to address the local needs of the program rather than simply comply with top-down directives. A close review of the curriculum revealed what we needed to change in our writing course sequence. These discoveries then produced conversations that led to rethinking and reinventing our administrative structure. Meanwhile, culture building helped to shape the construction of an intentional writing program as ongoing professional development reinforced and maintained the work of curriculum alignment. If possible, we recommend other emergent programs make institutional connections that allow faculty to share and discuss scholarly work, placement policies, pedagogical strategies, and other concerns. These connections reminded us that invention does not happen in a vacuum; in our case, we were able to compare and contrast our choices with peer institutions. Through these connections, WPAs can reimagine the relationship between their local work and program development within the larger field of writing studies.

Our intention was to share our process in building a writing program from the ground up and to suggest concrete, strategic advice for two-year programs. The commitment to make smaller yet meaningful changes and initiatives led to a cohesive, visible, and democratic writing program. In moments of drastic change, what stabilized our collective work was imagining the student experience. We considered what it was like for students to move through our writing program courses and beyond. This concern was the centerpiece of the conversation and helped us to maintain focus during periods of change. When we began this process in 2015, we did not imagine our current WPA leadership structure. Moreover, a top-down administrative approach could not have achieved these results. Our reinvention evolved organically based on the issues raised and addressed by the faculty, and its democratic process. While we were not the first people in

the department to embark on this journey, our ability to successfully build a program was facilitated by a climate ripe for change. No one can be sure whether these changes will endure after our tenure as administrators; yet, we remain hopeful.

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# Cultivating a Sustainable TYC Writing Program: Collaboration, Disciplinarity, and Faculty Governance

Annie Del Principe

*This article looks back to the 1998 special issue of WPA themed on collaborative administration and contrasts patterns in the articles in that issue—written almost entirely by four-year-college and university WPAs—with the particular conditions of one TYC writing program to argue that collaboration is equally valuable and vital in TYC programs but for different reasons than at other types of institutions. The specific material conditions of TYC writing programs—including diversity of disciplinary expertise among the faculty, and complex power dynamics—create a setting in which WPAs must build deep and wide collaborative structures that are both strong and radically inclusive. This article concludes with a list of design principles to guide the ongoing work of creating sustainable collaborative TYC writing programs.*

## I. COLLABORATION VIGNETTE #1 | INCREDIBLY NAIVE

In 2010, the elimination of a system-wide rising-junior reading and writing exam afforded our TYC writing program the opportunity to redesign the common final assessment for our FYC I course. Over the course of that year, faculty teaching Comp I experimented with a few different modes of final assessment that might work better for our students and faculty than the former timed exam. Based on the feedback we received from the faculty who'd been trying out various modes of final assessment, the directorial team of our writing program created a protocol for collaborative assessment at the end of all Comp I courses. The idea was to have faculty members work in small groups to cross-assess a single piece of student writing (not an entire portfolio) from each other's sections of the course. Our hope in designing this new practice was that it would help bring a needed level of harmony and consistency across sections of Comp I. We knew that some radically different versions of the course and assessment judgments were happening across the 85+ sections we run each semester, and we felt that it was ethically incumbent upon us to try to work towards greater consistency in a required core course. So, in 2011 when we devised this practice of cross-assessment of a single piece of student writing across all sections of Comp I, it felt like the right thing to do, and it felt as if there was an abundance of positive energy from the faculty to make this practice successful.

Well. While we weren't wrong that the majority of our colleagues were up for cross-assessment and thought it was a good idea, we had seriously underestimated the passion and resolve of the faculty members who were not on board with collaborative assessment. Long story short: a minority of faculty members began to openly challenge the new practice on various grounds: as a possible violation of academic freedom, as a possible contract violation, and as imposed via a specious authority (we WPAs). Although there were only a few faculty who voiced these sorts of sentiments, they were persistent, and, ultimately, we eliminated the compulsory cross-assessment practice.

In retrospect, this experience served us, all of us in the department, as a useful learning opportunity. Without this naive misstep on our parts as WPAs, we wouldn't have figured out why our process was faulty and how we could do better. This experience not only reinforced our knowledge that collaboration in decision-making and leadership within our writing program was essential, but it also surfaced some of the particular qualities of the professional ecosystem in our TYC English department that require a rather patient, ongoing collaboration among our WPA team and the rest of the faculty in the department. The combination of the diversity and ambiguity of disciplinary expertise plus a relatively flattened power hierarchy create an environment in which consensus is not easily reached and collaborative decision making is absolutely necessary to create what might be recognized as a writing program.

Recently, TYC-oriented scholarship in our field has helped to draw out several features of the professional location of TYC faculty members who teach composition courses. Adjunct, contingent faculty comprise a substantial portion of the composition "teaching majority" (Hassel and Giordano) and are frequently denied, along with reliable employment, a voice in decisions that control the courses they teach (Jensen). The fact that most TYC English departments effectively function as writing programs (Taylor), in that composition courses are the bulk of what they teach, creates a host of particular tensions connected to disciplinarity, autonomy, and academic freedom for faculty with backgrounds in various fields of English studies (Del Principe and Brady; Klausman, "Two-Year"; Larson). These tensions create situations in which faculty with a wealth of experience in TYC writing classrooms cannot confidently adopt clear professional "footing" (Toth, Griffiths, and Thirolf 100) and professional autonomy in their local writing programs and in national writing studies scholarship (Griffiths; Larson). How can WPAs work effectively in TYC settings, in which the boundaries and epistemology of the field of writing studies is ambiguous, disciplinary expertise and autonomy are in question, and faculty might rather

digress into their “underlives” (Zino) than come together to create common ground and learn from and with each other?

From the particular perspective of a WPA at a large urban TYC, I argue that collaborative structures are utterly necessary, not just desirable, and might work differently and for different reasons than they do in other higher education settings. The specific material conditions of TYC writing programs—including staffing issues, diversity of disciplinary expertise among the faculty, and ambiguous power dynamics—create a setting in which WPAs must build deep and wide collaborative structures that are both strong and radically inclusive. I frame a close analysis of the material conditions of one TYC writing program within previous scholarship on collaboration in writing program administration to draw out how collaboration functions in two-year settings, and I conclude with a concrete example of a TYC collaborative structure and a suggested list of design principles WPAs can use to create sustainable programs in their home institutions.

## II. THE 1998 *WPA* ISSUE ON COLLABORATION

I begin by briefly revisiting a 1998 issue of *WPA* focused on collaboration in order to place my analysis of my TYC within the somewhat broader history of the discussion of collaboration within the pages of this journal. The articles in volume 21, numbers 1–2 of this journal, guest edited by Jeanne Gunner, frame collaborative administration as a highly desirable goal that, for the most part, enriches the experiences of the administrative team, who are most often tenure-track faculty members, but who might include grad students in writing studies, as well as the other members of the teaching staff in the writing program. In her opening letter to the special issue, Gunner reflects that “the concept of collaborative writing program administration has been in existence long enough for it to have been enacted, theorized, critiqued, and reconceived” (7), thus positioning collaborative administrative structures as commonplace in 1998.

Across the articles in the 1998 issue—only one of which was written from the perspective of a scholar at a TYC, who was serving as a dean—there are various justifications offered to readers for a collaborative approach. A couple of articles describe the advantages of collaboration stemming from its grounding in feminist and postmasculinist theories of power (Meeks and Hult; Smoke). Lynn Meeks and Christine Hult draw on a 1994 work by Hildy Miller and Jeanne Gunner and reframe Miller and Gunner’s overtly feminist stances into less-political language, labeling the collaborative structures as “co-mentoring” relationships in which “all parties contribute equally to the relationship” (Meeks and Hult 10). Less

optimistically, Trudy Smoke focuses on the fraught position of “powerless power” (93) that the WPA finds herself in, particularly in Smoke’s setting—a large, urban college in which the writing program is largely staffed by PT, non-TA, adjuncts. Many of the articles describe ways that collaborative WPA power structures benefit the graduate students who serve in them as the primary staff of the writing program (Anson and Rutz; Blakemore; Meeks and Hult; Recchio). Being included in various types of administrative roles both helps these up-and-coming teacher-scholars become familiar with the types of work involved in designing and running writing programs and with writing studies scholarship more generally—particularly if their doctoral study is not in a writing studies field. It’s clear that the primary goal of collaboration within these programs is the need for practical composition teaching and administrative experience in order to professionalize and prepare future PhDs (from various disciplinary backgrounds) for their future (possible) roles as teachers of composition.

*The Harmonizing Effect of Shared Knowledge  
(or the Messy Question of Expertise)*

Many of the articles from the special issue focus on what might be described as the nitty-gritty surface of WPA work—running meetings and professional development, staffing and scheduling, managing student and instructor complaints, and textbook selection, to name a few—and very few bring up the more conceptual, intellectual aspects of the work. For instance, none of the articles describe situations like the one I describe in vignette #1, above, in which a portion of the teaching staff, or collaborative team, had a serious difference of opinion about what “writing” is and how it should be taught or assessed. Having experienced many of these types of disagreements in my own experience as a WPA in a TYC, this puzzled me. Then I realized that one reason for this seeming lack of deep disagreement might be the fact that, in nearly all of the writing programs described in this issue, the faculty and teaching staff share the same (or close to the same) knowledge base and disciplinary identity. For the most part, the writing programs reported on in this issue are directed by TT faculty with degrees and/or professional scholarly identities in writing studies and are staffed primarily by TAs who are graduate students in writing studies. These teachers study composition scholarship, history, and pedagogy, and that probably allows them to understand why the faculty who have designed the curricula or outcomes for the courses in the program might have made certain choices rather than others. Those TAs who are pursuing PhDs in subjects other than composition—I’m thinking of the students

described in Chris M. Anson and Carol Rutz's article—are teaching in the writing programs as part of their graduate training and are there to learn the scholarship of the field. As part of their preparation to teach in the program, they take a pre-fall training session in which, I assume, they learn about the courses in the program and why they've been designed the way they have. Again, these teachers have acquired disciplinary knowledge, at least some of it, that would allow them to understand why the program is structured as it is. As they collaborate in the administration of their writing programs, they are not engaging in “a collaborative construction of knowledge; it is [instead] the cooperative application of pre-existing expertise” (Quiroz 83). Of course I do not assume that there are not, at times, significant disagreements between teachers in these programs, but I found it telling that none of the authors in this issue mentioned ameliorating or managing deep differences of opinion as part of the routine work involved in collaborative WPA.

For better or for worse (likely, for both), the harmonizing factor of a shared disciplinary knowledge base is not present in my experience in the TYC writing program in which I have worked since 2004. Kingsborough Community College (CUNY), my home institution, is an urban, highly diverse TYC that enrolls 15,000 students, and our composition program is housed within the English department. Our department teaches literature, journalism, ESL, and creative writing courses, but fully 68% of the courses the department teaches are the two core, required transfer-level composition courses. On average, we offer approximately 140 sections each term of our Composition I and Composition II courses combined; 40% of those courses are taught by FT faculty, and 60% are taught by PT faculty members. Our department has 104 faculty members: 40.4% (42) are tenure track (of those, 37 are tenured); 12.5% (13) are lecturers who will be eligible for a tenure equivalent; and 47.1% (49) are adjunct faculty. Upon review of our current list of faculty members, I am one of a total of six FT TT faculty members (two of the six are untenured) who have PhDs in a writing studies field (composition, English education, urban education, etc.) and whose scholarly identity is in writing studies. This places those of us with formal composition credentials as 14% of the FT members of the department. Unlike departments described by other TYC scholars (Andelora “Teacher/Scholar/Activist”; Klausman, “Toward”), my department hasn't fully pivoted to prioritizing hiring new TT faculty with degrees and disciplinary expertise in a writing studies field. Because those of us in writing studies are a small minority within the overall faculty, there is absolutely not a shared familiarity of writing studies scholarship among the faculty teaching our composition courses. As described by Tim Taylor, we are an English

department that is essentially a writing program, in which “mostly literature-trained faculty teach mostly composition” (Janangelo and Klausman 140). At the same time, these non-writing-studies FT TT faculty members have all taught composition courses during their years as graduate students and have spent most of their classroom time in our TYC teaching composition courses. Thus, they have extensive experience teaching writing while also not personally identifying as composition people. While I realize that TYCs are diverse in their contemporary hiring practices, I truly doubt that my institution is anomalous in that the majority of faculty teaching writing courses do not have a scholarly background in writing studies (Andelora, “Response”; Calhoon-Dillahunt).

Many of our PT adjunct faculty members come from backgrounds teaching English in secondary schools, or they are creative writers with MFAs who are looking for college teaching work to round out their income and to provide them with steady, good benefits. These teachers typically bring many years of classroom teaching experience to their work in the program, and, while most of our adjuncts did not begin their teaching careers in our school, most of them remain with us for many years, thus building local expertise and valuable institutional memory. The former, and sometimes current, high school teachers bring their expertise, gained through years of intensive teaching in the NYC public schools, of managing classroom dynamics, motivating students, and handling heavy workloads. Our teachers who are creative writers bring their expertise in creating voice, experimenting with structure, and writing autobiographically, among other things, to their teaching and to our community’s discussions of the writing habits that might benefit our students most. Of these 49 PT adjunct teachers, only two have direct graduate-level training and scholarly identities in composition and rhetoric despite the fact that all of them teach numerous composition courses each semester. So, while these teachers have a wealth of classroom experience teaching composition, they, like most of our FT TT faculty, do not share the national, scholarly knowledge base of the field of writing studies. Rather than enhancing our ability to collaborate effectively, this lack of shared disciplinary knowledge creates situations in which teachers talk past each other (Del Principe), act as “independent contractors” (Griffiths) quietly doing their own thing in their own classrooms, and seek out other faculty who share their teaching philosophies, thus creating factions within the department that undermine true collaboration (Griffiths and Jensen).

Our non-composition FT TT faculty generally lack familiarity with the field—if, by “the field,” one means scholarship—of writing studies, but they also have a somewhat different perspective on their expertise as

composition teachers as compared with the PT faculty members. For the most part, these 55 full-time career academics have taught composition since they were grad students pursuing their PhDs in a literature-related field. Many of them had some level of training—perhaps a semester-long course, or an on-the-job practicum—in teaching composition as new grad students, and ever since then they’ve taught primarily composition courses while teaching the occasional literature course in their area of scholarly expertise. While most of the PT instructors identify as teachers, the FT instructors identify as teachers and professional scholars, and, as a whole, they are well-published in their literature-oriented fields as our guidelines for tenure require publication. Perhaps their preparation for teaching composition courses in a TYC would have been improved if the most recent *TYCA Guidelines for Preparing Teachers of English in the Two-Year College* (Calhoun-Dillahunt, Jensen, Johnson, Tinberg, and Toth) had been in place when they were in graduate school, but their preparation isn’t the primary source of struggle; rather it is the ambiguity regarding disciplinary expertise that exists in writing studies and manifests in a range of behaviors and positions that bubble up from the “underlives” of these faculty members (Zino). For example, one receives a palpable sense of resentment from many of these full-timers in response to any attempt to get them to work together to create shared curricular guidelines or even student learning outcomes. Many label this work as a violation of their academic freedom—their right as professionals to determine what to teach and how to teach it in their own classes. Faculty who take this stance would prefer a “house in disarray” (Andelora, “Teacher/Scholar/Activist” 304), as it were, to a “writing program” with more consistency across sections. A healthy percentage of these full-timers quietly question or outright reject the idea that there might be a difference in expertise between them and those of us who have degrees and scholarly identities in writing studies because they perceive the teaching of writing as part of their professional expertise, given that they’ve been doing it for so many years. They have a good point.

The issue of (the lack of) shared disciplinary knowledge and different forms of expertise begs a central question for those of us working as WPAs in TYCs: what does/might it mean to be in the field of composition or writing studies? The situation of diverse expertise I’ve described in my writing program has become a relatively common topic of reflection and scholarship by TYC authors in the last decade or so and has inspired discussions regarding the nature and origin of expertise in writing studies. Because we work every day in writing programs in which the majority of the teachers, FT and PT, do not hold “the academic credentials typically required of faculty members in other fields,” we find ourselves trying to square this circle

by thinking quite hard and creatively about knowledge and professionalism in our field (Wardle and Blake 90). In many ways building off Stephen North's 1987 concept of instructor "lore" in composition, Holly Larson questions whether it is fair, equitable, or valid for writing studies to produce knowledge via scholarship that is largely produced and sanctioned by scholars from four-year colleges and universities. Implementing standpoint theory, Larson examines how the standpoint of the field of writing studies preserves the field's participation in traditional modes of knowledge-making, i.e., the traditional scholarly article that is embedded in and responding to previous scholarship in the field. She argues that this stands at odds with the fact that a huge proportion, certainly more than half, of composition courses in the country are taught by faculty who, like herself, do not hold degrees in composition and rhetoric; and, further, this standpoint excludes the knowledge of those non-composition-credentialed teachers by considering it non-scholarly or anecdotal. Larson advocates the redefinition of "scholarly work" to include the lore, or "folk knowledge" (Larson 129) generated by composition teachers who do not participate in or are shut out of the traditional forms of composition scholarship. Thus, her argument seeks to elevate practitioner knowledge to scholarly, professional knowledge. This perspective would define being in the field of composition as teaching composition classes, reflecting on one's experiences teaching those classes, and processing those reflections and experiences reciprocally with other composition teachers (Larson 130). Larson's reframing of expertise is a radically democratic, non-hierarchical vision in that it positions the act of teaching composition courses as the origin of scholarly knowledge that heeds Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano's call for the field of composition to reflect the reality of the "teaching majority" (117).

As appealing as it is, on the basis of validity and fairness, to accept Larson's redefinition of the origin of professional knowledge, it is troublesome to do so because it questions the very nature of scholarly knowledge more broadly and questions whether writing studies has a status equal to other academic disciplines. In describing their work in their own writing program—albeit in a university setting, but in a program not staffed by composition-credentialed faculty or graduate students—Elizabeth Wardle and J. Blake Scott admit that "Rhetoric and Composition is unlike most other fields" because it doesn't "see graduate training in the field as a necessary qualification for teaching the field's scholarship" (73). From this perspective, composition could appear to be a field that routinely hires non-professionals to teach its courses. How odd. By Jeff Klausman's definition of the term *professional*, the majority of faculty, FT and PT, who teach

composition courses in my writing program would have to be categorized as non-professionals:

the status of professional must be determined by the community of professionals, as the AAUP states, which in our case are the scholars and practitioners who work within, at, or near the disciplinary boundaries of composition-rhetoric as expressed in the journals, presses, and conferences that disseminate the field's research. ("Two-Year" 390)

Given that writing studies does appear to operate as a field—complete with journals, presses, conferences, graduate programs, etc.—it must be that in order to have expertise and professional status in writing studies one must participate in the communal, scholarly interactions of the field—right? So simply teaching composition courses, however long one has done that, would not qualify one as a “professional” in the discipline and would imply that one doesn't have the same rights to academic freedom as do those teacher-scholars with degrees and scholarly identities in the community of writing studies because “one has the right to autonomy only when one is teaching one's subject” (Boland 44).

To return to my own colleagues, the conundrum regarding the expertise of the FT faculty members, in particular, creates an identity crisis of sorts for them and creates challenges for those of us working as WPAs and trying to foster collaboration. While a small minority of these faculty members have embraced identities as “transdisciplinary cosmopolitans” (Toth, Griffiths, and Thirolf 94), the majority don't identify as members of a writing studies field. For the most part, these faculty members want to continue to define themselves primarily as professionals in literary studies who publish in literary journals, attend and present at the MLA and other literary conferences, and who generally engage in the scholarly communities of their field. They got into English studies because they wanted to study and write about literature or a related field, and that is what they enjoy doing the most. At the same time, as TYC faculty, they spend nearly all of their time teaching and talking about their composition courses, of which they teach 3–5 per year, on average (in addition to a couple of literature courses). Whether they perceive their composition courses as a rewarding part of their job or as an unfortunate neoliberal reality that must be tolerated, it is my impression after working with many of these colleagues for 18+ years that all of them feel they have the right to determine how to teach and what to teach in their composition courses and that they have the right to academic freedom in making these choices. If asked whether composition and rhetoric is a scholarly field, I'm sure the majority—but perhaps not all—of

these faculty members would say yes; if asked whether they are members of that field, I think the responses would be mixed, but I'm sure that quite a few would respond in the affirmative, even though they do not participate in the field of composition in any other way than teaching composition courses. To act as a WPA in this context requires one to woo these colleagues into collaborating with each other, and with PT faculty, to create consistency and coherence across a writing program. It requires walking a tightrope between acknowledging faculty expertise in classroom teaching while simultaneously gently, but consistently, suggesting that greater familiarity with writing studies scholarship and the practices of other teachers in our program might actually strengthen their teaching and their students' learning.

### *Power Differentials*

In addition to the lack of what I've called the "harmonizing effect" of a shared disciplinary knowledge base among teachers in TYC writing programs, the power dynamics at play between WPAs and other teachers differs in the TYC and four-year/university settings. Regardless of the collaborative structures, creative, democratically minded WPAs in programs staffed by TAs construct, the fact is that the TAs are junior in every way to the TT faculty collaboratively directing the program. Regardless of the collaborative structures that might exist in a program, there really is no getting around the fact that the hierarchical, apprenticeship structure of academia is one in which there is a substantial power differential between grad students and tenured faculty. This power differential very likely has a number of effects on the ways in which collaboration functions in these settings. For example, I'd imagine that grad students might sometimes not truly feel that they are able to voice dissenting points. Further, the TT faculty serving as the WPA, or WPA collective group, very likely are, or have been, the actual instructors of the grad students teaching in the program, thus TT faculty's perspectives have quite literally shaped those students' teaching philosophies and knowledge of what a composition course might actually look like. This goes back, in another way, to my earlier point about the harmonizing effect of a shared knowledge base, but this time with a power dynamic. Overall, my guess is that this power differential serves to both motivate the grad students to collaborate, and be seen as collaborating, with the TT WPAs and to make this collaboration as functional and as smooth as possible.

In my TYC setting, the power and status differentials between program leadership and the rest of the teaching staff of the program are significantly

different than the situations described in these articles and influence the ways we're able to collaborate. It's not that there are no power differentials, but the nature and direction of the power is more diverse and complex than programs with the TT prof WPA and grad student/TA set up. I'd like to briefly describe the power relationships in my program by looking at three settings: among program leaders, between program leaders and PT teachers, and between program leaders and FT teachers. In our program, the inner leadership team is comprised of four FT tenured (at this point) faculty members: myself (a PhD in English education, who has always identified as a teacher-scholar-researcher in writing studies), and three other English department faculty members (one has a PhD in cultural studies, two have PhDs in literature—one of those has adopted writing studies as her scholarly identity and the other continues to publish scholarship on literature). While I currently carry the title of director of the composition program and they serve as associate directors, all four of us share the responsibilities of administering and making decisions about all the various branches of the writing program. That said, the fact that I am the only one of us who holds a degree in a writing studies field and who has always had a scholarly identity in writing studies creates a power differential between me and the other three members of the leadership team. Despite my ongoing attempts to balance our power and voices in the dynamic among the four of us, I find that my colleagues continually defer to me in making the final decisions about actions the program should take or in providing disciplinary leadership and vision for the program. While I would still say that the four of us collaborate quite functionally, it would be inaccurate for me to pretend that there aren't power differences within that four-way collaboration.

Here I'd like to draw out the power dynamics I see between our program leadership and the other faculty members, our colleagues, who teach, along with us, the writing courses that comprise the composition program. Our program illustrates well what Joseph Janangelo and Jeffrey Klausman have identified as the defining feature of TYC writing programs in general: "the notion of autonomy—strong respect for and insistence upon the individual faculty member's independence in course design, textbook selection, assessment, and so on—is what marks the two-year collect writing program as different" (140). While our numerous adjunct PT teachers certainly hold a status that has less power than do our tenured FT faculty, they have a different power profile than do TA grad students. First of all, as mentioned earlier these PT instructors have nearly all been teaching writing at the college level for over a decade. While they generally do not participate in the field of composition and rhetoric, as described earlier, they have earned a level of authority—in their own and others' eyes—through

their years of teaching. In addition, while I would never deny that those of us on the leadership team hold certain types of power in the program, we do not determine the schedules of PT teachers (including the number of courses assigned to different teachers), we do not arrange for the observation of their teaching, and we are not positioned as their teachers. Given the relatively good job security and benefits that come with a long-term PT position teaching in our unionized system, our adjunct teachers truly are our colleagues. As we collaborate with them, there is no way in which their eagerness or agreeability earns them greater rights, more stable employment, or better written recommendations than other PT colleagues receive. Of course, the same thing is true of our FT colleagues. Given the fact that we are literally employed at the same status, and given their previously discussed sense that they are equally in the field of composition, having taught it for so many years, I have never sensed a hesitation on the part of these colleagues to openly express their opinions and judgements about what they like or don't like about the work we're doing on our program.

It is this sense of professional autonomy and confidence that we see in (naive) vignette #1, when faculty members felt able to express their own sense that cross-assessing student writing was a violation of their rights as faculty members. Most of the time, faculty in my department operate as independent contractors, the term Griffiths uses to describe TYC faculty who want and take independence in their classroom practice, but they really do not engage in the wider profession in a way that affords them full autonomy. However, our request that they collaborate on student assessment pushed a few of them to demand professional autonomy and speak from their footing (Toth, Griffiths, and Thirolf) as writing teacher/experts. Both Griffiths and Toth, Griffiths, and Thirolf attempt to parse the same issue—the ambiguity of the professional identity and authority of TYC faculty—using frameworks that help clarify the quite particular positioning of these faculty. As my associate directors and I came to better understand the power dynamics at work within our program, we became better able to design collaborative structures that take advantage of what might appear to be irreconcilable differences.

### III. COLLABORATION VIGNETTE #2 | SOMEWHAT WISER

Based on what we learned via the experience of trying, and failing, to introduce the practice of cross-assessing student papers at the end of our Comp I course, we retooled and tried another, very different, approach to building deep, meaningful collaboration into our writing program. I offer this second, more successful, story to readers as just one example of the kind

of collaborative structure that is working pretty well, albeit with regular adjustments and tune-ups, in a TYC writing program. I do not offer it as a blueprint for a structure other TYCs should necessarily attempt to replicate because it was borne from the very particular material conditions of my setting, and that is very much part of the point.

After our attempt to initiate cross-assessment of student writing at the end of Comp I crashed and burned (perhaps a bit hyperbolic, but this is what it felt like), my associate directors and I reflected on what that experience had taught us, and in 2013 we initiated a new structure within the composition program and in the English department—the Course Review Committee (CRC). We named it the course review committee because we were thinking that the CRC would function as a way of having faculty collaboratively review and share thoughts and judgments about the writing students submit at the end of our Comp I course; thus, it would be a different way of accomplishing a function similar to that intended for the cross-assessment groups. Over the years as the CRC has continued, we've realized the myriad functions and potentials for the group, and it has truly blossomed.

At present, here is how the CRC works. Mid-summer, I put out a call to all faculty in our department inviting them to volunteer for service on the CRC during the coming academic year. I stress that the CRC is a year-long commitment and that faculty earn payment—in time or in money—for their participation. Each year, I secure funding, through internal system-wide funds for the improvement of undergraduate education, to pay up to 25 teachers, FT or PT, for the CRC, so I keep the group to 25 or fewer. From the pool of faculty who have volunteered, I select CRC participants based on whether they have served on the committee before (new participants are prioritized), and I try to match the ratio of FT to PT participants on the CRC to the ratio of teachers who actually teach our Comp I course (approximately 60% PT to 40% FT). Maintaining this ratio is important to our work because we are dedicated to ensuring a voice for PT teachers (who are not paid to attend department meetings and cannot vote in those meetings) and because we want the powerful professional development features of the CRC to reach the teachers who are actually in the classroom teaching our composition courses.

While the big picture goal of the CRC changes each year, there is a predictable rhythm to the type of work the committee does. During the fall, we read and discuss composition scholarship on a particular issue we're working on; currently, we've been learning about ways to move toward greater equity in our composition sequence. In addition, faculty participate in their choice of "collaboration groups" with other CRC members. This

past fall, there were three choices of collaboration: classroom intervisitation, co-teaching, or cross-marking. These forms of what I would call deep collaboration—collaboration that goes beyond discussion and crosses the threshold into the sanctum of a teacher’s classroom—have helped us build “psychosocial resilience” among a large portion of the faculty teaching composition in our program (Griffiths and Jensen 303). My observation is that they help build this level of resilience and community among members of our program because, in all versions of fall collaborations, faculty are put in the (possibly stressful) situation of having some aspect of their individual private teaching practice exposed to one or more of their peers. Because these collaborations are done peer-to-peer and because there are no written documents or evaluations that are produced and filed as a result of these collaborations, they become deep moments of sharing and bonding between and among faculty members.

During spring semesters, faculty design and carry out small-scale classroom-based empirical research projects in their own classrooms based in some way on the overarching focus of the CRC that academic year. The purposes of these “spring research projects,” as we call them, are multiple:

- they provide an opportunity for faculty to experiment with researcher/scholar mode and imagine how one might empirically study student experience and/or learning; as mentioned earlier, very few of our FT or PT faculty have backgrounds in composition or in fields that involve empirical research;
- they are the way we do program-level assessment;
- they require each faculty member to find and use at least one piece of composition scholarship in framing their project, which pushes them into the field’s scholarly literature as researchers rather than as students of that literature;
- they result in faculty making concrete changes to their own teaching practices based on what they themselves found out via a study that they designed and carried out.

While there are even more advantages of these spring research projects, these are the most salient for the current discussion. Our CRC meetings during spring semesters are designed to help support faculty as they design and carry out these studies, and faculty share and discuss their findings and conclusions at our last meeting of the spring term. At that last meeting, we also did some deep collaborative reflection and work to set goals for the next year’s CRC.

Periodically, suggested changes to the curricula or assessment practices of our composition courses grow out of the CRC's work. In 2015, we were faced with such a situation when the CRC produced mission statements and revised the student learning outcomes for both of our composition courses. At the end of that year, we wondered together how that work would and should be brought to the larger English department (remember, we are only 25 out of 104 faculty in the department) and what status these collective decisions should have within the larger program. What we were realizing was that the program, and the department as a whole, did not have a clear faculty-led governance structure. This realization inspired the CRC to design what it felt was a fair process of faculty governance for changes to the composition courses. We created operating procedures for the CRC whereby any proposed changes to curricula, assessment practices, or required elements of syllabi would be voted on within the CRC and would only be approved if they received 65% or higher of the vote within that body. Once a proposal has been approved via this process, I request of the English department chair that we have time during a department meeting to bring the proposal forward for the vote of the entire department. Once this vote has been taken, the proposed changes are in force across all sections of the course(s).

Overall, the CRC has been a successful and popular addition to our writing program. Each semester, we get a healthy list of volunteers, and faculty frequently ask to join mid-year and often make suggestions about issues that they'd like to see the CRC focus on in the future. The CRC collaborative structure works for us because it meets the particular needs of our faculty and the scale of our program. Given that there is not a shared disciplinary knowledge base among our faculty, the CRC provides enough ongoing contact with and discussion of composition scholarship to help some faculty become at least somewhat familiar with trends in the field and/or the history of the field. The CRC works within the (lack of) power differentials that exist by patiently working through issues together and by voting on any proposed changes to the courses. The fact that PT instructors have a vote equal to FT instructors within the CRC helps ameliorate, to some degree, the fact that PT instructors are "citizens [who] do not have the right to vote" within our college bylaws, cannot serve on other levels of departmental or college governance, and are generally excluded from positions of power within the institution (Calhoon-Dillahunt 124). The clear governance structure we've created in the CRC has created greater transparency and shared authority that has helped us increase consistency and reduce the level of "disarray" across sections of our courses (Andelora, "Teacher/Scholar/Activist" 304). Further, by engaging deeply, patiently,

and iteratively with faculty member's suggestions for the program, this collaborative program structure flips typical WPA authority structures. Rather than trying to impart program consistency through various top-down "boss" techniques such as syllabus reviews and restrictive curricula, the CRC heeds Dominique Zino's call for writing programs to harness faculty's often tacit resistant ideas and behaviors and to create "spaces where people have to think for themselves, lay out arguments, and keep conversations going" (258–59).

Since we've had the CRC in place, it has also shown to have imparted "design resilience" to our program and has served to protect us from sudden and random incursions into our program from higher administrative leadership (Griffiths and Jensen 304). For example, a couple of years ago I was asked by a dean at our college to approve the move toward offering more sections of our composition courses online; this was, of course, before spring 2020 when we were all unceremoniously forced fully online. While I was and am very much open to the idea of expanding our online offerings, I was able to respond by suggesting that, rather than answer that question myself in some sort of authoritarian way, the CRC could work on this idea of how to ensure quality and equity, for students and faculty, across online sections of composition. This allowed me to respond to the dean's request in a positive way and simultaneously slow down the process to ensure that faculty voice and governance would make decisions regarding changes to our composition offerings.

What follows is a list of design principles for creating sustainable collaboration within TYC writing programs, but, first, a caveat. Perhaps this goes without saying, but there is no one generic TYC writing program type or model. While I think that the writing program that I've been describing in my own home TYC is probably similar in some important ways to other TYC programs, I also know that TYC writing programs can vary from each other in ways that are quite significant and would demand very different approaches to collaboration. The scale of the institution/program, the scholarly identities and expertise of the faculty, the labor rights afforded to PT and FT faculty, the location of the program within the college, municipal and state laws, and the unique local history all strongly influence what sorts of collaboration will work best in each setting. That said, I suggest that TYC WPAs consider the following list of design principles when creating collaborative structures within their programs. While I list these individually, they are quite deeply connected:

- **Patience.** Perhaps this goes without saying, but, if done well and inclusively, collaboration takes time, more time than making decisions

on one's own or with a small group of peers. I've learned that this is time well spent because it allows for layered, iterative processes that includes as many voices and perspectives as possible.

- **Enact a local field.** As discussed earlier, the operational boundaries of the field of composition and rhetoric are fraught and are in flux. There isn't enough space in this bullet point and article to fully articulate this idea, but I call for TYC writing programs to enact local fields of composition, in line with Christie Toth and Patrick Sullivan's (2016) call for the cultivation of "local teacher-scholar communities of practice," complete with the discussion and production of scholarship (248).
- **Transparent governance structure.** Simply discussing things doesn't mean you're collaborating on decisions. Collaborative WPA structures should have a clear, documented protocol for faculty governance of the writing program and should employ iterative, consensus-building processes in preparation for voting.
- **Include/represent faculty who actually teach the courses.** To the degree that it is locally possible to do so, work toward a structure that represents the faculty who really teach the courses in the program.
- **Get funding.** Building and sustaining a collaborative structure within a TYC writing program, part of creating "resilient praxis" (Griffiths and Jensen 314), is labor and must be recognized as such by the TYCs in which we teach and learn. Faculty must be paid, in time or in money, for this ongoing labor.

These principles are not a to-do list, on which one can cross off items once they've been accomplished. Instead, they are ongoing, dynamic goals that must be renewed regularly to respond to changes in the field in micro (hyper-local) and macro (national) scales. These principles have helped us build and sustain a writing program that promotes "both programmatic unity while inspiring greater collegiality and autonomy" (Janangelo and Klausman 141), a delicate balance anywhere, and a particular balance within a TYC setting. Just as the multiple diversities of our students demand creativity from us as teachers, the diversity of faculty who teach composition in the TYC requires that WPAs build deep and wide collaborative structures that are both strong and radically inclusive. Given the palpable shift in the field of writing studies toward seeking out more scholarship from and about TYCs, I'm hopeful that, 22 years from now, the scholarship on collaborative WPA will reflect the diversity of these TYC structures.

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# Structural Barriers and Knowledge Production at the Two-Year College

Steven Accardi and Jillian Grauman

*While nearly half of all college undergraduates complete first-year writing at two-year colleges, very little research is conducted in two-year college writing programs. Encouraging two-year college writing teachers to redefine themselves as teacher-scholars or even teacher-scholar-activists has not been enough for them to produce knowledge in this area because the institutional structure of two-year colleges constrains scholarly production. Therefore, comprehensive structural reform that creates resilient academic leadership roles is required. The authors demonstrate how they were able to begin dismantling their restrictive institutional structures and produce knowledge in writing program administration by leveraging their tenure portfolios and leadership roles.*

In “The Two-Year College Teacher-Scholar-Activist,” Patrick Sullivan argues that we as two-year college English faculty should “deliberately frame our professional identity, in part, as activists—accepting and embracing the revolutionary and inescapably political nature of our work” (327). This move builds upon the Two-Year College English Association’s (TYCA’s) decades-long agenda “to redefine the identity of two-year college faculty from that of teacher to that of teacher-scholar” (Andelora 354). However, incorporating “teacher-scholar” into our work as “teacher,” let alone “teacher-scholar-activist,” is challenging for two-year college English faculty; making this change is not as simple as merely redefining or deliberately framing our role. There are “institutional constraints” (Andelora 355), such as “the teaching load and lack of institutional incentive for research and scholarship” (354), that restrict faculty from being able to “take part in traditional scholarship” (355). These constraints frame our role primarily as practitioners, rather than scholars or activists. We may want to expand our role to encompass knowledge production and political activity, but the structural conditions of the two-year college do not afford this change. In order to overcome these challenges to knowledge production, we have leveraged the one main structure we can access—tenure. By tying our knowledge production goals to those valued by tenure, namely teaching and service, we have been able to contribute to the fields of writing studies and writing program administration. It is our hope that writing faculty at two-year colleges can examine our methods and adapt them to their local con-

ditions so that more two-year college writing faculty can contribute their valuable knowledge to our field.

### STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

We work at the largest two-year college in Illinois, College of DuPage (COD), located 25 miles west of Chicago, which serves approximately 25,000 students a semester. We teach five courses a semester, a typical workload for two-year college faculty. In recent job postings for our full-time tenure-track faculty positions in English, the term “generalist” was used by administration, signaling to job applicants that anyone with a degree in English can and should teach any of our English course offerings. While faculty at many four-year institutions typically have a hand in composing job advertisements, those of us at two-year colleges may or may not be allowed this kind of input, with the work of writing these ads frequently falling to people working in human resources or administration (Ostman 129). Faculty at unionized institutions, like COD, may face additional complications to composing job advertisements because the bargained contract may assign that task to administration rather than allowing faculty a role in the process (Kahn). Second, while an area of English specialization in literature or writing studies or creative writing or film may be valuable to a department interested in developing scholarship in that area, the language of these job advertisements makes it clear that this kind of disciplinary expertise is not necessary nor valuable to teaching or developing courses at COD. Specialization, and therefore the knowledge production that might accompany it, is simply not necessary.

This de-emphasis of knowledge production is also borne out in the typical tenure requirements of two-year colleges.<sup>1</sup> At COD, teaching is listed first among the required areas of excellence in one’s tenure portfolio, followed by advising, curriculum development, and committee work. Scholarship, we suppose, is relegated to the fifth and final area, called “additional achievements.” While we have opportunities to share some of our *pedagogical* knowledge production internally, through events like departmental faculty development workshops and college-wide initiatives sponsored by the Teaching and Learning Center, there is little value placed on developing or sharing *disciplinary* expertise, especially in the somewhat invisible discipline of writing program administration. While we do have professional development funds that can be used to attend conferences and share knowledge externally, thereby creating and maintaining vibrant national scholarly conversations, faculty tend to leave funds on the table. Taken together, our institution, like many two-year colleges, positions all faculty as teach-

ers—as practitioners, not producers of knowledge. The role and workload of teacher limits us from producing knowledge in an area of expertise. The structure of tenure at two-year colleges uncouples pedagogical knowledge from disciplinary expertise, isolating tenure-track and tenured faculty as teachers rather than shaping academics who engage with and produce scholarship that informs their teaching.

In addition to two-year college tenure requirements, the structure of writing programs at many two-year colleges is another limiting factor on faculty's ability to produce knowledge. Like many two-year colleges, ours does not have a cohesive writing program. We do not have one person who functions as the writing program administrator (WPA); instead, our first-year writing courses are led by an elected committee of full-time faculty members. This decentered structure is very common to two-year colleges and is described many times throughout this special issue, but this more collaborative leadership style without a seat at the administrative decision-making table also makes it difficult to take actions that would help our writing program become more cohesive. Ours is the largest department on campus, with about 30 full-time tenured or tenure-track English faculty and over 120 adjunct faculty, nearly all of whom teach at least one first-year writing course every semester, and we lack or struggle with most of the features of a developed writing program, such as ongoing curriculum development, programmatic assessments, and professional development (Klausman, "Toward a Definition" 263). Though the program has become more cohesive in recent years, in 2015, when Steve was hired, the "English Program" was merely a listing of courses on the college's website: two in first-year writing, two in linguistics, three in technical communication, three in reading, three in basic writing, seven in creative writing, and twenty-four in literature. There was a dean and an associate dean of liberal arts, but no WPA or English department chair. The associate dean assigned courses and held meetings at the start of each semester but merely updated faculty on college-wide initiatives. There was no departmental structure, leadership roles, philosophy, or curriculum.

Finally, being part of a unionized faculty, as we and just over 40% of other two-year colleges are (Mayhall, Katsinas, and Bray), complicates two-year college writing program administration work. While the specific working conditions made possible by collective bargaining agreements are impossible to generalize, it is safe to acknowledge, as Seth Kahn does, that since the contract must cover everyone in the bargaining unit equally, it "may not be especially responsive to [writing program administrators'] needs" (259). In our case, there is no specific contract provision for faculty-administrator, only faculty-teacher. Thus, while the very nature of the work

of a WPA blends together teaching and administration, the contract may not allow for that sort of hybrid teacher-administrator role (Malenczyk 23), which makes it difficult to create or have a WPA position. At COD, all full-time faculty are part of one bargaining unit, which means we have a contract that must apply equally to all full-time faculty. (Our part-time faculty have their own separate union.) While this contract protects us in our working conditions and contributes to our overall well-being as employees, it also creates a strong separation between faculty and administrative roles, reinforcing our academic conditions as teachers, thereby making it difficult to create space for the administrator part of being a writing program administrator—let alone academic knowledge production in this area.

In short, the only role available to English faculty at many two-year colleges, including COD, is teacher, and as a teacher, one teaches five courses each semester, composed mainly of first-year writing, regardless of English degree specialization. This teaching load and role does not afford one to produce knowledge based on systematic inquiry (even the “alternative forms of knowledge” called for by Holly Larson (128) are challenging to achieve). There is no structure nor institutional incentive for scholarship, regardless of one’s individual desire to redefine or reframe one’s role. Those of us at two-year colleges are the ones who engage with first-year writing the most, interacting with over a hundred students each and every semester, but we are largely unable to generate scholarship in this area. Of course, there are two-year colleges where this kind of scholarship is both encouraged and successful, but these places are the exception—not the rule. At a time when 49% of college students attend a two-year colleges first (“Community College”) and is the site in which they complete first-year writing, the faculty teaching nearly half of all first-year writing classes are largely unable to effectively study their writing, evaluate pedagogies, create and administer writing programs, or professionally develop our writing faculty.

In this essay, instead of arguing to redefine our identity, we ask how can we change those identity-defining structures to enable scholarly knowledge production about our writing programs? While some two-year colleges have leadership roles for faculty to steer a writing program and the administrative support (in the form of course releases and stipends) for writing faculty to execute scholarly projects, community projects, assessment projects, we, and many other two-year colleges, do not. How can we argue for more of the material conditions that are necessary for sustainable knowledge production? In short, what can we do to become the teacher-scholar-activists we want to be?

Over the last four years, we have sought to answer these questions by dismantling some of the restrictive structures at our institution and rebuild-

ing more generative ones. We used the one structure we had access to, tied to the college's priority on teaching—the tenure structure. In this essay, we detail how we leveraged the tenure structure, which requires curriculum development and committee work, to remake English at College of DuPage. In doing so, we carved out the space for academic projects and scholarly work, allowing for the production of knowledge and contribution to the field of writing program administration and writing studies.

#### LEVERAGING THE AVAILABLE MEANS: THE TENURE STRUCTURE

According to *The Portland Resolution*, WPA positions should have a job description, a means of evaluation for their work, job security, access to decision-makers, and the resources and/or budget needed to do the work (Hult, Joliffe, Kelly, Mead, and Schuster). These positions afford WPAs the time, space, and resources to run their programs and to make knowledge. However, positions like these rarely exist at two-year colleges. According to the National Census of Writing, only 11% of participating two-year colleges have a WPA (“Who has”). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that writing program knowledge production at two-year colleges is rarely achieved, let alone widely recognized and valued by the field.

It was clear to us that in order to start producing knowledge in writing program administration, we needed to build a writing program. As Helen Howell Raines points out, what one means by “writing program” at the two-year college can vary wildly because of many different factors, including the purpose of writing classes, faculty workload, and where the courses are situated in the college, indicating that, “to many two-year faculty, the term ‘writing program’ does not evoke a precise image of what we do” (154). Despite these variations, Jeffrey Klausman (“Toward a Definition”) outlines features of a writing program as a means of conducting a self-evaluation; the features are the degree to which there is ongoing professional development, ongoing curriculum development, ongoing programmatic assessment, ongoing and attuned leadership, and a strong sense of community (270). Underlying several of these features is the assumption that someone, or a group of someones, is keeping up with current scholarship enough to design some of these initiatives for and with the larger English faculty body. In our self-assessment using Klausman’s features (“Toward a Definition”), the lack of a regularly supported person in a WPA position contributes to our relatively underdeveloped writing program.

To move us closer to having a writing program and a WPA to administer it, Steve leveraged our tenure criteria, which privileged teaching and required curriculum development and committee work, and took on the

massive undertaking of developing a curriculum for tenure that could be used to assemble a writing studies program. This work happened in two key ways.

First, as a newly elected member of the composition steering committee in fall 2015, Steve contributed to COD's "Statement of Core Principles," which followed the Council of Writing Program Administrators 2014 update to the *WPA Outcomes Statement* and were approved by the English faculty at the end of that academic year. The following year, the committee revised both first-year writing courses (Composition I and Composition II) to align with these new core principles. Steve saw this work as an opportunity not only to develop curriculum and work with a committee for his tenure portfolio but also to suggest creating Advanced Composition as a natural extension to the first-year sequence.

Second, during fall 2015, Steve joined the technical communication committee, which oversaw the technical communication certificate, a 24-credit hour credential, spread across English, speech, art, computer information systems, and journalism. After 10 years in operation, it only had nine graduates. At the first meeting of the semester, the committee sought to officially terminate the certificate, which had been deactivated the previous year, but Steve encouraged them to consider revising rather than terminating it. He proposed scaling back the certificate, housing it exclusively in English, and offering a new slate of courses that reflected today's academic and professional standards. While some members of the committee objected to the amount of curriculum development this would take, Steve took much of the heavy lifting on as part of his tenure portfolio. The other committee members did not have any professional incentives to participate, but even if they had participated, there were disciplinary knowledge barriers for them to overcome, the result of years of "generalist" hiring practices. Their objections then were an understandable byproduct of the institutional constraints of the two-year college.

Like the revision and development of first-year writing, the available structure of tenure provided the agency to assemble a burgeoning writing studies curriculum. The revisions of the technical communication certificate resulted in the creation of several new courses and several 2 + 2 transfer agreements with Elmhurst College, a nearby four-year institution (recently renamed Elmhurst University). The transfer agreements helped to give the newly renamed professional writing certificate legitimacy and increased visibility, as well as an opportunity to create an additional course that Elmhurst students needed: Advanced Composition. Moreover, it established the groundwork for a writing studies program, an organized writing curricu-

lum with a credential that has direct connections to an established four-year institution with a BA in English with a writing emphasis.

By spring 2017, Advanced Composition, all the new and revised professional writing courses, the new professional writing certificate, and the revised first-year writing courses were approved and ready to launch.

#### EXPANDING THE AVAILABLE MEANS: LEADERSHIP ROLES

Up to this point, we have argued that the tenure structure provides agency, allows us to work on committees and build curriculum. We built a curriculum that could be shaped into a writing studies program, reinforcing it with 2 + 2 agreements (i.e., a transfer agreement that guarantees program completion in two years at the first school and two years at the transfer institution) and a certificate credential. However, what happens when tenure is achieved and the kairotic window for agency is closed? How does one continue to assemble a writing studies program that could lead to knowledge production?

Shortly after the launch of the professional writing certificate, Steve earned tenure; however, since its curriculum contained “technical” and “professional” coursework, this certificate was placed into the COD’s career and technical education (CTE) programs. CTE programs “directly prepare the student for the world of work. . . . Students can master the fundamentals of a new trade or profession or build on established skills” (“Career”). One of the benefits to being placed into the CTE programs is the requisite role of “program coordinator,” which comes with a 3–credit hour course release each semester to schedule and promote courses, assess and review curriculum, compose and propose Perkins grants, and assemble and maintain an advisory board.

Steve was given the course release to coordinate the program, since he was chair of the professional writing committee. The academic leadership role, like the 2 + 2 transfer agreements, gave legitimacy to the work we had done so far and credibility to the program we were trying to build. It also afforded more time and agency to develop the program. For example, we secured Perkins funds to develop a professional writing lecture series. We invited local professional writers and professionals who write to speak to students on field-specific themes, such as writing for nonprofits, writing in healthcare, legal writing, and writing in STEM. It has functioned to demonstrate the importance of writing across the college and the community. It has attracted students to enroll in our professional writing certificate, and it has been used to vet and recruit new members to our advisory board. In addition, this academic leadership role afforded Steve the voice to develop

the program through hiring, pushing administration to have some say in the writing of our job advertisement for a full-time tenure-track English faculty member, and, for the first time, the term “generalist” was replaced with “a specialization in rhetoric and composition” and “who can teach courses in our new professional writing certificate program.” The search resulted in the hiring of Jill, with WPA experience.

The coordinator position offers two-year college faculty the rare occasion to take on a new role. It’s not a redefinition or reframing of “teacher,” but rather an institutionalized academic leadership role that affords the agency to take action and access to administrative decision makers. Furthermore, as is the case at COD, the scarcity of these positions grants a level of authority that is unattainable by the “teacher” role alone. These resilient academic leadership roles, common at universities and four-year colleges, are critically needed at the two-year college to assemble, develop, and produce writing program knowledge.

Around the same time we were exercising the agency and authority of this new role, COD went through a reorganization. One of the changes that occurred was the elimination of associate deans. The deans took on the administrative work of the associate deans in addition to their already burdensome workload. Consequently, looking to offload some of this work, the deans formed chair positions for faculty for the first time. English was given three chair positions—chair of literature, creative writing, and film; chair of developmental English; and chair of composition—with a 3–credit hour release for each. It was a massive axiological shift, exchanging teaching time for administrative time, a move away from the limited role of teacher. The English faculty member who became chair of composition was also the chair of comp steering. He decided to step down from the committee chair position, and Steve was elected chair of the committee. In the same way that the tenure structure yielded agency to expand and shape our writing offerings, this leadership position yielded agency to expand and shape the role of comp steering, from choosing textbooks and evaluating courses to engaging in the work of a WPA—and for the first time, producing knowledge.

For example, after the newly revised first-year writing sequence was rolled out, the composition steering committee designed and conducted a small-scale assessment project of 125 final essays from nine sections of Composition II. We were to assess whether students met course objective two: “Analyze a rhetorical situation within a discourse community.” These essays gave the committee a window into the course content, course materials, and course instruction of these sections. They were wildly inconsistent, and in some cases, emphasized the old rather than the new course objec-

tives. After some discussion of what comp steering could or should do, the committee decided to address the inconsistency like a WPA, by using the data to improve the program, which would improve writing instruction and student writing.

The following fall, Steve steered the committee to collect and respond to new data. Together they designed a “comfort survey,” listing all eleven new course objectives for Composition II, and asked writing faculty to select whether each objective made them feel “not comfortable,” “somewhat comfortable,” or “very comfortable.” The results identified three “uncomfortable” objectives, all having references to technology (e.g., “digital texts,” “digital media”) and terms used in writing studies parlance (e.g., “rhetorical situation,” “discourse community”). As a response, the committee designed and facilitated best practices workshops as professional development opportunities for writing faculty. We required attendees to fill out pre- and post-workshop reflective surveys about expectations, previous knowledge, comfort levels, and new learnings. The following semesters, we iterated on the format but continued to professionalize faculty.

Through this WPA-like assessment project it became clear to us how entangled pedagogical knowledge is with disciplinary knowledge. Without the up-to-date disciplinary knowledge in writing studies, writing faculty were “uncomfortable with”—unable to meet—the new course objectives, putting our students at a disadvantage. The resilient academic leadership role and the agency it afforded helped us to produce and pursue this knowledge. We are certain that with more institutionally sanctioned and supported academic leadership roles, two-year college faculty would have the ability to develop more writing program knowledge.

For the first time, comp steering expanded its role to include WPA work and began producing knowledge and contributing to national WPA scholarly conversations. For instance, Jill presented on our best practices workshop design, facilitation, and data at CWPA 2019 in Baltimore. We received funding, based on our data, from the COD Foundation’s resource for excellence grants program to study if/how best practices workshop attendees incorporate what they learned into their FYW courses the following year. (We are only halfway through the study, but already, the knowledge produced on adjunct writing faculty inequities and vulnerabilities fills a gap in our knowledge.) Finally, this special edition of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* gives us the chance to contribute to the national WPA conversations surrounding how two-year college writing programs make knowledge. These scholarly projects would have been impossible without the expansion of comp steering’s role.

Nevertheless, using the academic leadership role of committee chair to change the role of the committee to engage in WPA work is unsustainable. Yes, the role brought about task-oriented projects which lead to WPA knowledge production, but it is not “resilient” (Griffiths and Jensen) enough to afford the time and space to administer and study our developing writing program, undertake assessment initiatives, faculty development, teaching observations, dual credit and 2 + 2 transfer agreements, let alone schedule courses, and review syllabi and policies. In other words, to “redefine” (Andelora 354) or “deliberately frame our professional identity” (Sullivan 327) is not enough. A committee chair is not a WPA. A truly sustainable practice would be to dismantle the two-year college barriers—the 5/5 teaching load, the lack of incentives for scholarship, the devaluing of academic specialists, the myopic teaching requirements for tenure—and build a 21st century writing studies program with an institutionally-sanctioned WPA. This action would require “design resilience” reform, “institutional structures designed to foster individual and department resilience” (Griffiths and Jensen 305). With Steve’s leadership roles and Jill’s tenure-track structure, we attempted to make this last move.

#### SUSTAINABLE STRUCTURAL REFORM

First, we needed to shore up our writing curriculum to have a complete writing studies program. In our course catalogue, Jill found an old course that had not been offered in anyone’s recent memory. It was called “Introduction to Writing and Reading Center Theory and Practice.” She not only leveraged her tenure structure to revise it into “Writing Center Theory and Practice” but she also got permission to offer it as an honors section. The approval provided us with the opportunity to promote the course to a new audience, expanding our collegewide visibility. Steve reached out to DePaul University, home to the only independent writing program in the Chicagoland area, offering a BA and MA in writing, rhetoric, and discourse (WRD), and negotiated a new 2 + 2 transfer agreement. The design of the agreement mapped out a writing studies program at COD that would directly transfer coursework into DePaul’s WRD program. Like Elmhurst, this agreement afforded us the opportunity to create a new course for students—Argumentative Writing—to complete our rhetoric and writing offerings.

By the end of spring 2019, we had the following new or newly revised courses:

### First-Year Writing

- Composition I
- Composition II

### Professional Writing

- Workplace Writing
- Technical Writing
- Digital Writing
- Writing in the Professions
- Professional Editing
- Writing in the Community

### Rhetoric and Writing

- Argumentative Writing
- Writing Center Theory and Practice
- Advanced Composition

We felt as though we finally had the curriculum, the transfer agreements, and credential offering to articulate a cohesive writing studies program.

Second, while we were working to assemble and articulate a modern writing program, our new college President required all faculty to map out “program pathways” for counselors and advisors to share with students, based on the guided pathways model advocated by Thomas R. Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins. As coordinator of the professional writing certificate, Steve was tasked with mapping a “Professional Writing Pathway.” At first this task seemed redundant. The certificate’s requirements already forged a “pathway” for our students. However, Steve saw an opportunity to officially construct—institutionally structure—our imagined writing studies program. Consolidating his leadership roles, Steve worked with both committees to bridge writing curriculums into one pathway for students to identify where to find more courses that study writing. And so, by combining the plots of both *Rogue One* and *Field of Dreams*, we mapped out a writing studies pathway and submitted it to our department chairs.

Third, we needed this new structure to be made visible, so that students could see it and follow it. Submitting the map to our chairs sparked a conversation about English as a whole, about being made up of multiple paths and programs. In the months that followed, in alignment with the college’s desire for clear pathways, we worked with the English chairs to redesign our official English webpage to illustrate this new vision. What used to be a listing of courses became a rebranding of English. We were now officially Eng-

lish programs, made up of four distinct programs: creative writing, film, literature, and writing studies. Using our tenure structure and leadership roles, we made a new structure, one which promised a sustainable space to produce knowledge. All we needed now was a WPA.

## CONCLUSION

So far, we do not have a WPA. We do, however, have a new union contract, which maintains new language about “division chairs” (essentially the old associate deans), “interdisciplinary chairs” (such as an honors program director), and “program chairs” (replacing the term “coordinator” for CTE programs), which gives faculty new hybrid roles that cross into administrative territory. The WPA role that we envision spreads across these new roles, and so does not tidily fit into one of these categories. As Klausman argues “the WPA at the two-year college (and perhaps at small four-year colleges without a graduate program in English) is not only an essential function but is significantly different from the WPA position at universities and larger colleges” (“The Two-Year” 238). We are working with our dean to negotiate something that fits our program as we compose this manuscript.

At a time when nearly half the nation’s undergraduate population attend two-year colleges (“Community College”) and take FYW courses, it is essential to have a modern writing program, one that equips students with the rhetorical and literacy skills to succeed in the always already changing world. It is therefore essential to have a WPA to administer this program. However, when the entire structure of the two-year college positions English faculty as “teacher” and constrains their scholarly production, it is not enough to encourage them to “redefine” (Andelora 354) or “deliberately frame” (Sullivan 327) their role into something else.

There needs to be structural reform. We need four-year colleges and universities partnering with us, forming 2 + 2 transfer agreements, and building a comprehensive and cohesive structure that directly connects our programs together. “[L]eadership and coherence among two-year writing programs remain elusive” (Calhoon-Dillahunt 131), but they do not need to be nor remain that way. It’s time two-year writing programs are recognized for what they are, the starting point of a four-year writing program. They need to be structurally defined that way, and supported that way, with a resilient institutional role of WPA.

Our writing studies’ professional writing certificate won the 2020 Diana Hacker TYCA Outstanding Program in English Award. Such a program and our academic leadership roles have allowed us to produce some WPA knowledge, but such knowledge production under our restrictive two-year

college conditions is not sustainable. We will never be able to systematically study our share of nearly half of the nation's undergraduate population's literacy skills and how to address their rhetoric and writing needs. We will never be able to comprehensively develop and professionalize the two-year college English faculty who teach them and who are credentialed in specializations other than writing studies. For our work and knowledge production to be truly resilient, we need a sanctioned role with time and support, value and visibility, that can be filled by qualified faculty over time.

Some argue that since the conditions of two-year colleges are different from four-year colleges and universities, the criteria for scholarly work should be different. Since there is no time, support, or institutional incentives for two-year college English faculty to produce knowledge, and since we are expected to be teacher-scholars or even teacher-scholar-activists, the definition of scholarship should change. For example, Larson in her award-winning *TETYC* article argues for syllabi, narratives, and teacher lore to be included as publishable scholarship. "Why cannot my colleagues' and my kitchen-table conversations on critical writing or pedagogical issues be valuable scholarly work in itself?" (Larson 122). Such work certainly can be a valuable scholarly contribution, but why should more systemic inquiry be out of reach? Mark Reynolds argued years ago that "the most hopeful areas for two-year knowledge making lie in the recent calls for new definitions of scholarship and for valuing teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning" (10). But new definitions are not enough. While they do help to encourage two-year college faculty to engage with scholarship, they only reinforce our role as teachers and do not actively work to dismantle the structures that restrict our knowledge making at the two-year college.

And so that's the bind we are in. Two-year college faculty have the experience, teaching more FYW than any other academics in the field. We have the narratives and the lore. But we are institutionally constrained from studying and publishing them. Simultaneously, it is the two-year college FYW teachers who also need this knowledge the most because it is "researched-based best practices that are relevant to the daily work they do" (Hassel and Giordano 119). Additionally, the fact that two-year college FYW work is going largely unexamined means that, despite the *TYCA Guidelines for Preparing Teachers of English in the Two-Year College*, graduate programs will continue to produce graduate students who are not well prepared to work at two-year colleges (Jensen, Johnson, Tinberg, and Toth). That is why name changes and role expansions are not going to bring us the real progress we need. Until comprehensive resilient design structures are made at the two-year college, WPA and writing studies knowledge will remain limited.

## NOTE

1. Unlike four-year colleges or universities in which tenure-track assistant professors are allotted a six-year probationary period (given successful two-year reviews) to assemble an exceptional record of scholarship, teaching, and service, at COD we are given three years (reviewed annually) to show evidence of excellence in teaching and service, with teaching being the most important. The dean observes and evaluates our teaching each semester, and along with student evaluations, gives feedback that we must respond to the following semester to show evidence of excellence in teaching.

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

Brett M. Griffiths

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### THE PROJECT: FUNDING, LANGUAGE, AND COMMUNITY

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

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

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

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

#### THE LIMITATIONS: ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN CONTEXT

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

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

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

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

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

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

The funded project had three elements:

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

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

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

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

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

Table 1: Mapping Terrains Ideas Exchange Participants

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

#### ANALYSIS: ACADEMIC LITERACY EXCHANGE CONVERSATIONS

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

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

### *Identification of Misperceptions*

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

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

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

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

### *Teacher to Teacher: Supporting Best Practices within and Across Institutions*

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

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

### *Small, Sustainable Changes*

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

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

### *Making Sense of the Meta-Narrative*

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

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

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

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

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

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## NOTES

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

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

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# Preparing to Become a Two-Year College Writing Program Administrator

Sarah Elizabeth Snyder

*WPA work at two year colleges (TYCs) is distinctly different from work in other institutional contexts. Writing program administration has been an institutional necessity at TYCs for some time now, but WPA preparation and other graduate education has yet to catch up with this reality. This article builds on Ostman's (2013) work by synthesizing decades of research with the experiences of a new TYC WPA to address the following research question: What does it mean to know WPA work as a TYC professional? In short, at the TYC, many aspects of the position reflect the unique institutional characteristics of TYCs; the student and faculty population; funding and professional development; varying concepts of academic freedom; research and activism; and more. This article also addresses the current call for graduate education to include preparation for two-year colleges in general (Jensen & Toth, 2017), and it extends the call for more robust preparation of WPAs for work in TYC contexts. This article also serves as a primer that current and aspiring WPAs can use to introduce themselves or their graduate students to this important context for WPA work.*

Intersectionality within WPA work creates new ways of knowing and understanding the work that we do as WPAs with new contexts, student populations, lived experiences, and critical perspectives. For example, Jonathan Alexander (2017) shared his research review of queer ways of knowing WPA work. Given the 2020 best book award by the CWPA, Staci Perryman-Clark and Collin Lamont Craig's (2019) "Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration" shares the experiences of WPAs who embark on crucial intersectional race work informed by Afrocentric perspectives in their positions as WPAs. In an effort to show how WPA work is fundamentally different at TYCs than at four-year institutions, Heather Ostman (2013) shared her text, "Writing Program Administration and the Community College." All of these texts are important intersections of WPA work that should be understood and applied by current and aspiring WPAs.

Despite the importance of this type of WPA knowledge, the TYC literature is very clear in its stance that graduate preparation has ignored appropriate inclusion of TYC topics. Our field's traditional notion of graduate education does not prepare scholars in general for work in TYC contexts (e.g., Calhoon-Dillahunt et al., 2017; Jensen & Toth, 2017), and in the same ways, it does not prepare aspiring TYC WPA scholars either—if they

even serendipitously realize that they can aspire to being a TYC WPA. Rather, most WPA coursework, preparation, and research assumes that WPA work occurs at a four-year institution. Furthermore, many remember the figure of a WPA from their graduate education as someone who holds the unilateral responsibility for the curriculum, professional development, and assessment, among others. While these may be realities of some four-year institutions and graduate experiences, these implicit notions of what WPA work is can be detrimental to the understanding of how WPA work functions in TYCs.

To create more understanding of what TYC WPA work is, this article builds on Ostman's (2013) work by synthesizing decades of research, and incorporates the experience of a new TYC WPA to answer this question: What does it mean to know WPA work through the TYC profession? In short, at the TYC, many aspects of the position are shaped by the unique institutional characteristics of TYCs; the student and faculty population; funding and professional development; varying concepts of academic freedom; research and activism; and more. This article also echoes the current call for graduate education to include more preparation for TYCs in general (Jensen & Toth, 2017), and it extends the call for more robust preparation of WPAs for work in TYC contexts. This article also serves as a primer that current and aspiring WPAs can use to introduce themselves or their graduate students to this important context for WPA work.

#### WHERE ARE TYC WPAS?

Official WPA positions in TYCs are not new but are still relatively scarce. According to the 2013 National Census of Writing for Two-Year Institutions, the majority (51%,  $n = 65$ ) of TYCs report that the Department Chair is the head of the writing program and only 11% ( $n = 14$ ) have a WPA. These ratios are in stark opposition to the Four-Year Institution Census which reported that 51% ( $n = 286$ ) had a WPA, and the chair of the English department ran 17% ( $n = 95$ ) of the writing programs that participated in the census. Since TYCs teach approximately 49% of the undergraduates in the United States (Community College Research Center, 2020), this stark contrast in administrative structure is curious when both systems claim to meet the same goals: teaching first year composition and administering composition programs. When we as a community of WPAs know the necessity of the position for a healthy first-year composition program, how could writing programs exist at TYCs without a dedicated WPA? How different might WPA work be in a TYC? The position of WPA

is being developed and negotiated through TYCs (Holmsten, 2005), as the TYC is full of unique institutional characteristics.

### THE UNIQUE INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TYCS

As early as 1990, Helon Raines described the concept of a writing program at a TYC as a varying situation from one college to the next, and even more different from writing programs at universities and small liberal arts colleges (SLAC). The identity of a TYC WPA is different from that of a university or SLAC WPA. Mark Blaauw-Hara and Cheri Lemieux Spiegel (2018) relate their stories of connecting with their communities of practice as young WPAs at their respective community colleges, bringing issues of WPA identity directly to the community college, and demonstrating just how different being a TYC WPA can be from the representation in the mainstream WPA literature. Taylor (2009) compounded this identity issue with his finding in his national survey of WPAs, that TYCs often employ a team approach to WPA work. Moreover, there are issues of identity that impede the participation of many TYC WPAs who do the work of WPAs without the title, or who do not identify with the work (Calhoon-Dillahunt, 2011). Carolyn Calhoon-Dillahunt (2011) has also observed that the collective and collaborative work done in TYC writing program administration requires political savvy and consensus building, as often the position is unnamed and sometimes unremunerated. Beyond identification, the landscape of the TYC, its administration, faculty, staff, and student body, are especially diverse. This reality of the TYC WPA transcends usual boundaries for teaching, administration, service, and—to the extent possible—research (Andelora, 2005) and advocacy (Sullivan, 2015).

### STUDENT POPULATION AND FACULTY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The complex, labor-heavy teaching environment at TYCs necessitates WPAs to provide their faculty with specialized yet flexible support. Community colleges serve a majority of the nation's African American, Indigenous, Latinx, and immigrant students, as well as a large percentage of rural, low-income, and working-class white students (Cohen et al., 2014). In 2018, the American Association of Community Colleges reported that to compound this complex teaching environment, emotional labor is exponentially higher and even expected in community college teaching (Gonzales & Ayers, 2018). With most community colleges being open access, the role of the TYC WPA significantly expands. The writing program is the locus at which students' personal lives intersect with the academy (White, 2020).

The particular needs of students at TYCs require the WPA, who may be the only person responsible for the professional development of the composition faculty, to know about and be able to deploy pedagogical insights from research including multilingual writing, developmental writing, learning and physical disabilities, queer and trans-theory, veterans issues, among many others. This professional development becomes all the more necessary when we realize that, as Jeffrey Klausman (2008) notes, not all community college faculty members have training in composition and rhetoric, engage with the literature, or participate in the national communities that exist to further the practice of teaching English at many types of institutions. To the extent possible, the TYC WPA will be responsible for making those pedagogical insights quickly deliverable and digestible with a low overhead to an overworked full-time faculty and an underpaid part-time faculty (e.g., Ostman, 2013), all perhaps without the label of mandatory attendance (Klausman, 2008). Even if the most engaged faculty do attend, at the end of the faculty development session, or on Monday morning, the reality of a 100+ student workload will weigh heavier than any best practices doctrine.

The TYC faculty situation is different from many four year institutions. WPAs at PhD- or MA-granting institutions most often have a continuous contingent of willing graduate teaching assistants teaching modest course loads to develop professionally, to try new curricula, and to participate in program building as a requirement of their contract. The situation that most WPAs are familiar with is one where teaching assistants are looking for leadership, professional development, and a common goal. However, at the community college, many faculty are experienced professionals in literature, creative writing, journalism, and less commonly, rhetoric and composition (Calhoon-Dillahunt et al., 2017). A tension exists in the TYC WPA position as many TYC WPAs are not supervisors but rather peers to their faculty body, and as Jared Anthony of Spokane Falls Community College said, “everything [in community college writing programs] happens through consensus building” (Calhoon-Dillahunt, 2011, p. 123). By nature of the faculty body, the TYC WPA has to do more politicking and savvy maneuvering (Hassel & Giordano, 2011). Drawing on Klausman’s (2008) idea of what a professional might look like in a TYC composition program, and the responsibilities that the WPA may have, ranging from assessment of the program to evaluation of faculty members, it becomes clear that triaging student grievances, scheduling, hiring and firing, curriculum discussion, and many other situations, may converge in a stalemate (or worse) due to the political nature of the position.

Thomas Amorose (2000) asserted that the community college WPA's main persuasive tool is influence through interactions that work with the previous constraints of the faculty and administration, rather than power with their colleagues (as paraphrased in Holmsten, 2005). This approach to working with colleagues is especially important at a college where the WPA position is rather new. At many TYC institutions, writing programs have been operating for many years without a WPA. The terrain that Klausman started to map in 2008 is very much still being explored among colleagues. This lack of enculturation of the WPA position at the TYC provides the same uphill battle of making the WPA work visible not only to colleagues but also to upper administrators. Arguably, in other types of institutions, colleagues and administrators are already familiar with WPA work and have made the space for it. But perhaps the TYC is a differently complex experience that requires skill, tact, and time when trying to motivate colleagues to reach consensus rather than advising graduate teaching assistants how to keep their TA contracts.

#### ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND ASSESSMENT

In institutions with a large contingent of continuing or tenured faculty, the TYC WPA position is also preoccupied with issues of academic freedom and assessment.<sup>1</sup> Continuing faculty tend to have an interpretation of academic freedom stemming from the specific and full-time nature of faculty employment at such TYCs. The composition of the faculty body affects the ways in which TYC WPAs conduct their important program building work. In the TETYC symposium on Academic Freedom and Labor, Annie Del Principe and Jaqueline Brady (2019) noted that, "In most community college writing programs, the clear labor and power dynamics seen in R1 contexts staffed by TA grad students are made murkier by a teaching labor force that is mostly not nationally credentialed but possesses decades of experience teaching FYC" (p. 353). Although the TYC WPA may be highly trained in best practices and theoretical concepts important to the field of rhetoric and composition, her full-time faculty may value their innovative and diverse approach to their classroom teaching that prioritizes efficiency, or even a different set of goals. Program building, in a sense, becomes a matter of academic compromise between individual practices and program needs.

On the other side of the academic freedom coin is assessment of a writing program, which presents another set of challenges with the variety that is oftentimes found in TYC writing programs. The fundamentals of writing program assessment (and really any principled assessment) require

some sort of coordination, a deep understanding of what the goals of assessment are at the college and how to measure progress towards these goals, and a solid knowledge of writing assessment theory to be able to convince colleagues of the need for this coordination (White, Elliot, & Peckham, 2015). This description sounds similar to the coordination of assessment at four-year institutions; however, complicated notions of academic freedom and the consensus-building nature of TYC WPA work create a gauntlet of sorts to perform any meaningful assessment (see Del Principe's article in this issue). Regardless of the pressure they may face from administration requiring assessment for accreditation, TYC WPAs will be delicate in their requests of colleagues to undergo any assessment, and perhaps may not request at all if the cost could be too great.

#### THE WRITING REPRESENTATIVE

Another issue is that the TYC WPA may experience a higher-than-usual administrative load through service. Without a strong culture of the WPA position at the TYC, defining the work of the TYC WPA position may be subject to the perceptions of others, and often defined in "unrealistic" ways (McLeod, 2007, p. 9). In this way, the TYC WPA may be disproportionately taking on (or being given) service work to the college on top of the often unseen labor of writing program administration. The TYC WPA position may be following the same path as the university WPA did decades ago, defining and making the work visible through multiple organizational documents such as the Portland Resolution, instigated, written, and adopted at multiple national meetings attended by WPAs (Hult et al., 1992).

One especially perilous aspect of TYC WPA work may be mission creep of the college's need for writing leadership in general, especially as important as writing is to transfer-level coursework. TYC WPAs often quickly become the face of writing at the institution, and as such, can be tasked with the running of the WAC/WID program, creating and implementing a new writing learning initiative, or assessment of a college-wide student learning outcome.<sup>2</sup> This puts the TYC WPA in situations where the position seems unduly subject to continual expansion given the difference in student body, faculty body, the political overtones, potential for conflict, and the under-defined nature of many TYC WPA positions—especially for institutions without tenure, or for positions of WPA without tenure (see Dew & Horning, 2007). One can only lead a faculty body of peers by consensus, and without a sympathetic administrator or supervisor, many initiatives may be unsuccessful. The potential for conflict and deviation

from the job description due to these concerns can certainly affect the progress towards programmatic goals and therefore the evaluation for hire. Although it is well documented that WPA positions can be described in less-than-honest terms (see Janangelo, 1991), mission creep of this magnitude is less likely to happen at a four-year institution because WPA positions at these institutions have clearer traditions and more defined scope.

#### TYC WPA PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, SUPPORT, AND RESEARCH

The conditions of TYC WPA work make it imperative for TYC WPAs to seek professional community, support, and guidance through participation in our national organizations, as WPAs are accustomed to do at four-year institutions. Juxtaposed to the overrepresentation of TYC WPAs in institutional and local service, national service (or at the very least participation in national conventions) may be undervalued by the community college budget. As Toth et al. (2014) documented, many colleges do not monetarily value participation in national-level service or [TYC] organizations through funding travel on a regular basis, even though the identity of the two-year college English faculty is both “Distinct and Significant” from their four-year peers (Toth, Griffiths, & Thirolf, 2013, p. 90).

Andelora, Giordano, and Smith (2019) described the importance of the first national TYCA conference to the field of TYC. They identified

several issues affecting [TYC] scholarship and the collection of evidence to support the work of engaging in teacher-scholar activism, including misconceptions in the profession that two-year college instructors aren't qualified to do research, scholars from other institution types talking at (rather than with) two-year college teacher-scholars, a lack of resources and funding, and teaching loads that limit time for research. (pp. 13–14)

Although they are not yet widely known for their research capabilities, Carolyn Calhoun-Dillahunt (2011) rightly stated that “community colleges are fruitful places in which to do research and have many model programs and effective practices to share, particularly for working with developmental writers” (p. 132). Brett Griffiths (2017) encouraged TYC faculty (and by association TYC WPAs) to engage in scholarly disciplinary discussions around pedagogy and practice not only to enhance the profession, but also to create cultural capital within their own departments and assert their expertise.

Many TYC WPAs and faculty have participated in the scholarly discussions in journals in our field. For example, Peter Adams and colleagues at the Community College of Baltimore County are credited for their innova-

tion of and research on the Accelerated Learning Program, which has been one of the most influential developments in restructuring developmental education (Adams et al., 2009). Holly Hassel and Joann Bard Giordano (2011) were a part of the body of research surrounding Multiple Measures in placement, and many colleges, even if the results are unpublished, have done original work in directed self-placement and a lucky few have presented their work at national TYCA conferences. Mark Reynolds (2005) called for an appreciation of classroom-based research, of which TYC faculty and WPAs would be best positioned to do with their wealth of pedagogical experience. For the typical TYC WPA, the release time and administrative imperative may never allow for the time to engage in research, but as wily WPAs normally do, they find impetus within the needs of the college and combine both administrative function and research into one.

Community colleges should be known for their applied, pedagogical research. The community college is especially well-suited to research, as the difference between what might theoretically be a best practice and what the majority of teaching faculty across the United States actually have the time and expertise to do with such heavy teaching loads will obviously differ. Research and publication in the case of the TYC WPA might be envisioned as “staying current with the field” as it is currently stated in some job descriptions and contracts.<sup>3</sup>

#### TEACHER-SCHOLAR-ACTIVIST

Activism is highly, if covertly, embedded in the TYC WPA position. Both the WPA literature (Adler-Kassner, 2008) and the TYC literature have called upon WPAs and faculty to include in their mission the spirit of the activist. There is an entire legacy of work colloquially known as “Teacher/Scholar/Activist” (e.g., Andelora, 2013; Sullivan, 2015) and the scholarly blog of the same name founded by Patrick Sullivan, Darin Jensen, and Christie Toth. TYC WPA is “democracy at work” as Nell Ann Pickett helped us see in her 1997 chair’s address to the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Patrick Sullivan (2015) reminds us that as we continue to democratize higher education,

the conditions that led to the creation of open admissions institutions are still very much with us, and the need for institutions that work for the public good and promote equity and social justice are perhaps more important now than they have ever been. (p. 327)

By virtue of our underprivileged student populations and, many would say, our exploited faculty populations, the TYC WPA, through research, teaching, and service, is responsible for advocating not only for better writing

programs, but for more ethical writing programs, degree programs, colleges, and ultimately institutions of higher learning. As our colleges face restructuring due to loss of state funding (e.g., Andelora, 2013), or government mandates such as Guided Pathways (Bailey, 2015; Hassel & Giordano, 2020), the TYC WPA engages in the type of teacher-scholar-activist work that will serve students beyond their classrooms, and generations into the future like only TYC faculty and WPAs can.

#### PREPARATION TO BECOME A TYC WPA

So then, how does one become a TYC WPA? The “TYCA Guidelines for Preparing Teachers of English in the Two-Year College,” published in 2017 by a formidable TYCA task force (Calhoun-Dillahunt et al.), identified many methods by which our profession could be better preparing graduates for a TYC position, including four major guidelines (presented verbatim from the original):

- Make two-year colleges visible to graduate students;
  - Collaborate with two-year college colleagues;
  - Develop curricula relevant to two-year college teaching;
  - Prepare future two-year college faculty to be engaged professionals.
- (p. 2)

The task force recommended multiple avenues by which these guidelines could be achieved, including selecting TYC scholarship for discussion in graduate coursework, inviting qualified TYC faculty to teach graduate courses and participate in dissertation committees, supporting projects of inquiry related to two-year colleges, and encouraging participation in TYC organizations and conferences, among many others.

Sarah Z. Johnson (2017) warned against a “‘narrative of replication’ in graduate programs, where mentors only prepare and professionalize their students for positions just like their own” calling for graduate programs to include “meaningful coursework, professionalization, and mentoring for students interested in pursuing careers at two-year colleges” (p. 26). Faculty can and should make these opportunities visible and available to students. In the absence of faculty support, students must take their agency in stride to prepare themselves for this challenging intersection of a WPA career. In the penultimate section of this article, I describe the opportunities that were afforded to me through my graduate program, as well as the opportunities that I made and took for myself.

## PREPARING MYSELF

I am a product of a traditional WPA education for the most part. My personal story is one that might sound familiar, as I shared parts of it in my portion of the CWPA 2019 Saturday lunch panel, “Sustainable Becoming: Women’s Career Trajectories in Writing Program Administration” or in print in *WPA* (Whetherbee-Phelps et al., 2020). I identify strongly as a “Gen Admin” WPA, or a person looking to do WPA work early on in her career (Charlton et al., 2011). As I was preparing myself for a WPA position, I did everything I could to specialize in this profession: I wrote a WPA-as-researcher (Weiser & Rose, 1999) dissertation and took as much WPA coursework and as many jWPA positions as I could at my institution. I had been to the CWPA annual conference almost every year since 2012, and I was active in WPA-GO. It was exciting to be offered a position as a WPA right away, and I happily took it—but you already know the twist: this WPA position was at a two-year college.

Of the four major guidelines put forth by the TYCA task force, I was lucky to be able to take advantage of one through my graduate program. Until I started my TYC WPA position, the only interaction with the community college system that I had was adjuncting for composition and ESL classes and a short summer internship concerned with faculty onboarding.<sup>4</sup> The internship was made possible by the alternative-academic or “alt-ac” movement at my doctoral institution. Although I was adjuncting at three community colleges, more than anything, the internship was the most transformative experience that helped prepare me for life as a TYC WPA. That’s not to say that it was enough. The (paid) internship allowed me to see the inner workings of a large two-year college and introduce me to the unique political situations inherent in the job. As I shared at the 2019 CWPA Saturday lunch panel, these seemingly fleeting and peripheral experiences in my PhD program changed my life in ways that I never expected, including broadening my WPA preparation to the context of the community college and eventually inspiring me to apply to a TYC WPA position that I accepted later that year.

This sharp, serendipitous turn in my career trajectory amplifies the necessity of TYC inclusion in graduate programs that Calhoon-Dillahunt et al. (2017) called for. With the volatile (and sometimes nonexistent) academic job market, graduates may find themselves with an enticing offer from a community college, and they should be familiar enough with the TYC mission and reality to confidently take it. Perhaps I shouldn’t be so surprised after looking at the data shown by the TYC portion of the National Writing Census that shows 64% of the respondents (nine out of

14) who identified as current TYC WPAs were not hired for the position of WPA, thus the need to prepare students for the possibility of this position is so essential. Many graduate students have the potential to become excellent and productive faculty and WPAs at TYCs, and preparation would only increase their value on the job market. Perhaps if graduate students were better versed in the TYC WPA scholarship and prepared for their positions, the following transitions into the identity and practice of a TYC WPA might be easier.

Since I arrived, the TYC setting has inspired my teaching, as well as my scholarship and activism. I have deepened my understanding of what I think it means to teach composition, and experienced the heavy workloads that are endemic to TYCs. I have found intersections between college assessment, activism, and research that has made an opportunity for a forthcoming publication on the success and persistence of first-generation students at our high-HSI college context (Snyder & Lee, in press). I am now an elected member of the CWPA executive board, helping many others to represent TYC WPA issues in our field. As we battle unforeseen situations, like COVID19, I am more encouraged every day that the TYC WPA route was the best decision I could have made, and that if I leave, I will do so taking invaluable experience that will only deepen my respect for TYC WPA and WPA work.

## CONCLUSION

The work of TYC WPAs is dynamic and rewarding. Anyone who might be interested in this work should prepare for it as early and as often as possible. Researchers at TYCs can embrace nontraditional career trajectories through TYC WPA positions and show the world that “two-year access institutions are rich and rewarding sites of teaching and learning” (Gordano, Hassel, Heinert, & Phillips, 2017, p. 77; see also Calhoon-Dillahunt, 2011) as well as excellent places to research and advocate. There are so many rewarding avenues to address social justice through the curricular administration and research with an exceptional student body. TYC WPA is teaching, administration, service, research, and activism, all with and for our most underserved and deserving student populations.

## NOTES

1. Many such faculty interpret the concept of academic freedom to mean that they do not have to follow program guidelines or goals. To understand the complex political and historical importance of the concept of academic freedom, please refer to the original AAUP statement on academic freedom.

2. It is all too common for a writing center director at a TYC to become the *de facto* WPA as well (e.g., Griffiths, 2017).

3. As I say this, I realize with irony that I am currently accessing the TYC body of scholarship through my alma mater's library rather than my college's library.

4. I am grateful to Dr. Craig Jacobsen for reaching out to my doctoral institution and supervising the MLA-sponsored alternative academic internship at Mesa Community College.

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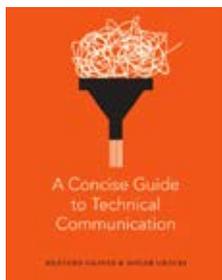
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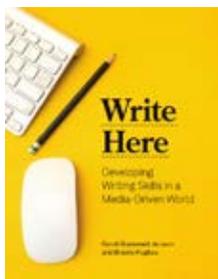
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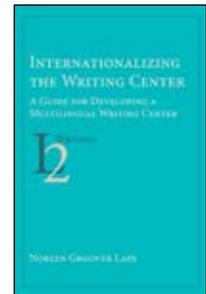
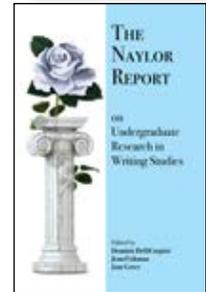
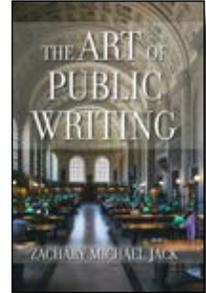
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