



# WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Volume 44 • Number 1 • Fall 2020

CWPA Statement on Racial Injustice and Systemic Racism

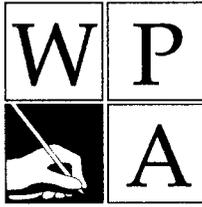
Writing Outside of Class: The Untapped Potential of Students' Non-Academic Writing

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A Broader View: How Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition Prepare their Graduate Students to Teach Composition

Enacting Bricolage: Theorizing the Teaching Practices of Graduate Writing Instructors



# Writing Program Administration

Journal of the  
Council of Writing Program Administrators

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## Guide for Authors

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

Possible topics of interest include:

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

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

### *Submission Guidelines*

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

- be a maximum 7,500 words;
- be styled according to either the *MLA Handbook* (8th edition) or the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th edition), as appropriate to the nature of your research;
- include an abstract (maximum 200 words);

- contain no identifying information;
- be submitted as a .doc or .docx format file; and
- use tables, notes, figures, and appendices sparingly and judiciously.

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

### *Reviews*

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

### *Announcements and Calls*

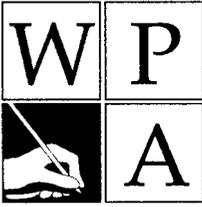
Relevant announcements and calls for papers may be published as space permits. Announcements should not exceed 500 words, and calls for proposals or participation should not exceed 1,000 words. Submission deadlines in calls should be no sooner than January 1 for the fall issue and June 1 for the spring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

### *Correspondence*

Correspondence relating to the journal, submissions, or editorial issues should be sent to [wpaeditors@gmail.com](mailto:wpaeditors@gmail.com).

### *Subscriptions*

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



# Writing Program Administration

Journal of the  
Council of Writing Program Administrators  
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## Meditations on the Merganser: Administration in Uncertain Times

Lori Ostergaard, Jim Nugent, and Jacob Babb

*Grief and resilience live together.*

—Michelle Obama

No one needs us to rehearse the brutalities of 2020 and we are, frankly, too overwhelmed to take full stock of this historical moment. As we write this in October 2020, the country is on the verge of an epoch-making election and is experiencing civil unrest, domestic threats, a global pandemic, and an uncertain future for higher education. In this space, we would like to cast some hopeful light against this dark year. There is much to be encouraged about despite the gloom of 2020: the Black Lives Matter movement has led many to face the enduring disgrace of systemic racism; an emerging generation of leaders has shown their commitment to rebuilding this country and effecting positive social, institutional, and political change; and young people are leading the way in efforts to stem the effects of climate change, gun violence, economic inequality, and more. To the extent that our country is tipping toward fascism and white supremacy, we believe that it is equally poised on the edge of positive and lasting social change.

As of this writing, Lori and Jim are at their summer cottage—or camp, in the local idiom—on a bay of Lake Superior in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. The nearest interstate highway is 215 miles away and, although hospital ventilators are scarce up here, the location is very amenable to social distancing. Jacob, meanwhile, is hunkered down with his family at his home in suburban Louisville, Kentucky [and is definitely not jealous of his co-editors’ idyllic lake home —JB]. One day in late August, Lori and Jim noticed an orphan duckling on the lakeshore, a red-breasted merganser that had separated from its brood and was trying to make it on his own. Lake Superior is a cruel home for a lone duckling, of course: the bay’s resident birder warned Lori and Jim to keep their distance and to not get too attached. So they promptly named him Scooter and began keeping an eye on him.



Photo by Jim Nugent.

The red-breasted merganser (*Mergus serrator*) has dwelled on the coastal lands of North America for millions of years. Only one or two days after hatching, mergansers are led by their mother to the water, where they are fully equipped to feed themselves by diving for insects and fish. Mergansers stick together as a brood for about eight weeks, at which point they can fly and are ready for a late fall migration. Although Scooter seemed small, alone, and utterly impermanent, he was actually equipped with some powerful genetic firmware—beta tested and refined over millennia—that made him a tenacious survivor from the moment he hatched. Still, it was nerve-racking for Jim and Lori to watch Scooter each day from their bunkhouse window, eliciting equal parts trepidation and hope. Every Scooter spotting brought joy and marvel at his growth, as well as relief that a predator hadn't yet found him. As his tiny wings expanded and his feathers started coming in, he was inching closer to flight.

Witnessing the merganser, it is hard not to reflect on our lives as educators, administrators, and citizens. We step into institutions that long precede us and, whether we thrive in them or not, these institutions are likely to long succeed us. Against the fact of our own impermanence—and in

the midst of circumstances beyond our control—we labor for survival and we strive to make things better. Scooter appeared on the lakeshore right as Lori was stepping down from a six-year term as department chair and a two-year term as chair of Oakland University's General Education Committee. At the same time, Jacob traded his WPA hat for one as English department chair at Indiana University Southeast and Jim stepped down from a five-year term as director of Oakland University's professional and digital writing major. Faculty who have served in these roles understand the frantic legwork taking place below the surface, necessary to keep our programs afloat and moving forward in the face of uncertainty. And each of us knows the mix of trepidation and hope that accompanies our work in higher education and in the larger society.

As we look back over our last few editors' introductions, we realize that we have been mourning and processing complex emotions even before the challenges of 2020. After months of sheltering-in-place, and with a country on the verge of massive social changes for better or worse, we would like to focus on this as a time for survival, for growth, and for moving forward despite the cold waters that crash over us. To make good on the lessons of 2020, we may do no more in a day than to keep our heads above water and to help our family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and students to stay afloat themselves. Our hope for us all is that when the waves break, we can dive under them; when it's calm, we can rest; and when we get lost, our flock will find us. May we be as tenacious as the merganser, even in the face of our own impermanence.

It was sixteen days after his first appearance that Scooter was last spotted for certain. But on the twenty-first day, Lori and Jim saw a brood of ten young mergansers diving for minnows out on the bay. The next day, they saw a brood of eleven. Red-breasted mergansers commonly adopt ducklings from other broods; although we can't say for sure, we're hopeful that Scooter found his way and is no longer alone.



Photo by Jim Nugent.

#### IN THIS ISSUE

In “Writing Outside of Class: The Untapped Potential of Students’ Non-Academic Writing,” Heather Lindenman and Paula Rosinski present self-reported survey data from students regarding their non-academic writing experiences. They contend that students’ non-academic writing experiences are potential sources of transferable writing knowledge and suggest that bringing discussions of students’ non-academic writing into academic contexts can foster student writing expertise and a deeper culture of writing on campuses.

In “Toward a Rhetorical Model of Directed Self-Placement,” Zhaozhe Wang suggests that our students’ placement decisions may not align with “who we think they are” or how we expect them to engage with DSP practices. Wang begins this article by examining current DSP scholarship through the lens of rhetorical agency. He then proposes a “rhetorical model of DSP” and provides an example of such a model at work.

In “The Affiliate as Mentoring Network: The Lasting Work of the Carolinas WPA,” Meg Morgan, Marsha Lee Baker, Wendy Sharer, and Tracy Ann Morse provide a compelling argument for the potential of CWPA-affiliates to provide mentoring opportunities for WPAs. The article documents how the Carolinas WPA (CarWPA) was created to meet the local needs of isolated WPAs and asserts that “many more WPAs might be mentored through regional affiliates.”

Amy Cicchino's article "A Broader View: How Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition Prepare their Graduate Students to Teach Composition" presents survey data from 38 United States doctoral programs about teacher training practices for their graduate teaching assistant writing pedagogy education. The responses collected in this study shed light on the demographics, timing, goals, components, and methods used to prepare GTAs to teach undergraduate composition.

Meridith Reed's "Enacting Bricolage: Theorizing the Teaching Practices of Graduate Writing Instructors" examines how graduate student instructors act as pedagogical bricoleurs, drawing from several sources to create and enact their own pedagogical practices. Reed's research asks readers to "see new instructors not as trainees but as craftspeople," complicating how we think about pedagogical training.

Andrew Hollinger and Jessie Borgman's article "(Dis)similarity and Identity: On Becoming Quasi-WPA" examines the positions of "non-tenured, part-time or otherwise under-supported" quasi-WPAs, suggesting ways that the uncertain subject positions of these administrators present challenges to their authority, identity, and access to institutional resources.

Sheila Carter-Tod's review essay "The Importance of Documenting Oft-Unspoken Narratives" calls on WPAs to consider the narratives often left out of our scholarship, narratives from black WPAs and those who have been bullied in writing programs. These descriptions of varying experiences serve as needed appeals for us to pay more attention to the operations of power and privilege in our programs and institutions. Similarly, Christine Cucciarre's review "Non-Essential: Adjuncting During COVID-19" examines the tenuous role of adjunct faculty in our institutions at large and in our writing programs specifically, asking WPAs to consider how the pandemic presents an opportunity to redefine labor as it has existed and to create more ethical and fair labor practices moving forward.

#### THANKS TO OUR EDITORIAL BOARD

Every fall we take a moment to thank our editorial board for their support, insight, and hard work. We know our board members' time and energy is finite and valuable, but their input is essential to *WPA*. We first wish to acknowledge and thank the members who are cycling off of the board. We are immensely grateful to Seth Kahn and Wendy Sharer for six years of service on the journal's editorial board; to Carrie Leverenz for eight years of service; to Mark McBeth, E. Shelley Reid, and Shelley Rodrigo for eleven years of service; to Scott Warnock for ten years of service; and to Susan

Thomas for two years of service. We also wish Susan well in her new role as CWPA's vice president.

We are also grateful to members of the editorial board who are continuing their service: David Blakesley, Beth Brunk-Chavez, Sheila Carter-Tod, Casie Fedukovich, Collie Fulford, Teresa Grettano, Sarah Z. Johnson, Cheri Lemieux Spiegel, Amy Ferdinandt Stolley, and Chris Warnick.

Finally, we are delighted to welcome the following new members to the board: Nancy Bou Ayash, Chen Chen, Sherri Craig, David Green, Alexandria Lockett, Staci Perryman-Clark, Patti Poblete, James Chase Sanchez, Darci Thoune, and Peter Vandenberg began their service on the board in October. Thank you for agreeing to work with us.

#### OUR EDITORIAL TEAM

One of the great joys we have experienced editing *WPA* has been working with some amazing graduate students as assistant editors and ads managers. It is a bittersweet moment for us as we bid farewell to the wonderful students who served with us this past year and welcome to a new team. This year, we say goodbye to two of our assistant editors: Rebecca Petitti joined us in 2019 and Kendra Andrews joined us in 2018 as an ads manager and graciously agreed to serve again as an assistant editor this past year. We were fortunate to have these exceptional colleagues working with us. This year Emily Jo Schwaller will join Katelyn Stark and Eric D. Brown as our new team of assistant editors and Megan Schoettler will serve as ads manager. We are grateful to this team for helping with the production of volume 43.

We are also grateful for the opportunity to work with undergraduates at our home institutions. This year, Jacob is working with Richard Stettenbenz, an English major at Indiana University Southeast, and Jim and Lori are working with Elizabeth Bihary and Jaclyn Tockstein, majors in professional and digital writing at Oakland University.

#### COMING IN SUMMER 2021 . . .

We hope you read that subheading to yourself in the deep voice of a movie trailer announcer. If not, we'll give you some time to do so now.

We are pleased to announce that the journal is publishing a special summer issue in 2021 on Black Lives Matter and antiracist projects in writing program administration, guest edited by Sheila Carter-Tod and Jennifer Sano-Franchini. We originally asked Sheila and Jennifer to edit a symposium for the spring 2021 issue, but they received such an overwhelming response to their call for submissions that a full issue was warranted. We

are grateful to Sheila and Jen for their work on this forthcoming issue and to the CWPA leadership for enthusiastically approving our plan to add a third issue for volume 44.

#### CALL FOR NEW EDITORS

As we move into 2021, we are thinking ahead to 2022, when our editorship of WPA draws to a close. When we were selected to be the next editors, we had a year to shadow our generous editorial predecessors, Barbara L'Eplattenier and Lisa Mastrangelo. We look forward to doing the same for the next editorial team. Please read the following information and consider applying to edit the journal.

The term is for three years, with a possible two-year renewal. The new editor or editorial team will work with the current team to publish content already in development for spring 2022, shadow the editors as they process submissions in fall 2021 and spring 2022, and assume full responsibility for content and production beginning with the fall 2022 issue.

Interested applicants should have the following qualifications:

- publications and expertise in the field of writing program administration and related areas;
- knowledge of the issues that have preoccupied the field, both historically and in the recent past;
- familiarity with the journal, an understanding of the role the journal plays in the field, and a vision for the journal's future;
- a commitment to diversity and inclusive editorial practices; current membership in and a history of involvement with CWPA;
- strong editorial and organizational skills; and
- prior editorial and reviewing experience.

We especially encourage applications from prospective editorial teams and from BIPOC.

To apply, please submit an application letter explaining why you are qualified for this position and describing any resources or support your institution(s) will be able to provide (released time, secretarial support, startup funds, etc.), as well as resources you will request from CWPA. Applicants should also submit a current curriculum vitae for each member of the prospective editorial team. If you are proposing an editorial team, please explain how you will work together on editing and production of the journal. Upon request, additional information about editorial responsibilities and workflow, journal finances, and production timelines will be made

available to prospective editors. Address queries to Lisa Mastrangelo, Chair of the Publications Committee, at [lmastrangelo919@gmail.com](mailto:lmastrangelo919@gmail.com).

Please send application materials electronically as a single file to Lisa Mastrangelo at the above email address. The deadline is March 1, 2021. Members of the publications committee will be available for phone and videoconference consultations with prospective editors/editorial teams. We hope to finalize an agreement with the new editor or editorial team no later than May 1, 2021.



## **CWPA Statement on Racial Injustice and Systemic Racism**

The CWPA Executive Board and Officers  
June 16, 2020

With regard to the dehumanizing, traumatizing, and even lethal injustices recently represented by the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, we, the elected and appointed officers and members of the CWPA Executive Board, express solidarity with those who are striving for meaningful societal change and a just world. We acknowledge the insufficiency of any organizational statement unto itself, and that such a statement is only the first step toward meaningful action. However, we feel it is important to explicitly affirm our commitment to an equitable society, antiracist writing programs, and our own organizational self-evaluation and growth. We offer the following statements:

1. We condemn racial profiling, race-motivated violence, and other racist actions against anyone, anytime. We are actively listening to and coalescing with Black Lives Matter activists and social-justice allies who are rightly calling for an end to dehumanizing practices. Many of us have marched and demonstrated in our own local communities as well as providing other material support to protesters and organizations in pursuit of a more just and equitable society. We encourage you to participate visibly and vocally, and to give, as we have, in support of legal defense funds, voter registration initiatives, community-oriented non-profits, and more.
2. We acknowledge that the American educational system has been founded upon, long inflected with, and passively complicit in the perpetuation of white supremacy and racism. Higher education institutions and the writing programs so central to them, particularly in first-year, are inextricably implicated in histories of systemic racism. We strongly encourage all CWPA members to read widely within the growing collection of antiracist scholarship, especially as it directly applies to writing program administration, writing curriculum and instruction, placement, and assessment. Writing program administrators have a responsibility to imple-

ment antiracist practices in their writing programs and actively work to dismantle structures of white privilege.

3. Within the organization, the CWPA board and officers are initiating a principled, comprehensive re-examination of the organization, focused on enacting diversity; building a truly antiracist, inclusive, and supportive organization; and supporting equitable and just writing programs. We are developing a set of clearly defined, measurable actions to which we can hold ourselves accountable, and we invite you to join us in this important work. We will have an initial plan complete and made public by the end of August, 2020.



## Writing Outside of Class: The Untapped Potential of Students' Non-Academic Writing

Heather Lindenman and Paula Rosinski

*Students compose copious amounts of writing outside of school, but they do not always see its relevance to their academic work. Based on survey data (n =138), our study presents students' self-reported gains from their non-academic writing experiences and their learning (or lack thereof) from their non-academic writing struggles. We argue that students' non-academic writing experiences have untapped potential as sources of transferable writing knowledge and suggest that building discussions of students' non-academic writing into academic contexts can support the development of student writing expertise and a deeper culture of writing on campuses. We conclude that writing programs have the opportunity to enhance faculty development, and hence student achievement, by drawing on the value of non-academic writing to students' development as writers overall.*

*I've learned much more about writing from positions of leadership outside of class than inside class. Inside classes and for academic purposes, I am writing as a student, but outside of class I learn how to effectively write as a leader within the community. . . .*

*I've learned [from my non-academic writing] how to balance formal and informal language and structure for work that isn't purely academic so that a variety of readers can relate to the material. . . .*

*I would say that the writing I do outside of academia requires more editing than the pieces that I do inside the classroom. My non-academic writing has taught me the importance of proofreading, as well as taking time away from pieces before going back and revising.*

—Excerpts from student survey responses

Writing programs of various stripes—including first-year writing programs, writing centers, student support services, and writing across the curriculum initiatives—aim to support student writers as they move between various contexts of writing. These include academic contexts, both for general education requirements and in the disciplines, and sometimes professional writing situations, such as for job applications, internships, and future

careers. To help writers develop rhetorical dexterity, writing programs often form curricula or offer services to emphasize rhetorical awareness, writing processes, metacognition, and revision. However, writing programs, broadly conceived, still rarely take into account the copious writing that students compose outside of their academic or co-curricular requirements. Six years ago, our institution, Elon University, embarked on its own Writing Excellence Initiative (WEI), our university's Quality Enhancement Plan, in an effort to transform the culture of writing across our entire campus—both academic and beyond. The goals of this initiative are to enhance student, faculty, and staff attitudes and behaviors toward and practices of writing broadly conceived, including academic, professional, extracurricular, and self-sponsored writing, as well as visual, aural, and multimodal writing. This initiative fit well with some scholarly WAC conversations pointing to the need for writing programs to “stretch beyond the curriculum and campus” by making new institutional connections within the academy and beyond (Parks and Goldblatt 600) or by making “writing an important component of student internships and co-ops, field studies, and service learning projects” (Blumner, Eliason, and Fritz 29-30). However, Elon's initiative was unique in its response to research that emphasizes the importance of students' *non-academic writing* to their gains in rhetorical sophistication and overall growth as writers (Cleary; Roozen, “From Journals” and “Tracing Trajectories”; Rosinski; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak). In the words of Elon University's WEI, our institution made a commitment to recognize the “entire educational experience,” including the writing students “undertake on their own, without any formal connection with the university” (Writing Excellence Initiative 18). That is, the initiative pledges to acknowledge not only academic writing within the curriculum, but also the writing students compose beyond the curriculum.

This article focuses on this non-academic student writing slice of our Writing Excellence Initiative by reporting on a survey that gathered data on the out-of-class writing that students compose, what they report learning from this writing, and the potential connections between their academic and non-academic writing lives. After reviewing the scholarship surrounding non-academic writing of students and describing our data collection methods, we present and discuss our survey results in the following categories:

- Students' non-academic writing: what students compose outside of class;
- Students' learning from their non-academic writing, including self-awareness, process knowledge, writing abilities, and audience adaptation;

- Students' responses to their non-academic writing struggles;
- Untapped potential: learning from struggles and successes in non-academic writing.

As the above categories suggest, this article presents data that shows students' non-academic writing is alive and well, and that students already learn a good deal from their writing beyond the curriculum. Indeed, the opening epigraphs present a sample of students' self-reported learning from their non-academic writing experiences, including the importance of crafting one's own ethos, ways to vary their writing style for a given audience, and writing process strategies. Our study indicates there are rich opportunities to help students reconsider their non-academic writing struggles as a way to grow rhetorically and suggest that administrators and faculty could do more to help students connect their non-academic writing struggles and successes to their curricular writing. We argue that if writing program administrators fail to recognize students' vast array of writing experiences beyond the academy, and they do not attune writing faculty to the richness of students' non-academic writing experiences, they are overlooking powerful opportunities to help students transfer writerly knowledge and practices between academic and non-academic contexts. We conclude by sharing some examples of how our institution has expanded faculty development programming and community celebrations of non-academic writing to highlight the value of this kind of writing in all of our lives.

#### REVIEW OF LITERATURE: NON-ACADEMIC WRITING IS PROLIFIC AND VALUABLE

Recent scholarship on transfer and students' rhetorical educations demonstrates that a significant amount of college students' learning about writing comes from their out-of-school writing experiences (Alexander and Jarratt; Brent; Cleary; Fishman, Lunsford, McGregor, and Otuteye; Pigg et al.; Michaud; Moore et al.; Roozen "Comedy Stages," "From Journals," and "Tracing Trajectories"; Rosinski; Shepherd; Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak). As members of what Kathleen Blake Yancey calls "the writing public" (298), students compose various texts—including emails, grant proposals, websites, and speeches—beyond their curricular commitments. The research team behind the Stanford Study of Writing, which collected samples of students' academic and non-academic writing over the course of their five-year study, reports being overwhelmed by the quantity and quality of students' extracurricular compositions (Fishman et al. 29). Studies of students' self-sponsored writing, such as Jessie Moore et al.'s "Revisualizing Composition," demonstrate that col-

lege students write prolifically outside of school, for purposes ranging from entertainment to participation in public life (Pigg et al.; Moore et al. 7).

While mobile and hand-held devices may have altered and/or accelerated the ways students write beyond the curriculum, digital technologies did not initiate their prolific writing in extracurricular spaces. David Russell's research on the history of writing in the disciplines illustrates that the "extracurriculum" (Gere) was thriving in colleges in the nineteenth century, and many students reported learning more from their extracurricular involvement in literary societies than from their coursework (44-45). Indeed, Jonathan Alexander and Susan Jarratt's more recent research on student activists demonstrates "how little of [their] education the students attributed to learning acquired or even encountered in the classroom" (540). As a result, the authors argue for giving non-academic writing a central role in future research: "future studies of rhetorical education should encompass the curricular and the cocurricular, the formally sponsored and the self-sponsored, as mutually informing resources" (542). For similar reasons, Elon's Writing Excellence Initiative chose to capture information on the types of non-academic writing students compose, whether they learn from that writing, and also whether (and if so, how) it complements their curricular writing.

We recognize that, by using terms such as *beyond the curriculum*, *non-academic*, and *out-of-school* writing, our WEI and this study run the risk of insinuating false distinctions between students' integrated "streams" (Roozen, "Comedy Stages") of writing activity. Certainly, these labels are imperfect; after all, the significant scholarship that informed our WEI, and this study, suggests that these types of writing are deeply interconnected and interanimate one another. Kevin Roozen's multiple studies of writers' self-sponsored literacies illustrate that students' "self sponsored and school sponsored" writing are not "separate streams of literate activity" but are crucially integrated and mutually informing ("Comedy Stages" 100). In "From Journals," Roozen argues that Angelica's private, reflective writing plays an important role in academic and professional writing contexts (566). He puts forth a similar case in "Tracing Trajectories." Doug Brent's study of co-op students takes an approach related to Roozen's in that it emphasizes the connections students notice between their co-op writing and their wide array of academic and life experiences. Likewise, Marsha Curtis and Anne Herrington's study of students' writing development during their college years supports Roozen's claim that personal writing should not be considered "separate" or an island unto itself (88).

Studies that ask specifically about transfer between academic and non-academic writing contexts urge writing professionals to pay close attention

to non-academic writing as an influential part of college students' rhetorical educations (Cleary; Michaud; Rosinski; Shepherd; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak). Here, we understand transfer to mean the conscious or intuitive adaptation, integration, or transformation of writing practices, approaches, or strategies to serve new or alternate communicative ends (Anson and Moore; Brent; DePalma and Ringer; Nowacek; Yancey, Robertson, Taczak).<sup>1</sup> In her study of adult students, Michelle Navarre Cleary writes,

these students move, often daily, between writing at work, at school, in communities, and at home. To ignore how writing in these contexts influences how students write for school is to necessarily impoverish our understanding of our students, their writing development, and the possibilities for transfer. (661)

Michael Michaud's study of adult student Tony suggests that he draws on a mix of his workplace writing and reading experiences to write an academic position paper for a general education course. Paula Rosinski likewise demonstrates that students have heightened rhetorical awareness in their non-academic and self-sponsored writing, and argues that writing instruction in academic writing spaces might facilitate transfer by asking students to reflect and draw on rhetorical strategies they use in self-sponsored writing. In his study of students' digital and multimodal composing practices, Ryan P. Shepherd also makes a compelling case for the importance of helping students to bridge the gap between their wealth of digital composing practices and their classroom writing. It is crucial that educators help students draw these connections, he argues, because "creating a connection is the primary obstacle when facilitating learning transfer between in-school composing and out-of-school digital and multimodal composing" (110), and students stand to gain significantly if they are able to see the relevance of their out-of-class writing.

Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner's *The Meaningful Writing Project* also points to the importance of paying attention to students' non-academic literacy practices (134). Although 94% of the seniors who participated in their survey indicated that their most meaningful writing project was curricular (108), the survey did specify in multiple places that the students could select a project that was not assigned for a class.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, one of the six students profiled in their study, Leah, identified her most meaningful writing project as a "family-oriented out-of-school task" that "gave her a certain power over her experiences and a way to convey those experiences to a real audience" (47). Specifically, Leah wrote an article for her family newsletter about her experiences working as a volunteer with pediatric burn victims in China (48). She got "tangible, positive feedback"

from relatives and had opportunity to connect with a real audience, her family (48–49). Like many other students in *The Meaningful Writing Project* study, Leah explains that this project is meaningful for her in part because it contrasted with her previous experiences: “In contrast to . . . school-based tasks,” the authors explain, “the writing Leah did for her family newsletter allowed her to connect to a passion and be creative” (47). These distinguishing characteristics made the non-academic project a fulfilling experience for Leah in ways that her academic projects were not, further highlighting the potential value of non-academic writing in students’ lives.

The research on the importance and relevance of students’ out-of-school writing is copious and compelling. As we developed our Writing Excellence Initiative, this research made it impossible for us to ignore the non-academic experiences that inform students’ academic writing pursuits. In this way, our Writing Excellence Initiative, and this corresponding study, underscore and extend Steve Parks and Eli Goldblatt’s claim that “we should imagine our [WAC] project as one that combines discipline-based instruction *with a range of other literacy experiences* that will help students and faculty see writing and reading *in a wider social and intellectual context* than the college curriculum” (585–86, emphasis added).

While the above scholarship argues clearly for the inclusion of students’ non-academic writing in writing research, it stops short of detailing exactly what students, in aggregate, report learning from the writing they do outside of school. What specifically do students learn from their non-academic writing, and what happens when they struggle in their out-of-class writing pursuits? Our research moves beyond smaller-scale and case studies to discern in a systematic way what a larger cohort of students write outside of school and what they report learning (or fail to learn) from that writing. Below, we extend the scholarly focus on the importance of students’ non-academic writing to report on exactly what students claim to learn from their successes and struggles with out-of-class writing, and the ways they might stand to gain more from this writing.

## METHODS

The goal of our IRB-approved study<sup>3</sup> was to understand the extent to which students at our university engage in non-academic writing for personal, professional, and extracurricular reasons; what they learned (or not) from these types of writing; and whether or not they believe these different ways of writing inform one another. We expected that this data could provide us with a better understanding of the entirety of students’ writing lives, which in turn could help us develop ways to enhance the culture of writing on our

campus. We conducted our study by surveying current undergraduate students at our institution about their non-academic writing. We chose to conduct this study by survey in order to capture broad brush-stroke information about the types of writing students compose and to look for patterns among what they report learning from these types of writing.<sup>4</sup>

### *Survey Questions*

Our survey questions asked about students' non-academic writing beliefs and attitudes, writing practices, writing successes and struggles, and final products and genres. In sum, the survey asked 18 questions, four of which were open-ended and the rest of which were multiple choice (see appendix A). Our survey included questions about the following:

- What writing do students compose beyond what is assigned for their curricular requirements?
- What do students learn from their non-academic writing, whether through its success or failure?
- Do students perceive their non-academic and academic writing as informing one another?

The questions were based on principles outlined in our Writing Excellence Initiative as well as questions asked by recent studies, such as *The Meaningful Writing Project*, "Revisualizing Composition" (Moore et al.), and other previous studies of students' writing across contexts (Lindenman; Rosinski). One of the affordances of using a survey was that we were able to ask similar questions as previous studies, thereby joining ongoing conversations, while at the same time being able to include questions unique to our institutional culture. We found that the primary constraint of a survey was the same one as is common to this methodology, namely, the inability to ask follow-up questions when faced with interesting or provocative responses. For example, we found that students often kept journals, wrote opinion pieces and profiles for online outlets, and maintained blogs while studying abroad, but we were unable to ask follow-up questions about whether practicing these types of writing led to different attitudes toward writing in general or their writing lives in particular. We were also unable to ask clarifying questions related to our questions about the failure of non-academic writing pursuits. We chose to use the term *failure* because we were interested in learning from students about unsuccessful non-academic writing ventures—products that themselves did not succeed—rather than process-related struggles. However, *failure* may have been too strong and laden a term; students may have been hesitant to associate themselves with

*failure* in even a small way. Were we to conduct this study again, we might include a question that instead asked students to discuss writing that they would characterize as simply unsuccessful or that they felt didn't work as well as they hoped.

### *Survey Distribution*

We distributed our Qualtrics survey by sending email invitations to student and faculty leaders of a wide range of social, athletic, and academic groups. These included the Ultimate Frisbee Club, Women's Volleyball, Men's and Women's Club Tennis, Ballroom Dance, DanceWorks, InterVarsity, and Student Alumni Ambassadors, as well as Honors, Undergraduate Research, and the Writing Center. We distributed to this diverse array of groups to reach students in both academic and non-academic contexts and as a way to assemble a broad picture of student practices and beliefs/attitudes toward their non-academic writing. The email invitation asked faculty to forward the survey to students in the programs they managed and asked students to forward the survey to members of clubs and organizations they led. The invitation also encouraged students to forward the survey to other student groups in which they participated. One of the authors of this article sent the survey link via email to her two first-year writing classes (each with 18–20 students) as well. We also advertised this survey by posting a description of it, along with the survey link, to our Center for Writing Excellence social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and a university-wide webpage for sharing community information (*Today at Elon*, formerly known as *E-Net*). Because we posted the survey link and description on social media, and encouraged faculty and students to forward the email invitation to additional groups, we are unable to report the exact number of students who were invited to take the survey (there are about 6,000 undergraduates at our mid-sized private university). All students who completed the survey were offered the opportunity to sign up for a drawing to win one of ten \$20 Amazon gift certificates.

### *Completed Responses and Demographics*

A total of 138 students submitted surveys and we have complete demographic information for 127 of those students. Of those 127 students, 87% identified as female and 13% as male. According to credit hours, 8% of participants are first-year students, 21% are sophomores, 25% are juniors, and 47% are seniors. The most commonly represented majors among participants in our study are Psychology, Journalism, and Strategic Communications majors, which reflects the popularity of these programs at our

university.<sup>5</sup> Several other majors were also well represented (five or more respondents per major): Political Science and Policy Studies, Accounting, Public Health Studies, English, and Biology. The average GPA of survey respondents was 3.7, which skews higher than the campus average at the time of 3.3. While we do not argue our data is representative, we do believe our findings provide a deeper understanding of student writing beyond the curriculum that is relevant at many colleges and universities.

### *Qualitative and Quantitative Data Analysis*

Our survey included four open-ended, qualitative questions, and for each of these we used emergent coding to develop codes from the data itself. Our five coding categories corresponded roughly to our open-ended questions (with two for the question related to students' pride): Learned from Non-Academic Writing, Why Meaningful, Why Failed, What Proud, and Why Proud. Each of these categories contained four to nine codes. We coded each individual survey response one (and only one) time per coding category. For instance, for a student's response to the question of why their selected non-academic writing experience was meaningful, we applied one and only one of the following five codes: Communication or Connection, Professional/Future Development, Real World, Reflection/Processing/Self-Expression, or Other (for the complete codebook, see appendix B). We revised the codes collaboratively until we were able to separately code subsets of the data with interrater agreement of at least 80% (Cohen's kappa) before proceeding. Using this process, we divided up these qualitative questions, coded individually, and then double-checked each other's originally assigned questions as a way to determine reliability and validity. The remainder of the data is based on five-point Likert scales and multiple-choice survey responses.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our survey confirms and extends scholarship that suggests college students' non-academic writing lives are alive and well (Alexander and Jarratt; Fishman, Lunsford, McGregor, and Otuteye; Pigg et al.; Lindenman; Moore et al.; Roozen "Comedy Stages," "From Journals," "Tracing Trajectories"; Rosinski; Shepherd; Yancey). Indeed, 87% of our survey respondents somewhat or strongly agree that "writing is an important part of my non-academic life" at college, and 85% of respondents indicate that they put moderate, significant, or very significant effort into their non-academic writing projects (45% say they put in significant or very significant effort, and 40% say they put in moderate effort, for a total of 85%). In addition to finding their

self-sponsored, extracurricular, and professional writing projects important and worthy of effort, students indicate that these projects are meaningful to them as well. Seventy-two percent of survey respondents somewhat or strongly agree with the statement, “I have written something meaningful during my time at Elon that was not assigned for class.” Our analysis suggests that students’ reasons for finding these projects meaningful share some common features with the predominantly curricular projects featured in *The Meaningful Writing Project*: they feature engagement, especially with the self (and future self), and they address topics or issues about which the writers feel passionate (Eodice, Geller, and Lerner).<sup>6</sup>

The results and discussion below present and examine students’ engagement with non-academic writing. This includes the types of writing they compose, their perceived gains from out-of-school writing experiences, and the potential value of their non-academic writing struggles. We report on many ways that student’s non-academic writing supports their learning and growth and discuss ways that we (as writing program administrators) might more effectively tap or leverage students’ non-academic writing to maximize its value.

*Non-academic writing: what do students write outside of school?*

To frame our discussion of what students report learning and whether (or how) they report struggling, we first report the types of writing that students compose in non-academic spaces. Consistent with Stacey Pigg et al.’s “Ubiquitous Writing” and Shepherd’s “Digital Writing,” our study found digital writing, particularly texting and emailing for social coordination, to be pervasive in the lives of college students. Indeed, nearly all survey respondents report writing text messages, emails, and social media posts, with only slightly fewer on image-based social media platforms (such as Instagram and Snapchat) than text-based or multimodal social media platforms (such as Twitter and Facebook).<sup>7</sup> Our survey asked students to distinguish between the types of writing they compose most frequently in three non-academic domains: writing for personal reasons, writing for extracurricular activities, and writing for professional purposes (see Reiff and Bawarshi; Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi 102–03). Students tend to text and use social media more often for personal reasons, such as personal correspondence and communication, whereas email is distributed more equally among personal, extracurricular, and professional domains. Students compose significant amounts of non-academic writing beyond their digital correspondence and social media as well, including journals/diaries,

letters (longhand), speeches, proposals, and posters/flyers/infographics (see table 1).<sup>8</sup>

Table 1

Types of writing across domains, listed in order of frequency.

Personal	Extracurricular	Professional
1. Texting/SMS Messages	1. Email	1. Email
2. Social Media (Facebook, Twitter)	2. Texting/SMS Messages	2. Presentations or Speeches
3. Image-Based Social Media (Snapchat, Instagram, etc.)	3. Poster/Flyer/Infographic	3. Proposal (for grant, project, etc.)
4. Email	4. Social Media (Facebook, Twitter)	4. Texting/SMS Messages
5. Diary or Journal Writing	5. Presentations or Speeches	5. Social Media (Facebook, Twitter)
6. Letters	6. Image-Based Social Media (Snapchat, Instagram, etc.)	6. Essays/Reports
7. Creative Writing (poetry, fiction, lyrics, etc.)	7. Proposal (for grant, project, etc.)	7. Letters
8. Reviews (such as for Amazon, Yelp, books/movies)	8. Articles	8. Poster/Flyer/Infographic

*What students learn from non-academic writing: personal learning or growth, process knowledge, writing abilities, audience adaptation*

When asked (in an open-ended question) what they learned from their non-academic writing, students reported learning mostly transferable concepts or understandings, rather than “rules” or conventions associated with a particular type of writing or unique writing scenario. Interestingly, much of this learning came in the form of learning about oneself, such as enhanced self-understanding and time/life management abilities (see figure 1).

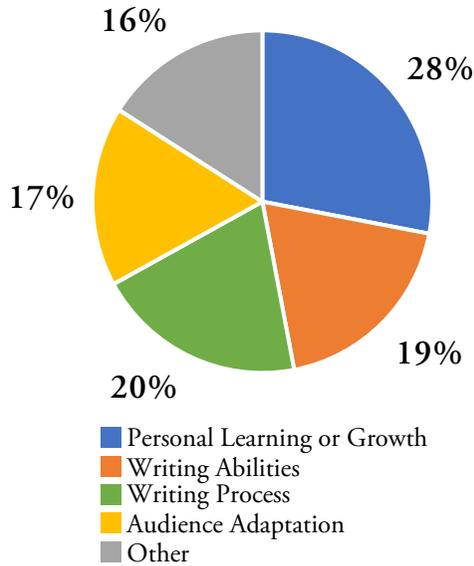


Figure 1. What students report learning from non-academic writing

The largest category for “what I learned from non-academic writing,” reflecting 28% of all responses, includes three types of personal learning or growth: self-reflection (intrapersonal growth), time/life management skills, and increased attunement to one’s passions. Self-reflection (intrapersonal growth) was the most prevalent of these three components. Reflecting the findings from the Stanford Study of Writing (Fishman, Lunsford, McGregor, and Otuteye 230), many participants in our study report composing ample amounts of personal, reflexive writing and extol the therapeutic value of that writing, journaling in particular. For instance, one participant wrote that, through her non-academic writing, “I’ve learned about who I want to be as a person,” and another wrote, “I’ve learned about myself, my beliefs.” Students in our study report frequently on their strategic use of writing for personal reasons. One noted, “Writing helps me to organize and understand my thoughts/ideas, which can aid in problem solving.” Another explained, “I use a lot of non-academic writing for personal wellness, whether that is journaling, listing upcoming activities, etc.”

Respondents also report the value of writing to organize daily life (time/life management skills). For example, one student wrote, “Lists are truly lifesavers. Write everything down and keep your lists organized so you never forget anything.” Others wrote about how writing can help with time management, in particular: “I’ve learned a lot about budgeting time

appropriately and maintaining a consistent schedule” and “it is important to carve out your own time to do assignments that don’t have as specific of a deadline as most school-assigned writing has.” Other students indicated their non-academic writing helped them gain self-awareness with respect to their passions or interests. One noted, “From my non-academic writing, I’ve learned the importance of letting my passion come through. This isn’t always what is asked for in academic writing, but it is the foundation of my non-academic writing.”

After intrapersonal growth and increased self-awareness, students frequently reported improving their writing process (20%). Those who commented on process often discussed ways to manage the labor of writing: “I’ve learned the importance of continuing to make progress, even if it’s slow,” one said; another wrote, “having something is better than having nothing. You can’t edit what you don’t have.” Others noted the importance of seeking out feedback; for instance, “it is also important to have other people look at your writing.” Some students remarked on how they had to develop more independence and accountability in their writing processes for non-academic writing projects. One wrote, “I’ve learned how to rework and revise my own work without the help of a professor.” Significantly, some students contrasted these practices directly with their curricular writing endeavors. One claimed (as stated in the epigraph), “the writing I do outside of academia requires more editing than the pieces that I do inside the classroom. My non-academic writing has taught me the importance of proofreading, as well as taking time away from pieces before going back and revising.”

Many students (19%) claim that writing for non-academic reasons improves their general abilities as creative thinkers and effective communicators. One noted, “I’ve improved my discipline and writing skills,” and another said her non-academic writing helped her learn “how to have a voice that is informed, fair, and articulate.” Twelve students (9% of the total) indicated that their writing beyond the curriculum has helped them learn how to express themselves, be creative, or develop a personal voice.

The fourth-largest area of self-reported growth was rhetorical: students claimed to increase their understanding of audience and their ability to cater their writing to a specific audience (17%). Most of these students wrote some variation of the following: “I’ve learned how to phrase things for distinct audiences and how to target it to the group that I want to address” or “I have learned how to appeal to my audience and get my readers’ attention.” These 17% of respondents explained that “different writing styles . . . appeal to popular and/or professional audiences.” One explained that “I like to review books on GoodReads and through writing and read-

ing others' reviews, I've learned the importance of writing to your audience." Many of these respondents directly contrasted their audience awareness in out-of-school writing spaces with the lower emphasis on audience in curricular writing situations. For instance, one wrote, "sometimes if you are writing for a high stakes audience you tend to put more work in than you would if the teacher was the only person reading it." These students' responses corroborate Rosinski's finding that students "showed more rhetorical sensitivity to audiences in their digital self-sponsored writing" than in their academic writing (272).

*Why I failed: Learning from non-academic struggles*

Literature on transfer suggests that some writers who "encounter a *critical incident*," defined by Kathleen Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak as "a failure to meet a new task successfully," may nonetheless go on to "use that occasion as a prompt to rethink writing altogether" (112). Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak argue that "setbacks motivated by critical incidents can provide the opportunity for conceptual breakthroughs" (120) and help writers "retheorize writing in general" (5). The authors profile student Rick, for example, whose struggles to compose a lab report that met his instructor's assignment expectations eventually led him to re-see genres as flexible and "develop a more capacious conception of writing" (124). Like Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak, we think it likely that critical incidents, or writing struggles, have the potential to "prompt learning in ways that perhaps no other mechanism can" (135). With so many non-academic writing experiences under their belts, students might be in a position to learn (or learn more) from their writing challenges in non-academic writing spaces. Indeed, our survey results suggest that when students report "failing" in their non-academic writing, 65% of respondents articulated a reason why they failed—the first step toward developing greater awareness and perhaps retheorizing writing, broadly speaking.

For those who could articulate why they thought they struggled or failed in a non-academic writing venture, there were they articulated reasons: rhetorical considerations (14%); process, time, or motivational issues (43%); and the writing itself (43%) (see table 2).

Table 2

Top three reasons why non-academic writing “failed,” according to survey respondents

Why non-academic writing venture failed	Percent
Rhetorical considerations, usually related to audience	14%
Issues related to lack of time; or problems with process or motivation	43%
Writing itself was “just bad” (e.g., problems with organization, bad ideas, ineffective wording)	43%

Fourteen percent of this cohort claimed that their extracurricular writing failed because of rhetorical concerns, usually related to audience. For instance, one student wrote, “As an RA, I write a lot of emails. Often, they are not read, so I try to make them somewhat fun and interesting, but that doesn’t work. I’m honestly still trying to work out how to write emails that will be read and comprehended and remembered.” Another respondent wrote that her “blog post” failed because it “was not written for the correct audience.” These respondents indicated that they were at fault for misreading their audience or being unable to craft their writing in a way that appealed to their target audience. Forty-three percent of respondents attributed their failure to lack of time, motivation, or effort or a rushed or inadequately staged writing process (in these cases, they claimed they knew what they were supposed to do, but they didn’t do it). They made comments such as “I lost motivation to finish it” and “Upon reflection, I could have spread the writing process over several days instead of six hours.” Finally, the remaining 43% of respondents claimed that their writing itself was just bad: some claimed their ideas were not strong, others claimed their writing was unorganized or badly designed, still others claimed they worded things poorly. One wrote, “My essay on [the] deliberation of life turned out to be more pretentious than I expected and I am not pleased with it.” Another commented, “I created a community newsletter during my internship that was not extremely effective, mainly because of the volume of information I was asked to include . . . I imagine that the content was overwhelming for residents of the community when we distributed it.” These rationales for failure do not guarantee that the students could do a better job given the opportunity. But if tapped for further reflection, they may.

It is possible that the students whose non-academic writing was unsuccessful would not have developed this awareness had it not been for the very tangible uptake (or in many cases, lack thereof) of their out-of-class writing ventures. In the case of curricular writing, when the teacher is often the central audience and source of feedback (Melzer), the student might attribute their shortcomings to the assignment, subject, or instructor idiosyncrasy (Thaiss and Zawacki). In the case of students' non-academic writing inadequacy, however, students were likely to see the demonstrable effect of their writing choices.

*Untapped potential: Learning from non-academic writing*

While there are many ways that students' non-academic writing may already contribute substantially to their writing growth, there are several ways that students' writing beyond the curriculum remains an untapped resource. Sixty-five percent of students in our study claimed to be aware of why their non-academic writing "failed"—but 35% either did not know why their non-academic writing failed (only that it did) or did not think they had ever failed in an out-of-class writing context. About a third of this subset of students offered evidence of their writing's failure in lieu of an explanation for why it failed. For instance, one student wrote that her "Facebook post to get donations for Relay for Life" failed because "no one donated." Likewise, a student wrote that her job application failed because "I did not receive a job offer" and another wrote that her scholarship applications failed because she "didn't receive them." We see this time and again: students report the evidence of the failure but do not mention the reason for the failure. One student reported that her journaling failed because it "failed to comfort me, and instead deepened my sadness"; another claimed that the grant she wrote failed because "it did not get accepted for funding." These students answered the question of "why did [your non-academic writing] fail?" by describing exactly how it failed to help them achieve their intended outcome—that is, by citing a failure of uptake. They did not explain what exactly about their writing, process, situation, or other factors contributed to the text's lack of success.

Some survey respondents combined the reason for failure with evidence of failure. For instance, one explained that her article "about a fair trade chocolate company" for Spoon University (a website dedicated to food writing, by and for college students) failed because "it lacked a lot of interesting anecdotes and it was very plain. It did not get that many page views." Her response, like many, includes both the proof that the document was not successful ("it did not get that many page views") along with the ratio-

nale for its failure (“it lacked a lot of interesting anecdotes and it was very plain”). While we cannot know, it is possible that without the tangible lack of uptake—as demonstrated by “lack of page views”—the student might not have taken the time to think through the reason for its inadequacy, or might have considered it a success. This is an area for further thought: if students recognize that something did not work, that is a worthwhile first step, but it is not enough. Those engaged with students in curricular writing contexts might be able to tap students’ understanding of non-academic writing struggles to better display principles of effective writing, persuasion, or rhetorical awareness. Reflecting on why their out-of-school writing did not succeed and brainstorming potential improvements could be an important step in encouraging similar reflection and action in academic writing situations.

Another area where students’ non-academic writing falls short of its potential, however, is in students’ perceptions of its relevance to their curricular writing tasks. While 60% of survey respondents report that “the writing I do in my classes helps me with my non-academic writing” (37% indicated it helps “a fair amount” and 23% indicated it helps “a great deal”), only 49% of respondents indicate that “the writing I do for non-academic reasons helps me with the writing I do for academic reasons” (with 30% noting “a fair amount” and 19% “a great deal”). While neither number is overwhelming, the fact that only slightly less than half of respondents believe their non-academic writing experiences help them in curricular spaces is a missed opportunity. As we discuss above, in the same survey, participants named what they learned from their writing in outside-of-school spaces; this included learning about the self (i.e., self-reflection, time/life management skills, and increased attunement to one’s passions), the importance of the writing process, increased capabilities as creative thinkers and effective communicators, and the ability to target writing to particular audiences. These are largely transferable practices and abilities. There is more that can be done—at the faculty development and the curricular level—to help students transfer this learning from their non-academic writing into their curricular writing and beyond.

## CONCLUSION

Our research into the non-academic writing of students confirms Brent’s claim that “We as writing teachers are not the sole and perhaps not even the main source of students’ rhetorical education” (589). While we are not suggesting that academia should colonize students’ non-academic writing for its own purposes, we do argue that first-year writing and WAC pro-

gram administrators, writing faculty, and writing center directors have rich opportunities to more explicitly tap the wide-ranging writing lives of students. Many students have active and diverse non-academic writing lives which could be referenced in a wider range of curricular contexts, to remind students both that they are writers already and that they have experiences on which to draw. For example, for those implementing WAC initiatives or directing first-year-writing programs, we recommend faculty development that encourages integrating metacognitive discussions in the classroom about writing beyond the curriculum, as it plays a crucial role in what students are learning about writing and themselves as writers. Likewise, writing center directors could ask consultants to talk with students about ways their non-academic writing might be a relevant source of transferable knowledge. It is possible that students may resist reflecting on or learning from their non-academic writing, either because they think faculty find it unimportant or because they have learned (from popular culture, academia, etc.) that outside-of-school writing is not valuable (Rosinski). But given our conclusions about students' experiences with non-academic writing—that they may learn academic writing behaviors and ways of thinking, self-awareness and time/life management, writing processes that support creative thinking and effective communicating, and the ability to adapt to different audiences—we argue that building such discussions into academic contexts can support the development of student writing expertise and a deeper culture of writing on campuses.

It is also important to note that when talking with students about their non-academic writing, we should encourage them to learn from their outside-of-school writing struggles as well as their successes. As noted above, among students who could articulate the reasons a piece of writing did not succeed, many of them explained that their piece of writing failed because it did not elicit the desired response or reaction from its audience. However, many did not explain the causes of their document's failure (see Sheriff). This gap provides an opportunity for growth. Like Daniel M. Gross and Jonathan Alexander, we advocate for closer attention to rhetorical failures and how they may be a "crucial component of our educational lives" (288). To do this work, students could be asked to analyze closely an out-of-class document that was not successful as a way to strengthen their rhetorical savvy. A next step might even be to ask students in a writing class to revise a failed non-academic document and imagine various alternatives. Writing program administrators might consider sharing the research on non-academic writing with faculty, to encourage them to take students' experiences with non-academic writing into account as they design their writing assignments. For example, student attention to how real audiences

react and respond to their non-academic writing could highlight to faculty the value of designing writing opportunities for genuine, outside-of-the-university audiences.

While our Writing Excellence Initiative has strived to recognize students' non-academic writing, there is still more we can do. Thus far, our Writing Across the University program has expanded faculty development programming and community celebrations of non-academic writing to increase awareness of its pervasiveness and value in all of our lives. We have also created a celebration of students' non-academic writing through an annual multimodal writing contest, with special categories for writing composed while working in a Student Life division (such as Elon's News Network or Campus Recreation) and for internships. We have encouraged students engaged in extracurricular and self-sponsored writing projects to attend write-ins and writing boot camps offered on campus. Moving forward, however, we see the need to increase our attention to this vital part of students' writing lives. We could do more to collect and celebrate students' copious non-academic writing; for instance, we could link to student blogs, articles, and other self-sponsored writing from our Center for Writing Excellence website and encourage other non-academic units on campus to do the same. Another area for future growth is enhanced faculty development, such as expanding the non-academic writing component at our annual Summer Writing Institute to encourage faculty across the disciplines to design writing activities or assignments that explicitly ask students to draw on their writerly knowledge (especially of less successful pursuits) in out-of-class writing situations. Ultimately, our study shows that students are exercising their rhetorical savvy in a varied array of writing contexts, including a wide range of beyond-school spaces. Writing professionals and teaching faculty ought to pay closer attention to this writing, because it is narrow-sighted for us to think we are the sole or even most influential factor in students' rhetorical education, because students are drawn to this type of writing and find it meaningful, and because this writing beyond the university is very much relevant to the curriculum.

## NOTES

1. We recognize that the term transfer is complicated, often mistaken to mean the direct application or movement of knowledge, strategies, or dispositions from one context to another, and we follow writing scholars who understand the concept to be much more complex. For five (among many) useful discussions of the complexity and problematic nature of the term transfer, see Anson and Moore, DePalma and Ringer, Nowacek, Shepherd, and Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak.

2. For instance, the Meaningful Writing Project survey Question 5 asks “For the writing project you have chosen as meaningful, was it required as a course assignment or was it not connected to a course?” (149).

3. Our research study, “Elon Students’ Self-Sponsored and Non-Academic Writing” (#17-217), was approved by the Elon University IRB on March 26, 2017.

4. While our survey helped us gain broad-stroke knowledge of students’ perceptions, it could be expanded in future studies to include discourse-based interviews and/or writing sample analysis (e.g., Lindenman; Reiff and Bawarshi; Shepherd).

5. While two-thirds of these most commonly represented majors are writing-focused, they are not rhetorically-oriented and instead value a specific disciplinary way of writing; therefore, we are not concerned that having so many student respondents from these majors has skewed our data.

6. Students’ reasons for finding their non-academic writing to be meaningful also differ in notable ways. For instance, and most likely because many of the projects students discuss are self-sponsored, students are less likely to discuss the importance of having agency; students automatically have significant agency in most of their non-academic writing projects. Students were also less likely in our study to discuss researching to learn as a key feature of what made their non-academic writing meaningful (Eodice, Geller, and Lerner 65).

7. It is possible that students report slightly lower use of image-based social media platforms not because they actually use them less frequently but because they are less likely to associate these social media apps with “writing” (e.g., Rosinski, Shepherd).

8. Some genres (and metagenres) students compose outside of class map cleanly on to curricular projects: speeches and presentations are frequently assigned across the disciplines and in general education courses, and proposals are regular precursors to research papers and long-term projects, for example. The one-to-one correspondence of genres (or metagenres) is not where we are most likely to locate the possibility of meaningful opportunities for transferable learning, however, and might even be the site of many “assemblage” and “remix” errors (see Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak).

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#### APPENDIX A: SURVEY

### Elon University Students' Non-Academic and Self-Sponsored Writing

This survey asks about your **non-academic writing**. By non-academic writing, we mean any writing you do for **personal, professional, or extracurricular reasons**.

1. I write for reasons other than my academic classes [scale: Never, Infrequently, Sometimes, Often, Very Frequently]
2. The non-academic writing I do is for (mark all that apply)
  - Professional reasons (job, internship, etc.)
  - Extracurricular activities (student organizations, clubs, athletics, etc.)
  - Personal reasons (journaling, creative writing, etc.)
  - Other (fill in):
3. Indicate what kinds of writing you do for non-academic reasons (check all that apply): [three checkboxes were provided for each of the item in the list below: "Personal Reasons," "Extracurricular Activities," and "Professional Reasons"]
  - Email
  - Articles (such as for *Odyssey*, *Pendulum*, *Mic*, etc.)
  - Poster/Flyer/Infographic
  - Reviews (such as for Amazon, Yelp; or books/movies)

- Video (such as script or storyboarding)
  - “How to” or Instructional text (such as on blog or video)
  - Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
  - Image-based social media (Instagram, Snapchat, etc.)
  - Diary or journal writing
  - Proposal (for grant, project, etc.)
  - Presentations or speeches (such as for job, stand up, formal occasion, etc.)
  - Letters
  - Essays
  - Blogging (fashion, area of interest/expertise, etc.)
  - Texting/SMS messages
  - Creative Writing (poetry, fiction, lyrics, etc.)
  - Other
  - Other
  - Other
4. I believe writing is an important part of my non-academic life at Elon. [scale: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree]
5. I have written something meaningful during my time at Elon that was not assigned for class. [scale: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree]
6. Why was it meaningful?
7. The amount of effort I have put into non-academic writing projects at Elon is [scale: Very little, Little, Moderate, Significant, Very significant]
8. The readers of my non-academic writing are (mark all that apply): [three checkboxes were provided for each of the item in the list below: “Personal Writing,” “Professional Writing,” and “Extracurricular Writing.”]
- Friends
  - Family
  - People interested in topic/issue
  - Advisor or boss
  - Colleagues or peers in organization
  - General Internet audience
  - Unknown
  - Other

9. I enjoy working on writing projects that are not class-related. [scale: Never, Infrequently, Sometimes, Often, Very frequently]
10. I participate in writing-related groups or events (such as writing contests, poetry readings, stand up, speeches, etc.) at Elon. [scale: Never, Infrequently, Sometimes, Often, Very frequently]
11. I value the writing I do for non-academic reasons. [scale: Not at all, A little, Somewhat, A fair amount, A great deal]
12. The writing I do in my classes helps me with my non-academic writing. [scale: Not at all, A little, Somewhat, A fair amount, A great deal]
13. The writing I do for non-academic reasons helps me with the writing I do for academic reasons. [scale: Not at all, A little, Somewhat, A fair amount, A great deal]
14. I use writing strategies (such as brainstorming and revision techniques) that I learned in class for my non-academic writing. [scale: Never, Infrequently, Sometimes, Often, Very frequently]
15. I use writing strategies I learned outside of school (through non-academic writing) to complete academic writing projects. [scale: Never, Infrequently, Sometimes, Often, Very frequently]

The following three questions ask you about writing that was *not assigned for a class*.

16. Please describe an example of a piece of writing that you have worked on that was not for a class and that you **valued or were proud of**. Why?
17. Please describe an example of a piece of writing that you wrote outside of class that failed or did not work as well as (or in the way that) you hoped. Why?
18. What would you say you've learned from the **non-academic writing** you've done during your time at Elon?

## APPENDIX B: CODEBOOK

### *Proud and Why*

- **Facilitated Connection.** Helped author connect personally with another person, family, or group; or helped facilitate interpersonal or personal connection between others.
- **Cared about Topic/Issue.** Author is passionate about the topic, believes in importance of issue or topic.
- **Communicated Effectively.** Author believes document was well writ-

ten, stated things clearly; did a good job communicating its points to its intended audiences.

- **Achieved Outcome.** Document enabled author to gain admission to graduate school, win scholarship, win contest/award, get job or internship offer, earn position, etc.
- **Got Attention.** Document got a lot of hits online, reached wide audiences, was successful on social media, had a lot of viewers; many people read document, document got positive feedback from internet audiences/readers, etc.
- **Process or Express.** Writing helped author work through experience or thought; writing successfully conveyed feelings or emotions about something.
- **Other.** Author expressed other reasons for being proud, e.g., learned a lot, learned from the process, enjoyed it, collaborative, put in a lot of effort, etc.

### *Failed and Why*

- **Rhetorical Considerations:**
  - *Audience Problems.* Document directed toward wrong audience, author misread audience.
  - *Couldn't Switch Gears.* Author wrote in too much of an "academic" style, didn't make document fit the situation.
- **"Just Bad."** Piece was badly written (no particular reason given why, necessarily, "just bad"); not well done.
- **Process and Time Problems:**
  - *Lack of Motivation, Time, or Effort.* Author didn't follow through, didn't have enough time, didn't feel obliged to do it, didn't put in enough effort.
  - *Process Problems.* Rushed process; did not proofread, did not seek input, did not draft or brainstorm thoroughly, did not take the necessary time.
- **No Failure.** Author did not write something non-academic that failed.
- **Evidence of Failure.** Student did not explain why document failed, but did offer evidence of failure.
  - *Intended Outcome Not Achieved.* Author did not win grant, did not get into school, did not get internship/job; document did not fundraise or advertise effectively.
  - *Lack of Attention, or Criticism.* Document had no hits, minimal readers, did not "catch on"; no one liked or shared it

on social media; author never sent it, never showed anyone; received criticism from audience.

### ***Learned from Non-Academic Writing***

- **Personal Learning or Growth:**
  - *Self-Reflection and Growth.* Learned about oneself; e.g., I learned about myself as a person, I reflected on who I am and what I value.
  - *Time and Life Management.* Learned how to write efficiently, how to get things done without external deadlines, life organization skills.
  - *Passion.* Helped writer discover and engage with personal passions.
- **Writing Process:**
  - *Process Strategies.* Gained abilities related to (or learned importance of) revising, editing; learned value of seeking help/advice, etc.
  - *Value of Practice.* Learned that practice makes you a better writer.
- **Audience Adaptation:**
  - *Audience.* Author learned how to shift styles for different audiences.
  - *Types of Writing Relevant for Career.* Learned about genres or types of writing that will help in professional world.
- **Writing Abilities:**
  - *Creativity.* Gained abilities related to voice or creative expression.
  - *Improved Communication/Writing Skills.* Writing or communication skills got better as a result of this project or experience; learned importance of clear communication.
- **Other.** Learned something that does not fit under any other code.

### ***Why Meaningful***

- **Communication or Connection.** Author made personal connection by communicating with others or connecting with family, friends, or groups.
- **Professional/Future Development or Success.** Helped author get internships, jobs, or admission into schools; helped author succeed in professional spaces; documents include job apps, admissions materials

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for grad schools, job letters, cover letters, emails for work purposes, professional materials, scholarship essay, etc.; focus is on personal/professional gain rather than others' gains.

- **Real World.** Document has external audience, real world goal/challenge, wide audience, and reached readers (**not** for application purposes); helped author gain real world experience, emphasis is often on goals for others; key factor is importance of real world audience.
- **Reflection, Processing, or Self-Expression.** Writing used to process emotions or situation, express experiences, reflect on self or situation.
- **Other.** Student states it is meaningful for reasons other than those listed in the other codes; could include that goal itself is laudable; organization, issue, cause, or topic matters to the student; outcomes could benefit others or society.
- **None.** Student goes out of their way to say they had no meaningful non-academic writing experiences.



# Toward a Rhetorical Model of Directed Self-Placement

Zhaozhe Wang

*Drawing on theories of rhetorical agency, the author argues that we rethink directed self-placement (DSP) as rhetorically distributed work that reflects collectively shaped agency within and beyond the immediate assessment ecology. To acknowledge DSP as a rhetorical act through ethical and responsible practices, the author proposes a rhetorical model of DSP that aims to fully recognize student agents' position, deliberation, negotiation, and appropriation in relation to the placement decisions, and to engage students in a "rhetorical rehearsal" before signing the placement contract.*

Below is part of a conversation I had with one of my first-year writing students during an individual meeting in fall 2017. He was a sophomore from mainland China studying economics at Purdue University, a large land-grant research university in the state of Indiana. I asked him what made him decide to sign up for ENGL 106-I (first-year writing course for international students at Purdue), to which he replied:

I thought a lot about it after I talked with my academic adviser. At first, I wanted to try ENGL 106 ("mainstream" first-year writing course at Purdue with mostly domestic enrollments), because I wanted to make some American friends and know more about how they write. I just wanted to be part of their culture. Although my TOEFL writing score barely made the cut score (26), I have read lots of English novels and been keeping a journal in English since the first day of high school. And I've been studying at Purdue for a year. So I feel if I work hard I could definitely make it. But my adviser told me in ENGL 106-I, the pace is slower and each of us would get more individual attention, I figured it might be easier than ENGL 106. And I asked my Chinese friends who took this class before, and they said it was an easy A. So I decided to sign up for ENGL 106-I. I will get 4 credits anyway.

Having scored 26 (out of 30) on TOEFL writing, he had the luxury to, through a directed self-placement system (DSP), place himself in either the mainstream FYW or one designed specifically for international students who are usually not native speakers of English. The conversation above revealed the internal debate my student underwent and the resources he mobilized to reach his final decision. He did end up completing the course exceptionally well with an A, and I could sense that he was happy with the

outcome. Yet my teacherly intuition prompted me to ask myself: Would he have achieved more and still earned an A in ENGL 106 (mainstream)? And more importantly, would he have felt happier if he had the chance to, in his words, “make some American friends and know more about how they write?”

Like hundreds of other established and well-maintained writing programs across North America, the writing program at Purdue adopted the now twenty-year-old DSP system that Daniel J. Royer and Roger Gilles introduced in 1998. However, there is an exception: international students with a TOEFL writing score below 26 are required to register for ENGL 106-I, as they are perceived to experience more challenges in a mainstream or accelerated section. It seems fair to claim, then, that DSP at Purdue is a “cousin” of Royer and Gilles’ original model, that is, it shares some genes with the “authentic” DSP yet grows its localized restrictions.

Yet local as it may seem, the question that baffled me echoes concerns regarding DSP shared within the broader professional community of WPA scholars and practitioners. There has been a consistent line of inquiry interrogating the validity of DSP since its inception (Gere, Aull, Green, and Porter; Jones; Nicolay; Toth and Aull). Others have questioned or investigated whether or not DSP actually works in diverse institutional contexts (Harrington; Reynolds). The responses are mixed. Just like any other ambitious attempt at fundamentally restructuring the current practices, DSP has invited both enthusiasm and criticism (Blakesley). Although statistical evidence points to DSP’s lack of strong validity (Gere, Aull, Green, and Porter), I tend to see the complication regarding current practices of DSP, however, as rhetorical in nature, that is, it is caused by lack of effective communication or by miscommunication between different stakeholders. As a consequence, in practices of DSP, there typically exists a tacit misalignment between the intended or claimed effects of a writing program’s DSP guidance and the actual rationale behind students’ self-placement decisions. In other words, although we expect and believe that students make their placement decisions based on the guidance we provide—one that is intended to familiarize students with course configurations and curricula and prompt students to critically reflect on their literacy experiences—our students, in reality, usually base their judgment on complex and even completely irrelevant reasons, for example, the ease of getting an A, the likability of the instructor, and the demographic makeup of the class, as suggested by ample anecdotal evidence. Further, their sources of information are not limited to the guidance we provide them with; rather, students have more street smarts than we think they do when it comes to leveraging their social networks to get advice (Saenkhum). Simply put, students may not be who we think they

are or do what we think they do in DSP practices. The question is, therefore, not exclusively about a priori validity. Rather, how do we justify our well-intentioned and well-orchestrated offering of placement guidance and reclaim the rhetorical power of the term “directed” or “informed” (Bedore and Rossen-Knill)? How do we share rhetorical agency and responsibility with students rather than grant them agency and hand over the responsibility? Ultimately, how do we rethink and re-articulate DSP in Kathleen Blake Yancey’s words, “as rhetorical act that is both humane and ethical?” (485).

In this essay, drawing on theories of rhetorical agency, I argue that we rethink DSP as rhetorically distributed work that reflects collectively shaped agency within and beyond the immediate assessment ecology. The “direction” in DSP is but one ecological resource that mediates and is appropriated by student agents to make placement decisions, while the “self” in DSP is but the student agent that ultimately signs the paperwork. The actual decision-making process is always grounded in distributed work that involves “dialectic interactions and collective negotiation” (Lewiecki-Wilson, Sommers, and Tassoni 166) between and among not only stakeholders but also people in expanded social networks. To do so, I propose a rhetorical model of DSP that aims to fully recognize student agent’s position, deliberation, negotiation, and appropriation in relation to the placement decision, and to engage the student in a “rhetorical rehearsal” before signing the placement contract.

I begin with a review of the development and assumptions of DSP in current scholarship while situating the discussion in theories of rhetorical agency. Then, I introduce the rhetorical model of DSP, describing what it entails and projecting its programmatic consequences. Lastly, I illustrate the rhetorical model of DSP with modified DSP procedures at Purdue to concretize and contextualize it with attention to administrative and material affordances and constraints.

#### DSP AND RHETORICAL AGENCY

Royer and Gilles designed and experimented with the prototype of DSP at Grand Valley State University twenty years ago in response to the pervasive frustration over the traditional placement tests for their questionable reliability and validity or artificiality and for the fact that they are materially costly to administrators and emotionally costly to students and instructors (“Directed”). Essentially, DSP frees instructors from reading students’ placement essays and make placement decisions for them by inviting students to make their own choices based on their self-awareness of their literacy history. The three benefits Royer and Gilles identify—DSP feels right,

DSP works, and DSP pleases everyone involved—may seem too intuitive to adequately justify any radical programmatic reconfiguration. Yet the innovative and timely reconceptualization of agency involved in academic placement practices found its appeal in the professional community at large, so much so that it turned into a moral imperative that inspired many writing programs to follow suit.

As this placement method evolves, it takes on a variety of forms and standards in diverse institutional and programmatic settings. Departing from Royer and Gilles' original fourteen statements that are intended to guide students' self-assessment, program directors across the country have made various attempts to modify, localize, and enhance the assessment instruments. Examples include the English Placement Questionnaire that Anne Balay and Karl Nelson try to validate, which generates a score and recommendation for the student, and the Writer's Profile introduced by Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, Jeff Sommers, and John Paul Tassoni, which prompts students to compile a portfolio of reflections on their literacy history for faculty to make placement recommendations. Although students are autonomous to different degrees during the decision-making process, they would take responsibility for the final decision, which has been the universal hallmark of DSP. In other words, regardless of the level of directive intervention a student receives, the fact that the student is the one who closes the deal defines DSP. In this sense, agency as traditionally understood as conscious intention or free will to cause changes is claimed to be given back to students.

The operative assumptions underlying DSP practices foreground this traditional notion of agency. For example, the fundamental assumption, as Ed White aptly puts, is that "students will be mature enough to choose the course that is right for them, if they have enough information and pressure to choose wisely" (vii). Agency here entails not only the free will to make decisions but also the competence to make the "right" decisions. It is premised upon the confidence of WPAs and instructors who are experienced and knowledgeable in the particular profession of teaching writing yet who know less about the students as individual agents than the students themselves. To build confidence, they need to create the right ecological condition that grounds students' decision making. This assumption implies that DSP has been primarily constructed upon a transactional model that involves exchanges of resources and signing contracts based on mutual trust. The writing program provides students with guidance and grants them the right to select the most suitable course in exchange for their informed decisions. The effect is to reduce the financial expenses on the program's side while pleasing both parties.

Righteous as applauding student's agentic action may sound, however, agency "does not exist in a vacuum but is exercised in a social world in which structure shapes the opportunities and resources available to individuals" (Cleaver 226). It is not something that is given to students, let alone being given back to students. Rather, agency is only manifested through dialogic interactions between students and academic advisers and writing teachers. As Marilyn Cooper notes, invoking Thomas Rickert, students confronted with placement decisions are already agents: "what we need is not a pedagogy of empowerment, but a pedagogy of responsibility" (Cooper 443). In this case, it is necessary to frame the notion of agency in rhetorical terms: "agency is a fundamental property of rhetoric: we can debate the discourse of an interlocutor through resort to argumentation" (Turnbull 207). As Carolyn R. Miller points out, agency is detached from the agent in poststructuralist or posthumanist theories as opposed to being treated as a possession. She goes on to suggest that we rethink agency "as the *kinetic energy* of rhetorical performance" that is "positioned exactly between the agent's capacity and the effect on an audience" (Miller 147). Agency is always in a state of becoming between the doing and what has been done and among co-doers rather than doers and do-ees.

The process of a student creating an individual DSP profile, negotiating desires and reservations with advisers, and eventually making the placement decision resembles a micro cultural ecology that involves multiple co-doers leveraging material and social resources and interacting with each other. Agency in this cultural ecology is dispersed, shared, and co-constructed rhetorical performance. The mutual goal of the intervention is, as Balay and Nelson succinctly put it, "to determine which level of writing class will be most helpful to any given student, ensuring he or she receives all the writing preparation needed, without wasting the student's time and money in courses that aren't personally necessary." Successfully achieving this goal is dependent upon not only an alignment between resources contributed from both parties—comprehensive course information from the writing program and literacy history from the student, but also a transparent and effective rhetorical negotiation—the student's justification of a certain self-placement decision. Rhetorical negotiation becomes especially critical when misalignment or discrepancies occur, for example, when students' decisions are made not based on their critical understanding of themselves and the curricula, but based on irrelevant factors or anecdotal evidence from people outside the cultural ecology. This is the moment when agency emerges as collectively shaped "*kinetic energy* of rhetorical performance" that engages the co-doers in an act of realignment (Miller 147).

The DSP models introduced or critiqued in the literature recognize the dispersed, shared, and co-constructed rhetorical agency to varying degrees. For example, Royer and Gilles' original DSP model has limited space for negotiation beyond declaring their placement choices ("Directed"). Moving toward the more dialectic end of the continuum, Lewiecki-Wilson, Sommers, and Tassoni's Writer's Profile placement program at Miami University experiments with a shifted power dynamic, namely, making placement decisions with students as opposed to doing so to or for students (173). Students need to, when preparing for the Writer's Profile, "become rhetors in the strong meaning of the term, engaging in a dialectical transaction with their audience (writing teachers), in a specific situation, for a specific purpose, in order to produce a practical action" (172). Pamela Bedore and Deborah F. Rossen-Knill's advocacy of a dialogic model of "informed self-placement (ISP)" at the University of Rochester takes the notion of shared responsibility a step further. They believe that giving students a choice should be "equivalent to students receiving the choice as it was intended" (Bedore and Rossen-Knill 56). In practice, the ISP adds to its essential procedures student-adviser meetings—"advisers do not simply accept a student's statement; they enter into constructive dialogue with the student so that the student may make an informed course selection" (Bedore and Rossen-Knill 59).

The evolution of the DSP model over the past twenty years shows a trajectory of a giant step forward toward a democratic model plus a few adjustments and adaptations. The initial enthusiasm about students' "full" autonomy has waned, and stakeholders in charge have begun to share more responsibility through various operative interventions. Yet despite the "dialogic turn" in the evolution of DSP programs, the notion of agency is still discursively constructed as a de facto property of each individual student, that is, agency is still seen as something granted to students, or so as it appears, as opposed to an emerging embodiment during interactions. This developmental trend is evidenced in Christie Toth and Laura Aull's analysis of the DSP instruments used in U.S. universities. Accompanying the dialogic turn is the realization and renewed notion of shared responsibility yet not agency. The consequences of this in practices are, for one, the DSP instruments usually created by writing programs to offer intervention, such as a detailed guidance brochure and a questionnaire that generates recommendations, may be theoretically sound but functionally dismissible. Namely, they may not be used by students in an informed and responsible way, sometimes not even in an institutionally intended way, since students may take their granted agency for granted. Second, writing programs and instructors may have students practice their shared responsibility by plac-

ing themselves in the right, or a “more right” class, and collect ample information about students through DSP and make responsible recommendations, yet they may not engage students in a rhetorical act of performing their emergent agency to consciously and proactively justify their placement decisions. I would like to note here, though, the potential consequences of a traditional view of agency in practices of DSP do not serve as counterarguments against the efficiency and efficacy of current models of DSP; they still feel right, work, and please everyone involved. However, not attending to the consequences may reinforce and perpetuate the view that “on the whole WPAs may have greatly underestimated the ethical and moral complexity of writing placement, even as we have worked so hard to show the value of ensuring that students take the course that will best help them become successful writers in the university and beyond” (Blakesley 10).

The ethical and moral complexity has been foregrounded in the unfolding discussion about the social justice implications of writing assessment and placement, which scholars call the “fourth wave” of writing assessment (Behm and Miller), “sociocultural models of validity” (Poe and Inoue), or the “ethical turn” in writing assessment (Kelly-Riley and Whithaus), particularly in the context of institutional diversity and internationalization. Some scholars argue that by granting students agency, DSP “has the potential to supplant placement practices that have long privileged White, middle-class students, fostering more equitable writing assessment that advances social justice goals” (Toth 2019, 2; see also Gomes; Inoue; Kenner; Ketai). Yet others express their reservations about shifting the responsibility completely onto students, since structurally disadvantaged students, such as multilingual writers, may “have been negatively informed by their histories with school-based assessment, histories often shaped by race, ethnicity, language background, class, gender, age, and/or (dis)ability” (Toth 2019, 2; see also Das Bender; Schendel and O’Neil; Toth, 2018). Thinking along the lines of the recent ethical concerns, we need to further interrogate the placement practices that sponsor the granting of agency and shifting of responsibility and take stock of the consequences of the rhetorical performance required. Therefore, I argue that we acknowledge DSP as a rhetorical act by building upon the current dialogic model and inventing a rhetorical model of DSP.

#### A RHETORICAL MODEL OF DSP

A rhetorical model of DSP reasserts the “responsive nature of [rhetorical] agency,” the type of agency that “supports deliberative democracy” (Cooper 422). It does not grant agency as a property; rather, it provides fair and ethi-

cal means for students to perform emerging rhetorical agency. It views the negotiation between traditional power-holders (programs, writing instructors, academic advisers) and students as multiple parties entering the same rhetorical ecology and agreeing to perform agency in a reciprocal and ethical manner. It is premised upon different rhetorical stances that multiple parties are inclined to take and defend. It also attends to social and material consequences of students' placement decisions by integrating a discourse of responsibility into negotiation.

In practice, writing programs would engage students in a rhetorical act of what I call "rhetorical rehearsal"—a trial performance of rhetorical positioning, deliberation, negotiation, and appropriation before making high stakes decisions (see figure 1). Specifically, students begin with rhetorical positioning, that is, articulating and justifying their philosophical, cultural, linguistic, and disciplinary position. This first step may seem too demanding for first-year students to accomplish effectively or meaningfully, yet regardless, it prepares students for higher-level engagement with the rhetorical defense of the rehearsal. Then, the processes of deliberation and negotiation prompt students to take an initial stance in terms of placement options based on their self-positioning and make a case for it through informed negotiation. Further, to substantiate the argument for their self-declared placement, students appropriate multiple types of resources—their own literacy history, DSP instructional packet, people in their immediate or distant network, etc.—and look for evidence to support their DSP decision. The four rhetorical components are interdependent and complementary to each other, as they together make up a coherent rhetorical rehearsal that helps both the student who's making the placement decision and the writing program who's executing the decision. However, it's worth noting that students may rarely rehearse the four rhetorical components in a linear fashion and may do so recursively. For example, a student may come with some knowledge of the course curricula and configurations obtained from people in their social network who have taken first-year writing. In this case, the student might make an intuitive decision first without careful self-positioning, then deliberates it through appropriation, and comes back to positioning themselves in relation to the decision. The student would also have the freedom to re-deliberate their decision if they find it challenging to claim coherence.

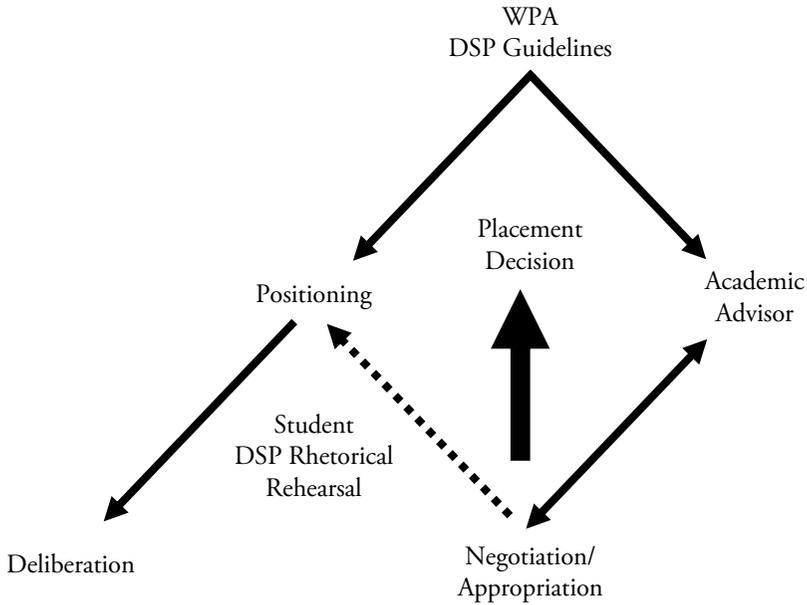


Figure 1. The rhetorical model of directed self-placement.

The rhetorical model of DSP seeks to provide a heuristic for students to responsibly practice their emergent rhetorical agency. Therefore, it requires more meaningful work from students. During a DSP rhetorical rehearsal session, the writing program will distribute to each student a digital packet that contains the instructions—usually an introduction to the program and curriculum, a typical DSP questionnaire collecting students’ basic information about students’ literacy history, a prompt that guides students to write a literacy history essay that complements the questionnaire, and a prompt that directs students to defend their placement decisions. The deliverables of a rhetorical rehearsal session include the completed literacy history questionnaire, a brief literacy history essay, and a justification essay. Students will present the deliverables in the form of a DSP profile to their trained academic advisers, who will then review their profiles and revise placement recommendations. It may seem that the responsibility is shifting from students to their academic advisers, who are more structurally privileged and powerful than novice students within the institution. However, I would like to contend that the responsibility is distributed across different stakeholders—students, writing program administrators, and academic advisers—within the rhetorical ecology where negotiations take place. The “twin fundamentals” of DSP, which are guidance and choice as Toth (2019) calls

them, remain intact. Negotiation, the third fundamental, is what distinguishes the rhetorical model of DSP.

Through rhetorical rehearsal, students essentially participate in an intensive training session in which they practice synthesizing sources of information and making a case for their placement decision that bears consequences. It creates its own cultural ecology where rhetorical agency emerges in communicative interactions and is shared between the rhetor (students) and audience (academic advisers and the writing program). This cultural ecology provides affordances and a certain level of institutional pressure for students to learn and grasp the distinctions between course curricula, enter meaningful and responsible negotiations with the administrative staff, justify and defend their stance, and ultimately make choices optimal for maximum educational gains. The writing program, on the other hand, may avert making placement decisions based on “arbitrary, class-marked, or simply irrelevant criteria” rather than “the real needs of each student” (Balay and Nelson), ensure that the intended or claimed effects of a writing program’s DSP guidance and the actual rationale behind students’ self-placement decisions are aligned through negotiation, and claim the shared agency that would more effectively justify the value of DSP in the face of institutional resistance.

#### AN INSTITUTIONAL EXAMPLE

Purdue has a total undergraduate enrollment of 32,672 as of fall 2018 (Purdue University Undergraduate Admissions). Each semester, around 2,000 students enroll in approximately 100 sections of first-year writing to fulfill the university’s writing requirement. These sections are divided into three placement options: ENGL 106, ENGL 106-I, or ENGL 108. The majority (about 50 sections) are ENGL 106, which is the mainstream 4-credit section. ENGL 106-I follows a curriculum designed specifically to meet international students’ needs, such as assistance with composing in their second or additional language—English—and with basic writing conventions in the U.S. academic context. I should note that this group of international undergraduate students accounts for 14% of the entire undergraduate student body, and the majority of them come from China, India, and South Korea (Purdue University, *International*). ENGL 106-I also bears 4 credit hours, and the writing program usually opens about a dozen sections each semester. ENGL 108 (accelerated first-year writing) is designed to challenge more advanced students through a faster-paced and more intensive curriculum. Since it bears 3 credit hours rather than 4, students spend less time in the classroom and more time doing independent work to meet slightly

higher expectations. The three different placement options use different syllabus approaches and assignments with different focuses; however, they all prepare students to meet the same program-wide learning outcomes, and all satisfy the university's writing requirement.

The writing program at Purdue adopted a directed self-placement system in 2003 to help students enroll in their appropriate sections. Before signing up, students may consult their academic advisers about specific course options, requirements, and expectations. Alternatively, they may also follow a set of guidelines to determine the appropriate placement. Despite Brian Huot's caution that standardized tests measure similar social and environmental factors more than they measure writing ability ("Towards" 167), the guidelines for international students foreground their standardized test scores and their literacy experiences in English, as the writing program still values the validity of the test scores in conveying information about students' language proficiency, given the particular institutional demographic makeup. As I noted previously, international students whose TOEFL writing score is below 26 are normally prevented from registering for ENGL 106, which suggests that a certain number of students are denied agency to make placement decisions because of their perceived language proficiency. Yet when students do have autonomy in choosing a section, they tend to be conservative and go below what instructors think they are capable of accomplishing, which leads to the misalignment evidenced in the opening anecdote. The misalignment could also be ascribed to the lack of meaningful and responsible negotiation between students and their advisers. The rhetorical model of DSP, therefore, can be productively localized and applied to the reconfiguration of the current DSP system at Purdue. Next, I will illustrate the rhetorical model of DSP with a description of a set of contextualized procedures. Please note although the instruments have been fully designed, they have not been piloted in the present writing program to obtain outcomes data.

### *Questionnaire*

As David Blakesley argues, "the placement of students in university composition courses is fundamentally an act of socialization" (9). In other words, placement is identity work. How do we provide just enough intervention so that students can identify groups that share not only similar literacy backgrounds but also similar goals? How do we make sure that our students identify groups where they can make new connections and receive new perspectives? To answer these questions, we need to work toward a clearer picture of who they are and with what they usually struggle. It is also cru-

cial to determine the relationship between students and the curriculum, and students' relative distance from the learning outcomes, as the validity of the placement procedure is tied to and affects curriculum (Moss and Huot). The first component of a rhetorical is, then, a DSP questionnaire that's intended to collect basic information on students' literacy history. The appendix presents a sample DSP questionnaire developed in the context of Purdue. The questionnaire would help both the student and their academic advisers to make an initial judgment about the relationship between the student and the curriculum. It would also provide valuable data for the writing program administrative staff to assess the program and improve the curriculum.

The questionnaire took into account the student demographic information and literacy history at my particular institution and the program course outcomes, as an alignment between the two would yield effective recommendations that help students identify the most appropriate social group. Christie Toth and Laura Aull's corpus investigation of thirty-four DSP questionnaires is also conducive to the development of our local instrument, as it offers an overview of the most frequently adopted and operationalized concepts, such as reading practices/abilities, genre knowledge/experiences, and research, etc. They also identified the most frequently measured dimensions, such as prior academic literacy experiences/practices, self-beliefs, and feeling/attitudes.

The questionnaire includes ten questions that cover the concepts of literacy history, genre awareness, rhetorical awareness, research, collaborative writing, multimodal and digital composing, attitude toward writing, and academic writing conventions. Each item is scored on a 3-point Likert-type scale (1 = low; 3 = high). An incoming student will take the questionnaire online a week prior to the beginning of orientation, and sum the scores after completing the questionnaire. The resulting score will point the student to one of the three placement options. However, the placement option that results from the questionnaire is merely a recommendation. The student is entitled to following or dismissing the recommendation.

### *Literacy History Essay*

Upon completing the questionnaire, which is intended to help students with self-positioning within the cultural ecology, students will then be prompted to reflect on their literacy history in more detail as a means of generating substance for their DSP argument. This process will take three days. The prompt reads as follows:

A prerequisite for placing yourself in the first-year writing course that will help you make the most gains is knowing yourself. This includes knowing your strengths and weaknesses as a writer, and knowing where you are coming from and where you are going. To help you know yourself better, we would invite you to write a 300-word essay describing your writer's experiences within the next three days. If you are not sure where to start, try framing your essay around these open-ended questions:

1. When did you start writing longer passages beyond sentences? What types of writing have you done? Academic papers? Diaries? Letters? Short stories? Narratives? Poems?
2. What types of writing are you good at? And what types of writing do you enjoy doing? Why?
3. How do you think your previous writing experiences would help you succeed in college first-year writing class?
4. What do you want to accomplish by taking first-year writing?

The process of composing this essay may engage students in active, deliberate, and critical self-assessment and presentation. First of all, students need to actively search for and select experiences with reading and writing that are relevant to the questions. This process reinforces students' emerging understanding of what qualities matter in composing in the context of a U.S. college. Further, the act of presenting the results to their academic adviser entails performing their lived experiences for an unfamiliar audience, which would activate the performers' existing rhetorical intuition. Mapped onto the rhetorical model of DSP, this stage still largely prioritizes students' self-positioning. Yet it also begins to call for students' rhetorical deliberation in the process of inventing the writer's profile, which contributes warrant that could be invoked when textually negotiating DSP decisions.

The literacy history essay, in addition, constitutes a powerful tool to battle against racialized assessment standards and practices that are said to reify and reinscribe whiteness and privilege (Behm and Miller). These essays invite students to perform their rhetorical differences (racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender, class) through reliving their histories on their own terms, create "a site of meaningful dialogue about students' lived experiences," and maintain other stakeholders' (administrators and advisers) sensibility to students' emerging and contingent differences involved in their decision-making (Wang 409).

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*Program and Curriculum Descriptions and Justification Essay*

The defining feature of a DSP rhetorical rehearsal is its inclusion of a justification essay, in which the student articulates the rationale for choosing a particular course and substantiates the claim with evidence from the literacy history essay and the program and curriculum descriptions. Through composing the justification essay, students rehearse their emerging rhetorical agency with their academic advisers and the writing program, rather than for them. They also assume a defensive position by yielding their right to making a “silent” placement decision behind the scene and turning their rationale from invisible to transparent. On the other hand, it functions as a formal invitation to negotiation—students invite their academic advisers to enter a responsible negotiation with them through well-orchestrated rhetorical performance so that the invitees confidently buy in to their placement, as opposed to advisers handing over the responsibility to students. If deemed unfit, a placement decision could be questioned, in which case the student would either write and submit an appeal or adhere to the adviser’s recommendation. This process will take another three days. Here’s the justification essay prompt that provides guidance:

You have completed the questionnaire and the literacy history essay, so we can safely assume that you have come to a better understanding of who you are as a writer and what writer’s quality we value at Purdue. Now, we would invite you to carefully read the Writing Program DSP guidelines you will find in the attachment, and write a 300-word essay stating your placement decision, articulating your rationale for making this decision, and providing evidence to support your claims. Here are some tips for providing stronger evidence and composing an effective justification essay:

1. Refer to the questionnaire and the literacy history essay as well as the DSP guidelines, look for matches between your previous literacy experiences and the expectations of your intended course option. Then make a claim as to how that particular experience has prepared you for meeting the expectation.
2. Be specific. With the 300-word limit, you only get to focus on a few key points. However, you should try to provide concrete evidence to support each point.
3. Think thoroughly and argue convincingly. Your purpose is to make an informed placement decision and demonstrate to your

academic adviser that you made the right decision and that you are responsible for it.

To prepare for this document, students will need to, first, be unambiguous about their placement option. It is often the case that a student feels like taking on some challenges by opting for a relatively more demanding course for them, for example, an international student with lower English language proficiency as indicated by standardized test scores choosing a regular ENGL 106, or a domestic student with less experience writing for multiple rhetorical situations choosing the accelerated ENGL 108. However, due to various reasons such as peer pressure, they end up staying in their “comfort zone.” Having to clearly state their placement decision in the justification essay may not incentivize them to take on more challenges while potentially compromising their course grade, but will provoke them into exercising their rhetorical agency more responsibly through this institutionally structured practice. Second, the justification essay itself serves as a site of negotiation where students showcase their rhetorical strategies prior to taking first-year writing and where writing program staff and faculty get to collect qualitative information about students’ general rhetorical preparedness. Third, academic advisers may practice rhetorical agency through textual negotiation when they see discrepancies between the students’ experiences and the course expectations. They will assume the responsibility to fairly and ethically read students’ DSP packet, and ensure that students make informed decisions rather than rushed ones out of irrelevant factors. All DSP packets will be submitted to students’ respective academic advisers by the first day of the orientation for advisers to review. Submitting the DSP packet marks the end of the rhetorical rehearsal.

There may be cases in which certain ill-prepared students attempt a more demanding course or, more likely, well-prepared students place themselves in a less demanding course just for the possibility of getting an “easy” A. When such cases arise during the screening of students’ DSP packets, academic advisers have the authority and responsibility to notify the students that their decisions are not approved while recommending a new placement option. Upon receiving such notifications, students may choose to submit an appeal letter, in which they confirm their decision, and provide new evidence to support it. A DSP appeals committee formed by experienced writing program staff will help the academic advisers to make the final decision based on students’ appeal letters. Alternatively, students may choose to modify their placement decision based on their advisers’ recommendations. In sum, through self-positioning, deliberation, negotiation, appropriation, and post-rehearsal appeal, students are empowered and guided to perform

their rhetorical agency with other stakeholders within the cultural ecology of DSP. Their decisions are ultimately their own, yet the process of reaching them involves shared responsibility and distributed agency.

Implementing a rhetorical model of DSP also calls for meaningful collaboration and coordination between writing programs and academic advisers. By “meaningful,” I’m referring to the type of collaboration and coordination that would ultimately optimize students’ educational experiences through well-articulated distribution of labor and transparent sharing of expertise between and among multiple stakeholders. For example, as the stakeholder that oversees and administers the DSP program and has the expertise and authority to collect and interpret data, the writing program at the university should be held accountable for providing various forms of training and consultation programs to academic advisers who are directly in contact with students. Academic advisers should be encouraged to share first-hand qualitative data and students’ feedback with the writing program, which would be instrumental in sustaining and updating the DSP program.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the innate limitations of the institutional example. To begin with, as I mentioned above, the fully developed DSP instruments have yet to be piloted to yield meaningful data that support the projected outcomes. Various types of empirical evidence need to be collected to evaluate the rhetorical model of DSP, for example, placement outcomes, students’ DSP profile, course grades, semester-end survey to be taken by students and course instructors, and interviews with selected key informants including students, instructors, writing program administrators, and academic advisers. Further, the instruments and procedures demonstrated were constructed within the institutional context of Purdue with its particular institutional culture, demographic makeup, curriculum setup, and program configuration taken into consideration. Other programs attempting to localize the model are encouraged to modify or completely revamp the instruments that acknowledge the rhetorically distributed work, create ethical rhetorical engagement, and empower students to make meaningful placement choices.

## CONCLUSION

As Emily Isaacs and Sean Molloy lament, “Despite considerable lip service to Ernest Boyer’s concept of the scholarship of application, for writing studies faculty and researchers, it remains difficult to persuade senior administrators and decision makers to value our scholarly expertise for on-campus application, particularly when the issue is seen as potentially

politically complicated or costly—as is the case with placement” (519). For senior administrators to buy in to a less costly DSP program is relatively less complicated; as Royer and Gilles note, it pleases administrators as it saves time and resources that would otherwise be spent on organizing placement exams or justifying the placement results (“Directed”). Yet to convince administrators to buy in to the implementation of a rhetorical model of DSP, admittedly, may not be as straightforward. The change may likely encounter the same old institutional resistance Blakesley has discussed extensively: for one, placement is “an expression of institutional ideology with deep roots in cultural presumptions about education” (15); and second, “the magnitude of the change and the number of people needed to make it work” (16). Shared responsibility and distributed agency may sound politically enticing as these concepts take us a step further toward the ideal of democratic education. However, by mandating the procedure of a rhetorical rehearsal where students are required to justify their position and are held accountable for possible re-placement, the institution is reclaiming a certain level of control. Nonetheless, I would argue that this redistribution of power, if done in accordance with the local ideological and material condition, would make a healthy adjustment pragmatically. Our claim that the traditional DSP model benefits students is predicated upon the assumption that students know themselves better than we do and are thus more likely to make the right or more right placement decision. Yet today’s Higher Ed institutions are almost universally characterized by diverse and complex demographic makeup. As a consequence, our assumption no longer holds true. We become skeptical about students’ choices that are motivated and mediated by their different and even sometimes conflicting desires, values, and beliefs. This is because although students’ decisions are rhetorical in nature, the process of rhetorical decision-making is behind the scene. By foregrounding rhetorical negotiation and holding students accountable for their decisions, the rhetorical model of DSP assembles all stakeholders—the WPA, students, academic advisers—as well as their distinct knowledge and expertise: the WPA knows what curriculum provides appropriate scaffolding but does not necessarily know who the students are and what they want; students know what they want but do not necessarily know what the writing program expects of them; academic advisers know what role writing likely plays in students’ careers but do not necessarily know what curriculum maximizes the potential. The outcome, then, is a rhetorically rehearsed and negotiated collective placement decision that all stakeholders are responsible for, and ultimately benefits everyone involved.

Institutional resistance may also come from questions regarding the validity of the DSP model. Huot lays out the principles for a new theory

and practice of writing assessment in an attempt to reclaim the expertise of writing assessment as a rhetoric and composition scholar. The principles, which include “site-based,” “locally controlled,” “context-sensitive,” “rhetorically based,” and “accessible” (*Re)articulating* 105), foreground the notion of localization against the backdrop of the pursuit of valid and reliable standardized tests. Following the same line of inquiry, Patricia Lynne proposes to replace the terms of “reliability” and “validity” with “meaningfulness” and “ethics” to “highlight the context of assessment and the relationships among those involved in the assessment” (117). Despite these scholars’ efforts to reclaim the expertise of writing assessment, however, administrators at large institutions, especially those with a neoliberal orientation that prioritizes the pursuit of “excellence” (Readings), may frown upon claims about non-measurable validity, since it would be rather difficult to track progress or make comparisons. Making a case for the rhetorical model of DSP may even encounter more resistance, given that a modified yet still mainstream DSP has been shown to not predict student success as well as simple standardized test scores do in a local context (Balay and Nelson). Not surprisingly, the notion of “student success” is operationalized as students’ first-year writing grades. I wonder, however, if the only criterion for a “valid” placement method is that it accurately places students in a classroom where they can get grades of a B or higher. To make a strong case for meaningful and ethical placement practices in response to the reductive view of the validity of DSP as only represented by scores and grades, we do, nonetheless, need to collect ample data at the programmatic level to justify the changes we propose (Blakesley). The DSP instruments designed based on the rhetorical model well fulfill this purpose in that they collect not only valuable quantitative and qualitative data that would inform us of students’ self-perceptions and literacy histories, but also data that would indicate meaningful and ethical negotiations between and among different stakeholders.

The most compelling reason for institutional inertia, however, may be its higher consumption of resources—financial cost, time, and labor. The institution needs to be willing to support programmatic collaboration between the writing program and academic advisers in the disciplines. The writing program needs to provide sufficient training for academic advisers and ongoing consultation. The academic advisers, too, need to invest considerable time and labor. Given the current political economy of higher education, no doubt, it’s a difficult argument to make. In response, we as WPA scholars and practitioners need to not only crowdsource expertise, experiences, and best practices with respect to economically and efficiently materializing the rhetorical model of DSP in the age of austerity, for exam-

ple, building an online management system and interface to distribute and store materials and maintain communications between different parties, but also, and more importantly, tie the argument for a rhetorical model of DSP into the bigger conversation regarding the role of composition in the university, for example, contributing to educational equity and scaffolding students' academic socialization.

In a word, situating the work within an institutional environment that values accurate, right, and affordable placement at the same time, no doubt, requires more of the writing program's efforts. Regardless, I believe it is valuable work. DSP is no panacea, as Royer and Gilles cautioned. And the rhetorical model of DSP is not intended to simplify the placement method; rather, it's meant to complicate it, and it would give rise to new problems. Yet White provides us with the reassurance that "the new problems are those that postsecondary education should be meeting anyway: helping students take responsibility for their own learning, replacing reductive placement testing with sound counseling, developing clear curricular guidelines and outcomes, and becoming less paternal and more, shall we say, avuncular" (viii).

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#### APPENDIX: INTRODUCTORY COMPOSITION DIRECTED SELF-PLACEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

These questions are intended to aid you in selecting a first-year writing course that meets your needs. Please bear in mind that the results only provide you with a recommendation. Based on the recommendation, you

will need to negotiate your placement decision with your academic adviser. The questions apply to both the U.S. context and contexts outside the U.S.; however, we assume any variety of English as the main language for these literacy activities.

TOEFL total score/writing score (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

1. I read books, newspapers, or magazines
 

On a daily basis	3
On a monthly basis	2
Rarely or never	1
  
2. English has been the medium of instruction
 

For all of my high school courses	3
For less than half of my high school courses	2
For none of my high school courses	1
  
3. I keep a journal or write blog post
 

On a regular basis for a long period of time	3
On a regular basis for a short period of time OR, occasionally for a long period of time	2
Occasionally or never	1
  
4. In high school, I wrote different types of writing for different teachers
 

Regularly	3
Sometimes	2
Rarely or never	1
  
5. When I write, I think about what my readers expect and what effects my writing would create
 

Always	3
Sometimes	2
Rarely or never	1
  
6. I have completed writing tasks for which I needed to base my ideas on others' works or on evidence I needed to look for by myself
 

Often	3
Occasionally	2
Never	1
  
7. I have worked with my peers on a single piece of document for a specific purpose
 

More than twice	3
Once or twice	2
Never	1
  
8. I am proficient at using computers and other digital tools to write
 

Very proficient	3
Somewhat proficient	2
Not proficient	1

9. I like reading and writing in general
- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Very                                | 3 |
| Not so much, but I want to practice | 2 |
| I don't like reading and writing    | 1 |
10. I'm familiar with basic U.S. academic writing conventions
- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| Very       | 3 |
| Somewhat   | 2 |
| Not really | 1 |

Your total score: \_\_\_\_\_

Recommendations

- If you score between 26 and 30 (including 26), you may consider registering for ENGL 108;
- If you score between 16 and 25 (including 16 and 25), you may consider registering for ENGL 106;
- If you score between 10 and 15 (including 10 and 15), and English is your second or additional language, you may consider registering for ENGL 106-I.



# The Affiliate as Mentoring Network: The Lasting Work of the Carolinas WPA

Meg Morgan, Marsha Lee Baker, Wendy Sharer,  
and Tracy Ann Morse

*The national CWPA has made impressive strides to advance mentoring opportunities for its membership, yet, as surveys of the membership have indicated, there are still notable gaps in these opportunities. Drawing on our experiences as founders (Meg and Marsha Lee) and leaders (all four of us) of the Carolinas WPA affiliate (established in 2003), we explore the critical role that regional WPA affiliates have to play in addressing mentoring gaps. We suggest that affiliates can enable broad individual and institutional mentoring work within a geographic region, can empower members by allowing for frequent communication and face-to-face contact, and can provide needed opportunities for multi-directional, non-hierarchical mentoring relationships.*

A report on the “CWPA Mentoring Project and Survey” in the fall/winter 2010 issue of *WPA* revealed a gap in the mentoring support that the national organization provides for WPAs working outside of Research I institutions. In response, the assistant editors of *WPA* solicited stories from WPAs at such institutions with the goal of learning “what the council could do better to train future WPAs, mentor new WPAs, and support the work of experienced WPAs in diverse institutional settings” (Ostergaard, Giberson, and Nugent 148). Several of the pieces received in response were published as “A Symposium on Mentoring the Work of WPAs,” in the fall/winter 2011 issue of the journal. Commenting on the narratives and the “overwhelming response” to their call for contributions, the symposium editors note that “new administrators . . . need mentors who will help them make productive sense of the institutional and individual contexts in which they do their work” (149). At the same time, the editors note, there are mentoring needs that appear to cross the diverse situations in which new WPAs work. For example, new administrators “need someone to listen to their stories of success, frustration, and failure” (149). Mentorship of new WPAs, in other words, should include plentiful opportunities for listening, affirmation, encouragement, and commiseration.

We suggest that regional, affiliate WPA organizations can foster this kind of mentoring because they can provide multiple, accessible, welcoming opportunities for new WPAs at all types of institutions to share stories and ask questions in a supportive environment. At the same time, affiliate

organizations can function as venues for experienced WPAs to garner support for their efforts to adapt and apply emerging disciplinary knowledge to changing institutional contexts. Furthermore, the regional affiliate has the ability to offer quick access to and rapid circulation of locally relevant writing program information and to allow for more targeted, strategic information-sharing in efforts to persuade institutional leaders to maintain or even elevate support for writing programs. In short, the regional affiliate is uniquely positioned to allow programs to mentor other programs: assistance and guidance become collective and collaborative, with stakeholders from various writing programs supporting one another.

We articulate more fully below the mentoring potential of a regional affiliate, interspersed with narrative accounts of our experiences as members and leaders of the Carolinas Writing Program Administrators (CarWPA). Our intent is not to offer a self-indulgent encomium; rather, we hope these narrative accounts serve as evidence of how, within affiliate WPA groups, diverse kinds of mentoring can happen, crossing institutional types (private liberal arts institutions, community colleges, public research-intensive universities, public teaching-focused institutions, etc.), community settings (urban, suburban, rural, online), career statuses (tenured faculty, tenure-track faculty, non-tenure-track faculty, graduate students), and administrative generations (well-established WPAs in longstanding programs, newly tenured WPAs in developing programs, untenured faculty in incipient programs, and graduate students new to the profession). The four of us recount the desire for individual and inter-institutional mentoring that led to the birth of CarWPA and that has established it as a dynamic organization, responsive to the mentoring needs of succeeding generations of WPAs in the Carolinas. We conclude by commenting on mentoring challenges that CarWPA faces today, with the hope that other affiliates might direct proactive attention to these areas and that we might hear suggestions from other WPA affiliates for addressing these challenges. We have included our email addresses in our author biographies for this purpose.

#### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “MENTORING”?

We begin by situating our CarWPA experiences within recent conversations about mentoring in composition and rhetoric. We see the CarWPA organization as a model of what Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Michelle F. Eble call “mentoring networks” (284). The “relationships in a network model” of mentoring, Gaillet and Eble explain, “are multi-faceted, multi-directional, and mutually beneficial” (287). They “disrupt hierarchies, are accessible as needs arise, and emphasize reciprocity” (283). Similarly, Cheryl Glenn

and Roxanne Mountford, drawing on the work of Black Feminist Alexis Gumbs, encourage those in composition and rhetoric to think of mentoring as “a site where we influence at the same time that we are being influenced within a dynamic system that is constantly shifting” (188). Elizabeth Keller likewise suggests that, in both classroom and professional contexts, “investment mentoring” might be a particularly useful replacement for traditional top-down versions of mentoring: “Investment mentoring . . . delineates how rhetoric and writing can shift away from master/apprentice models of mentoring and learning, and instead privilege mentoring as rhetorical work that builds productive relationships” (8). In this model of mentoring, the goal is not the individual advancement and success of mentees but rather the establishment of strong relationships that enable all involved to be more effective.

We have also found scholarship that addresses mentoring in professional organizations and workplaces to be helpful in writing this article, in part because so much of what WPAs are expected to do overlaps with what workplace administrators are expected to do. The concept of the “mentoring episode” is particularly helpful for understanding the nature and value of mentoring that happens through CarWPA. Kathy E. Kram and Belle Rose Ragins explain in *The Handbook of Mentoring at Work: Theory, Research, and Practice* that “mentoring episodes” are “growth-fostering interactions . . . that involve increased zest, empowered action, self-esteem, new knowledge, and a desire for more connection” (659). Kram and Ragins situate these time-limited mentoring interactions at the foundation of productive, long-term mentoring. Also useful in thinking about the unique mentoring value of the affiliate WPA is the emphasis Kram and Ragins place on personalities and compassion in mentoring relationships. Research in workplace mentoring suggests that “relational competencies,” such as emotional intelligence, empathy, and compassion, may be highly important in determining the success of mentoring relationships, particularly in terms of promoting a mentee’s personal, in addition to professional, development (659). CarWPA meetings offer an environment where these “relational competencies” can be developed. Perhaps because of traditionally limited models of mentoring, or perhaps because of a general skepticism and/or mistrust in academia of personality and emotions as factors in success or failure, personality (mis)alignment and emotional capability do not receive much attention in mentoring literature. At the same time, mentoring relationships in the academy often jettisoned such goals, focusing instead on pairing a “more experienced” faculty member with a “less experienced” faculty member in the same program with the instrumental goal of the mentee’s promotion. With the exception of very large programs, this model leaves precious

little room for choice or adjustments in mentoring relationships should a pair not “mesh.” In the sections that follow, we highlight how the structural framework and regular interaction of an affiliate WPA can provide mentees with multiple opportunities to meet possible mentors in settings that increase the likelihood of personality-emotional compatibility and that allow relational competencies of empathy and compassion to develop.

#### THE REGIONAL AFFILIATE AS AFFECTIVE MENTORING NETWORK

This article originated several years ago in the form of short narrative histories written by Meg and Marsha Lee, both of whom realized that the lessons learned and benefits accrued during the first decade of CarWPA were at risk as founding members moved on or retired. Wendy and Tracy also saw the value in these narrative histories and agreed to continue documenting the challenges and successes of the organization. For all four of us, a desire to pursue this project likewise arose from a deep appreciation of the support and compassion we have come to know through CarWPA. The narrative details we include throughout the rest of this article, in addition to supporting our claim about the professional mentoring functions of regional affiliates, are intended to highlight the personal impact the organization has had on us.

As noted above, engagement, compassion, and connection are central components of productive mentoring. Ensuring that WPAs—past, present, and future—feel welcome to the CarWPA affiliate has taken priority since the early days of the organization. The goal is not just to have greater numbers, but also to have greater engagement and impact. For these reasons, CarWPA founding members focused on breaking from traditional “academic conference” models of meeting, drawing instead on principles of hospitality. Marsha Lee notes,

*As I review archives of early board meetings and conferences from over fifteen years ago, I recognize kinship as a guiding principle in CarWPA’s development. The Executive Board immediately focused on face-to-face access. We wanted to physically gather people on a regular basis so that we would literally experience ourselves as colleagues over time, develop kinship, and support individual and collaborative short- and long-term WPA endeavors. From the outset, our goal has been to be hospitable, particularly by “generating a friendly and safe environment,” one of several principles of the hospitality industry (Chon and Maier 5). We did not want to add to the pressure and anxiety typically experienced by WPAs*

*to attend and present at one more conference, to keep in constant contact with another professional network, or to perceive affiliation with CarWPA as another rung on the professional ladder.*

The location of these annual retreat-conferences also contributes to the mentoring potential of the group. We meet in late September, as leaves are starting to turn, at Wildacres Retreat Center, located atop a mountain in western North Carolina. The natural beauty, combined with removal from the stress of daily WPA work life, promotes an atmosphere of openness, trust, and camaraderie among mentors and mentees, as we recall from our experiences at Wildacres:

***Marsba Lee:*** *The breathtaking mountainous view and isolated setting are, pardon the cliché, priceless. To this day, the gathering includes a bonfire, time for hiking in the surrounding mountains, and nightly social gatherings with games. Wildacres allows groups to bring snacks and adult beverages, which we set up in the canteen for our own happy hour.*

***Wendy:*** *One of the most energizing and sustaining aspects of CarWPA is the “retreatness” of our gatherings, particularly our annual fall gathering. Hearing cautionary tales surrounded by the natural calming beauty of the mountains has been invaluable. This is a far cry from what often happens at a big national meeting in a hotel or convention center complex with countless concurrent sessions. I always leave Wildacres feeling that I have a strong network of supportive and friendly mentors that I can contact anytime for advice, information, or moral support.*

***Tracy:*** *It is important to us to maintain a retreat quality to our fall conference. We have done well to protect part of the time on our agenda to be unplanned retreat time—some attendees hike, read, write, visit, or nap during this time. Recently, we invited participants to propose retreat activities from yoga to Appalachian plant identification walks.*

Unlike many larger academic conferences, CarWPA gatherings also focus on involving all who attend in all sessions, as Tracy, who served as president of the CarWPA until 2017, explains,

*Even at our multi-day fall meeting, the leadership of the organization does what it can to enable the engagement of faculty with different institutional demands. Rather than requiring formal presentations—with the attendant work of scholarly research, bibliography, PowerPoint or handout development, preparation for Q&A, etc.—participation and a spot on the official program typically involves sharing informal position statements, assignment overviews, rubrics, summaries of program structures and components, teaching ideas, or research projects in various*

*stages. We often frame these presentations as discussion starters or even pitches to get feedback on, emphasizing the collegiality and camaraderie of our affiliate.*

Individuals or groups identified as “presenters” often guide writing sessions, sometimes including sharing and responding. Additionally, CarWPA gatherings regularly provide time for writing and sharing of writing because leaders of the organization recognize that it is close to a universal truth, especially in tenure-track positions, that WPAs struggle to balance writing, teaching, and administration. Occasionally, then, our meetings do lead to publications and contribute to individual professional advancement in the way that “traditional” mentoring might. CarWPA gatherings have, however, always been configured to foster the kinds of relationships that, Diana Ashe and Elizabeth Ervin suggest, are essential to successful, long-term, non-hierarchical mentoring. Ashe and Ervin affirm the value of traditional formal mentoring arrangements, such as departmental or university programs that pair junior scholars with tenured faculty, but they also suggest that such models take “a short-sighted view of mentoring by conforming to the familiar dyadic relationship of mentor and mentee but paying little attention to the networks of affiliation that support long-term commitment to the academic enterprise” (90). For “networks of affiliation” to be fully effective sites of mentoring, Ashe and Ervin continue, they should be characterized by friendships that “encourage openness and risk-taking, [and that] seek to counter the ‘hyper-individualism’ of exclusive relationships” (90). Ashe and Ervin further explain that networks of affiliation “can be actively promoted . . . by positioning likeable people in ‘affective hubs’ that allow them to foster collaborations among people who might not otherwise interact” (91). In their chapter, Ashe and Ervin apply the concept of the “affective hub,” which is important to mentoring frameworks in the field of business (see Casciaro and Lobo), to mentoring situations in rhetoric and composition, and we believe this concept is also beneficial when thinking about mentoring scenarios in writing program administration. CarWPA, through the informal, inviting, low-pressure retreat environment of its annual fall meeting, functions as such an “affective hub,” serving as an inviting “safe place” for mentees to ask questions and discover contexts that are essential to their, and their programs’, success. As Wendy explains,

*As a new WPA who wanted to minimize risks but didn’t know how to identify those risks, particularly within a complex state university system, I headed to Wildacres for the first time with eagerness, but also a bit of fear because I knew that I’d be interacting closely with WPAs from all over the Carolinas. I didn’t want to look stupid. From the first eve-*

*ning—which involved a variety of icebreakers followed by games and adult refreshments in the “canteen”—I knew I had nothing to fear from this group in this setting. I was lucky enough to room with and learn from Nancy Penrose, an experienced WPA at NC State at the time. I also spent a lot of time eating M&Ms and talking with Meg who, in addition to bringing the M&Ms to the mountains every year, had developed a good understanding of the UNC System and the complexities and nuances of WPA work within it. There was no way I could have learned what I did about the state educational system or the state political climate had I not experienced that welcoming atmosphere and the open conversations that it fostered during our few days on top of the mountain.*

Holding conversations about potentially politically charged topics is easier when surrounded by natural beauty rather than institutional furniture, over-patterned carpeting, and the stark lighting of campus buildings or conference hotels. CarWPA provides an aspect of mentoring that D. R. Dunbar and R. T. Kinnersley call “psychosocial development,” which involves “helping develop the mentee’s self-confidence and sense of competence and providing acceptance and confirmation, counseling, role modeling, and friendship” (19).

The inviting environment of CarWPA also comes through the bi-directional (or multi-directional) mentoring it enables. In contrast to what Gaillet and Eble describe as “the traditional top-down hierarchical form of mentoring,” (283) in which younger professionals typically take an “apprenticeship” role, CarWPA gatherings regularly involve scenarios in which the “seasoned” WPAs learn from the “newbies.” Marsha Lee conveys her appreciation for the intergenerational and bidirectional mentoring work of CarWPA:

*When we met in 1999, Meg was a seasoned academic and experienced leader with substantial knowledge of the UNC System. I, on the other hand, was in the second year of a tenure-track position, for which I had been hired as the English Department’s first ever rhetoric-composition specialist. Meg’s invitation to meet at CCCC brought with it a rush of joy and relief. I yearned for the company of rhet-comp folks who knew my disciplinary focus and who could advise and contextualize my WPA work. I could not think of any reason not to want to be a part of a regional organization of WPAs. Along the way, I have been educated by colleagues younger and savvier than me; I have been sustained by the wisest veterans I could ever hope to know. I have introduced lecturers and new tenure-track colleagues from my university to our regional affiliate because, as grand as national is, local is likewise irreplaceable.*

These kinds of experiences suggest that cross-institutional and cross-generational regional affiliates such as CarWPA can help us follow Amy Stolley's valuable advice that we should "expand our notion of mentoring to create space for the questions more experienced WPAs might have of early career WPAs: 'What made you choose this? What can your experiences teach me about newer generations of WPAs? What can I learn about my own experience from listening to you?'" (24).

Through their capacity for fostering camaraderie and engagement, regional affiliates can also potentially expand the boundaries of our discipline by inviting WPAs in a greater variety of locations and institutions to become part of our community. As Glenn and Mountford point out, "In real terms, a 'discipline' is made up of relationships among individuals who dwell together for a time and then go forth to do work inspired, in part, by their mentors and friends" (183–84). A mentoring network in a regional organization enables more people, from a greater variety of institutional contexts, to "dwell" with others as mentors and to engage in the affective work of mentoring that inspires trust and friendship.

#### THE REGIONAL AFFILIATE AS ACCESSIBLE MENTORING NETWORK

The success of efforts to include more WPAs within the mentoring network, of course, depends on the ability of WPAs to attend events. Wildacres was selected as a mentoring site for CarWPA for several reasons, not the least of which were cost and drivability. As Marsha Lee explains, the decision included careful consideration of how people would get to the retreat and, once there, how they could afford to stay:

*To open our hub to a broad swath of participants, we had to consider location, location, location. Aware of the relatively low salaries and limited professional development resources for many WPAs in the Carolinas, we searched for a conference site that was accessible in time, money, and miles, and we found Wildacres Retreat near Little Switzerland in North Carolina. Wildacres is amazingly affordable: at the time of this writing in 2018 costs are \$220 for two nights, five meals, plus gas. Travel times range from 2 to 7 hours, averaging about 3 to 4 hours for participants. The Board intentionally timed the meeting early in the semester to avoid the academic calendar's sharp dive into the "I can't do one more thing" mode. Most attendees stay the entire time, although it is not uncommon for some to come late or leave early, which allows greater attendance.*

Cost and accessibility are particularly important to early-career WPAs, the group that most needs mentoring. As Wendy reflects,

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*When I first attended a CarWPA fall retreat at Wildacres in 2004, I was an Assistant Professor, just starting the second year of an administrative post. I honestly do not remember how I heard about the group: I just remember thinking that, although it was a bit of a drive from my institution in eastern NC, the cost seemed very reasonable, particularly considering that it included lodging and meals.*

A regional affiliate is beneficial for mentoring not only because it can bring a wider swath of people together through affordable (in terms of money and time) events but also because it can host such events more frequently than a large, national organization. Marsha Lee explains how the CarWPA responded quickly, efficiently, and economically to a need for more mentoring opportunities by creating a second annual gathering, a one-day “MinM”:

*In 2007–08, the CarWPA Board responded to the growing sense that we needed something more than one annual conference to sustain the mission of CarWPA. A year was too long to go for professional and personal relationships to develop apace. Frankly, we enjoyed each other’s company and the energy we took back to our home campuses. We also realized that the growing abundance of timely themes, issues, and initiatives were more than a single annual event could give adequate attention. So, we created Meeting in the Middle (MinM), a day-long meeting in February “in the middle” of our September-to-September stretch and at a more “middle” location among North and South Carolina campuses, Charlotte, so that most people could attend without an overnight stay. The one-day schedule, as well as a \$40 registration fee that includes lunch, makes it more affordable and convenient—less travel and fewer days away from on-campus responsibilities—for some WPAs to attend for their first time. Additionally, a BOGO option encouraged returning members to invite someone new.*

A regional affiliate, with gatherings that are geographically closer and less expensive than national conventions, helps WPAs working at smaller institutions or schools with a limited number of writing specialists to participate in mentoring. Specialists from other areas of English Studies can provide a certain level of mentoring for their writing studies colleagues, but, as Joyce Olewski Inman notes, support from such well-intentioned colleagues “is not the same as receiving mentoring from other compositionists who understand more fully the needs of a comprehensive writing program” (151). The national CWPA has provided wonderful resources and support for WPAs at large, research-focused institutions. Faculty at other types of institutions, however, have reported feeling that “CWPA seems overly

focused on the concerns of large research programs to the detriment of smaller institutions” (Walcher et al. 105). The most current available membership data, from the 2007 WPA Member Survey, suggests that these perceptions are grounded in reality: 58% of members reported affiliation with a doctorate-granting institution, while only 12% and 5% reported affiliation with a four-year college or a two-year college, respectively (Charlton and Rose 120). The organization has made efforts to address these concerns on the national level, but affiliate organizations provide a promising means for further engaging diverse types of institutions, as Wendy suggests,

*I've come to recognize valuable contributions that CarWPA makes to mentoring WPAs in the region, most notably to WPAs at smaller, teaching-focused schools. I am reminded of a story I heard at the first or second Wildacres meeting that I attended: an untenured WPA at a small, private liberal arts college relayed the story of "Uncle Steve"—not really her uncle, but that was his nickname on campus—the man all administrators went to see whenever they needed office supplies. While requesting supplies at my large state institution involved completing multiple forms and securing countless approvals from unknown individuals, her requests were very much dependent on one individual relationship: obviously, she needed very different advice/mentoring than I did when it came to navigating the channels of resource procurement. Fortunately, there were other WPAs from small schools at Wildacres (and in the larger CarWPA group) to help.*

Even today, many smaller two and four-year institutions do not have a specialist in composition and rhetoric; instead, someone from the English department—typically someone who has been trained in literary studies or creative writing—serves as the WPA. If these institutions hire someone with a background in rhetoric and composition to serve as the WPA, those specialists can find themselves as Darci Thoune did when she took a tenure-track WPA position at such an institution. As she explains, she was “under-prepared for what it meant to work in a department that had no established guidelines, expectations, or history of a WPA” (156). The national CWPA conference and workshops, Thoune notes, provided invaluable resources for approaching some of the challenges she faced, but the opportunity to use those resources comes only once a year, and participation is dependent upon often scarce funding. Thoune’s inclusion of the following details about her first national CWPA conference is telling: “Fortunately, the conference was in Minneapolis that year, which was close enough for me to drive . . . and I had a colleague living in Minneapolis who was willing to let me sleep in her spare room for a week” (157). Had Thoune been working

in the Carolinas, she would have had the opportunities of Wildacres and MinM to find the mentoring she needed.

Membership figures from CarWPA suggest that an affiliate group can support faculty from types of institutions that have not traditionally been well represented at the national level. As of 2014, individuals affiliated with four-year colleges (no graduate programs) accounted for 21% of membership, with individuals from doctoral-granting institutions accounting for 31% (as compared to 12% and 58%, respectively, in the national CWPA membership statistics from 2007). Furthermore, our executive board includes officers from two-year schools; four-year, BA-only schools; MA-granting schools; and PhD-granting institutions. The organization's ability to reach out to different types of institutions results from our awareness of and willingness to discuss our differences while also looking to identify common, pressing themes across those differences. As Tracy explains,

*Because we are diverse in academic positions and institutional homes, we often encounter different challenges and successes. Our two meetings a year as well as our listerv and social media sites are places we share these experiences. It is through these shared experiences that our Executive Board derives the themes for our events. CarWPA does not shy away from the controversial or political. Some of our most recent fall themes have been "Labor of Learning: WPA Concerns for Working Conditions" with John Warner, "Taking Action in the Carolinas" with Michelle LaFrance leading us to reflect on "A Poetics of Resilience, Refueling, and Resistance," and in 2017 "Communities and Contact Zones: Doing Justice" with Emma Howes and Christian Smith leading us with their keynote "Contemplating Race: Mindfulness as Antiracist Pedagogy."*

Despite CarWPA's success in involving people from smaller BA-granting institutions, we still struggle to involve those at two-year colleges. As we explain in the last section of the article, this is an area we hope to improve upon in the coming years.

#### THE REGIONAL AFFILIATE AS RESPONSIVE MENTORING NETWORK

Another way that an affiliate can help WPAs "make productive sense of the institutional and individual contexts in which they do their work" is by providing a network within which data and information can be compiled and accessed quickly (Ostergaard et al. 149). Through this network, WPAs who participate in regional affiliates can mentor one another at the same time that their programs empower each other. Given that many institutions compete with other regional institutions for students, faculty, and other resources, data from other regional institutions about critical program attri-

butes—such as curricula, assessment, course loads, class sizes, and salaries for non-tenure track faculty—can support arguments for improvement in a way that data from more distant institutions cannot. In the case of campuses within a state university system, data and experts from other state university campuses can bolster arguments for change, drawing rhetorical weight from external validation and intrastate competition for students and faculty. As Wendy notes, this rhetorical power can contribute to significant programmatic change:

*When I first started attending CarWPA gatherings in 2004, I hoped to use this group for leverage in making arguments for change on my campus. We've all likely had the experience where we make a well-supported case for something at our home institutions, but it is not until "outsider" evidence is brought to bear that people really listen. Being able to say "at UNC Charlotte they do X, Y, and Z" adds outsider-credibility to programmatic arguments. Years after that first meeting, when I took on a larger role as a WPA, I invited several WPAs that I'd met through CarWPA to my campus to lead sessions on curricular redesign in support of a major curricular overhaul that I was spearheading. The power of the external experts that I'd come to know through CarWPA helped move that curricular overhaul through to fruition.*

Similarly, if WPAs across a region and/or a university system have a structure in place to collaboratively respond to policy decisions by the university system administration, that united force can have more impact than responses from individual campuses. As Tracy explains,

*Through relationships formed at CarWPA events, many of us freely contact one another when we hear about something that may affect all UNC campuses. A few years ago, one WPA got word through her upper administration that ETS had been hired by the UNC system to create a standardized test to assess student writing at all UNC schools. About the same time, Wendy and I were notified by our institutional research office that there would be information sessions about this plan and that they wanted us to attend. Through our networked conversations with CarWPA members, many of us were able to attend an information session in Raleigh and through concerted efforts, ask questions of the ETS representatives, demonstrating our knowledge of writing assessment to the upper administration sitting in the room. At this point, a system-wide standard test has not been instituted. But once any of us hears rumbling of such a thing again, we will be ready to act together in response.*

The regional affiliate provides a structure for collaborative advocacy. While constituent campuses of a state university system are all hypotheti-

cally connected through that system, the diversity and complexity of institutional structures, in conjunction with geographical distances in many states, mean that a WPA is likely to face substantial challenges in communicating with other schools within the system. Communication networks, as Meg explains, are critical to mentoring, strategic action, and policy and curricular development, but they require a group of committed individuals to create them:

*The University of North Carolina higher education system includes 17 university campuses. They spread, like the state of North Carolina, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Appalachian Mountains. Five of the 17 are HBCUs; the smallest university has an enrollment of about 1,800 students; the largest almost 34,000. So, you can imagine the challenges faculty and staff face trying to communicate with colleagues across state universities. One of my first contacts with another North Carolina WPA was with Don Bushman at UNC Wilmington. This happened around 1997 or 1998 when I wanted to know if and how UNC Wilmington exempted incoming students from first-year composition because a student who had transferred from Wilmington to Charlotte wanted credit for composition. I spoke with Don, got an answer, and realized how important it was to have such a connection.*

*I poked around the UNC websites, made some contacts, and in March 1999 at the CWPA breakfast at CCCC, Marsha Lee Baker from Western Carolina University and I met and discussed the possibilities of pulling together the WPAs from all the state universities in North Carolina. We shared our experiences as directors and knew that getting together would be an exciting and productive experience. Marsha Lee was a new WPA and although our schools were very different, we had similar challenges. It was magical—someone actually knew my concerns and even shared a few. We stayed in touch over the next few weeks and put together a list of WPAs by checking websites and making phone calls. I remember making many phone calls, trying to contact people, trying to talk them into coming to a meeting. By the next month, we had scheduled a meeting that would take place on September 24 of the same year. Most of us had never met before, we had no idea of each other's programmatic practices and policies, but we were ready to throw ourselves into the fray.*

Once communication channels exist, an affiliate can provide for the sharing and pooling of resources on pressing issues—including placement, GTA training, and working conditions—for WPAs in the region. Subsequently, a secretary and a web coordinator (two positions that the CarWPA

now has on its Executive Board) can create a digital record that can be updated and shared.

A critical part of the mentoring provided through a regional affiliate is access to important information, including details that new WPAs may not realize they need until they are asked to provide them ASAP. Meg explains the priority CarWPA founders placed on gathering, preserving, and circulating information:

*Marsha Lee took great notes at our first meeting, and so we have an archive of the discussion and people's concerns. We discussed the use of part-time faculty and lectureships and compared salaries at different institutions for both positions. We discussed training for new lecturers and also for non-writing faculty who taught writing-intensive courses; we discussed program assessment, a hot topic in light of emerging national accreditation requirements. The meeting was a huge success; we talked a lot, shared information, got to know our peers, and by the end of the month had distributed contact information for writing program directors from twelve UNC campuses (out of fourteen at the time) and one private university (Duke).*

Once organized and in communication, the affiliate can establish mechanisms for gathering more information from a broader swath of institutions. The process of soliciting WPAs at other institutions also raises awareness of the organization, expanding the scope, reach, and information-capacity of the mentoring network. With expansion comes the opportunity for WPAs at different career stages and in varying institutional contexts to explore new ideas, as Meg elaborates below:

*At the first meeting, we also decided to participate in a survey about employment practices at UNC campuses administered by Erika Lindemann. Ten institutions participated in the survey, further evidence that we were beginning to come together and see the value of statewide information sharing. I believe we realized that knowing what other schools were doing, what policies were enacted, and how others were coping with issues current at the time would make our own decisions more informed and intelligent. Bolstered by the success of our first meeting and of the survey participation, we held our second statewide meeting the following September. Topics included the increasing dependence on part-time faculty for composition courses, and, from one of our rural campuses, the difficulty of hiring part-time faculty and a possible solution to that problem. We came to understand that our meetings taught us things: our professional friends were also our teachers and mentors who we could email*

*or call with day-to-day questions and who would help us solve WPA problems. By the end of this meeting, we had a working list of about two-dozen North Carolina WPAs.*

CarWPA gatherings create spaces to explore, commiserate, and collaborate—through large and small-group discussion, reflection, and writing—on common issues faced by WPAs. These issues have included the following: “Grants: Finding and Applying for Funding Opportunities” (Wildacres, 2011); “Tapping Institutional Priorities” (Wildacres, 2012); “Communities and Contact Zones: Doing Justice” (Wildacres, 2017); “Writing Courses Online: Dare We Go There?” (MinM, 2009); “Supporting ESL Writers and Showcasing Writing Programs” (MinM, 2010); “The Scholarship of Teaching” (MinM, 2011); “Working Conditions and Writing Instruction” (MinM, 2014); and “Advocacy in Classrooms, Programs, Research, and Beyond” (MinM, 2017).

It is also worth noting that informational resources developed within regional affiliates can be expanded through the national CWPA, a mutually beneficial partnership that Meg sought out fairly quickly:

*In March 2002, after several successful meetings and a very clear indication that WPAs in North Carolina were willing to make a commitment to meeting and discussing programmatic issues, Marsha Lee and I wrote a letter to Chris Anson, then President of the CWPA, to explore applying for affiliate status. Chris was extremely supportive without creating conflict of interest as a WPA at North Carolina State University. Moreover, the CWPA was offering a one-time grant of \$500 as start-up funds to new affiliates, a substantial incentive. In 2003, the CarWPA was officially made an affiliate of the national CWPA.*

## CONCLUSION: ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND MENTORING FORWARD

We have all benefited significantly from our participation in the CarWPA. Certain aspects of mentoring, however, continue to challenge us: (1) involving WPAs from two-year institutions, and (2) appealing to WPAs from South Carolina. Perhaps because the organization started among a group of North Carolina WPAs at four-year institutions, the group has tended to have more representation from four-year schools in North Carolina. Partly in response to these two membership gaps, the CarWPA Board now includes four “at-large” members, two from NC and two from SC. The duties of these “at-large” members specifically pertain to outreach, with the goal of expanding the diversity of institutions represented in the organization, as we explain on our website:

*At-Large positions on the board serve multiple purposes. One is to ensure representation from both states (NC/SC). Another is to conduct outreach within the representative state to recruit other members from NC/SC and community colleges. At-Large positions also help to organize both the MinM and the annual fall retreat. ("Board Member Responsibilities")*

We have also emphasized outreach by directly addressing the challenges we face: we focused the 2018 MinM on the topic "2020 Vision: Building Connections and Coalitions across Campuses." We hope these efforts will lead to greater representation from across the Carolinas and, in particular, from two-year schools, although the heavy course load and often transitory nature of employment at community colleges may make joining the organization and participating in even a one-day event very difficult. We remain hopeful, and we have seen some results, including record attendance at the 2019 MinM and a President-Elect from South Carolina.

Despite ongoing challenges, we are all incredibly thankful for CarWPA, and we are happy to report that other regions have heard of our affiliate and sought out additional information about it. Partly in response to the interest expressed, the four of us presented the CarWPA history at the 2015 national CWPA convention. That presentation and this article are themselves tangible recognitions of the mentoring traditions that we have established in CarWPA. As we share with colleagues from outside the Carolinas what our affiliate does, we find ourselves in a position to mentor others who are seeking to organize affiliates. As Tracy explains,

*I have had several emails and conversations including sharing our Constitution and our process to establish ourselves as a not for profit organization with writing instructors and WPAs on their way to becoming an affiliate of CWPA. We are proud of our not for profit status that happened in 2017—it reflects the work that began a few Presidents and Executive Boards ago. While we have yet to experience all the possible benefits from our new status, we are proud of the sustaining work we have accomplished as the CarWPA. We use the resources in our states to serve our needs and it has worked well for us. We are happy to share strategies with others.*

Our experiences in the CarWPA suggest that many more WPAs might be mentored through regional affiliates, and there is currently much room for growth: as of 2020, there are only 12 regional affiliates ("CWPA Affiliate Organizations"). This is not to say that a strong national organization is not valuable—indeed, the national conversation enabled via venues such as this journal are proof of that value. Yet, localized groups can allow for more frequent and more immediate non-hierarchical mentoring. We hope

that the experiences relayed here convince readers that expanding the number and reach of affiliate WPA organizations is a particularly promising endeavor. We invite you to explore our affiliate by visiting our website at [www.carolinaswpa.org](http://www.carolinaswpa.org) or by contacting us personally.

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# A Broader View: How Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition Prepare their Graduate Students to Teach Composition

Amy Cicchino

*This article presents a survey of WPAs serving at 38 United States doctoral degree programs in rhetoric and composition and seeks to describe their graduate teaching assistant (GTA) writing pedagogy education (WPE). Given the impact that GTAs have on undergraduate student retention, how we prepare them as teachers of writing has real implications for the students that they teach. The preparation that GTAs receive in their graduate programs in particular serves as an important foundation for their professionalization as emerging faculty. The responses collected in this study shed light onto the demographics, timing, goals, components, and practices used nationally to prepare GTAs to teach undergraduate composition.*

## INTRODUCTION

An American Federation of Teachers report (2009) found that GTAs (graduate teaching assistants) represent 41% of the instructional staff across public, doctoral-granting institutions in the United States (p. 10). GTAs teach a significant number of undergraduate students—especially undergraduates in composition courses. Studies of undergraduate retention (Davidson & Muse, 1994; Levitz et al., 1999; Reason, 2009) have identified the first two years of undergraduate education as the time when students are most likely to drop out (Murtaugh et al., 1999, p. 356). Powell (2009) noted that the composition course is one of the few spaces where the pedagogy necessary in retaining at-risk students can be enacted (p. 669). Holmes and Busser (2017) similarly identified composition instructors as important in university retention given that first-year composition instructors “are likely the one teacher students will see before stopping out, dropping out, or transferring” (p. 40–41). The connection between student retention and composition suggests that how we prepare the individuals who teach these composition courses is significant. At doctoral-granting institutions, GTAs teach many of these classes as instructors of record (not merely as assistants, as their title implies). GTAs frequently take on the full responsibilities of the composition classroom: delivering curricula, planning lessons, leading class activities, and responding to and evaluating student work.

The importance of GTA preparation is further complicated by the reality that GTAs in writing programs, especially those outside of rhetoric and composition, will graduate and enter their own teaching positions with fewer opportunities for additional preparation post-graduation (Beth Brunk-Chavez, 2010). Consequently, the teaching preparation that GTAs receive in their doctoral-granting program has impacts that reach beyond the immediacy of a GTA's graduate teaching career, having long-term ramifications as GTAs leave their graduate programs and take on administrative or teaching positions at institutions across the country. Despite its importance to higher education and periodic interest expressed in the scholarly literature, we have surprisingly few national data on GTA preparation in writing studies across the United States.

Estrem and Reid (2012) characterized writing pedagogy education (WPE) as the "complex, ongoing, evolving process in which instructors of writing are encouraged—through multiple venues and in multiple contexts—to teach, reflect, innovate, and theorize about the practice of teaching writing in college" (p. 224). Working from this definition, in the present study I seek to describe how 38 institutions across the United States with doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition designed and delivered GTA WPE in 2017. The data presented here can illustrate to WPAs administering or designing WPE programs what occurs at these institutions, how the identified practices relate to contemporary theory on GTA education, and what they might consider adding to their GTA WPE.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

GTA preparation is a perennial issue in writing program administration and has been consistently revisited since its beginning in the early 1900s (Greenough, 1913; Denney, 1918; Alden, 1913; Gott, 1929). A 1952 survey conducted by Harold Allen showed graduate student preparation in the mid-20th century was generally nonexistent with programs handling GTAs shared textbooks and a few rare others implementing observations and weekly practicum meetings. In response to this lack of preparation for GTAs and teachers of writing more generally, in 1982 the CCCC Task Force on the Preparation of Teachers of Writing crafted the "Position Statement on the Preparation and Professional Development of Teachers of Writing." The task force suggested all current and prospective teachers of writing should have opportunities to "develop knowledge of theory and skill in the teaching of writing" and "to work with individual learners and groups of learners, so that these teachers can apply what they are learning from the theories and practice of writing" (CCCC, 1982, p. 449).

Fourteen years later, Catherine Latterell (1996a) surveyed 36 programs to identify how they were preparing GTAs in English. She found the most common form of preparation (32 programs) was a preservice fall orientation, with 23 programs also offering a single course (most commonly a practicum). The practicum materials that Latterell reviewed dealt “with the immediate questions and concerns new GTAs have regarding their current teaching” (1996a, p. 36) and included discussion, response activities, journaling, observation, collaboration, and material review with “very minimal reading” (1996b, p. 18). Latterell’s findings echo many of the practices identified in GTA preparation scholarship of the early 1900s—practices that this study suggests still persist.

In the 2000s, WPA scholarship expanded our knowledge of GTA preparation, addressing labor (Marshall, 2004; Fitts & Lalicker, 2004), resistance to theory (Mano, 2000; Ebest, 2005; Restaino, 2012), peer mentorship (Weiser, 2005; Wallis & Jankens, 2017), computer-based and online pedagogical preparation (Duffelmeyer, 2005; Bourelle, 2016), writing teacher professionalization (Lamonica, 2011; Beason et al., 2010), writing center tutoring (Janetta et al., 2007), and the role of theory and local context in GTA preparation program design (Blakemore, 1998; Yancey, 2005; Stancliff & Goggin, 2007; Beason et al., 2010; Reid et al., 2012). However, because a majority of the studies and reports describe the local practices of a single institution, few can give insight into how GTAs are prepared more largely. In 2015, CCCC revisited their 1982 position statement, creating the “CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing,” which is more specific in its advocacy for GTA preparation and conditions as well as more detailed in providing principles and guidelines for WPE. Despite this robust body of scholarship, we do not have evidence that the way we prepare GTAs to teach writing has changed in the decades we have been studying GTA preparation, with the last larger scale study (Latterell 1996a) showing a misalignment among nationally articulated guidelines, scholarship, and implementation.

Literature reflects that there are many approaches to GTA preparation. As a discipline, we currently lack significant evidence that suggests one approach to GTA preparation is a better practice than another. We have not collected the empirical evidence needed to prove that our current practices in GTA preparation actually prepare GTAs to teach writing more effectively. It is my hope that by identifying what GTA preparation practices are, we can begin to move towards the development of evidence-based best practices.

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## METHODS

The survey data reported in this article was part of a larger mixed-methods study of GTA preparation across institutions with doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition. The survey was limited to doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition because (1) doctoral programs emphasize graduate education, which offers a unique space for disciplinary formation and new faculty development and (2) it is reasonable to assume institutions with doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition have faculty specializing in rhetoric and composition, and, thus, their WPE is more likely to be informed by recent scholarship. The goal of this study is to describe what these WPE programs look like—their population demographics, goals, timing, duration, components, and practices. Importantly, WPE is a term used by the researcher/author (see Estrem and Reid, 2012), which might not have been chosen by the individual respondents, who were asked to describe their GTA preparation programs. The survey was designed under the assumption that GTA preparation could exist across years and have “multiple venues and in multiple contexts” (p. 224).

Jim Ridolfo’s RhetMap identified 91 institutions with doctoral-granting programs in rhetoric and composition. I contacted the WPAs of these 91 institutions using email addresses listed on their programs’ websites. Forty-one percent of that population ( $n = 38$ ) responded. Although the sample is not large enough to generalize across the larger population of doctoral-granting institutions with absolute certainty, these data do provide a nascent glimpse into institutional WPE across this subpopulation and offer a foundation on which to build a more comprehensive survey that affords not only a deeper description but also creates a more quantifiably reliable representation of how institutions with doctoral degrees in rhetoric and composition prepare their GTAs to teach undergraduate writing.

The survey included open and closed questions. Closed questions asked respondents to designate where their GTA WPE was housed, the number of individuals participating, the percentage of participants who were GTAs, the disciplinary backgrounds of those participating, the classes WPE prepared GTAs to teach, how individuals were chosen to participate in WPE, when WPE occurred, and what components and practices made up WPE. Closed questions frequently offered an “other” option, allowing respondents to type in answers. Two open-response questions asked respondents to identify their goals for GTA preparation and what they would change about their preparation programs if given more resources. Each open response was broken into phrases and inductively coded. In total, 130 phrases were coded (from multiple readings by two coders). Ten categories

emerged: composition theory; practices tied to teaching writing; rhetorical theory; local program, curriculum, or policies; curriculum/course development; development of teacherly ethos/identity; development of student-writers; mentorship; time/timing; and technology.

It is important to note that there are limitations to this study's findings. Namely, the sample size for this study ( $n = 38$ ) is small, and the study was purposely limited to institutions with doctoral degrees in rhetoric and composition—of which only 41% are represented. Because this population size (91) is small, information that was potentially identifiable was not collected from the WPAs so this study cannot speak to WPA identity within these programs. For all these reasons, the results should be read carefully and not generalized to a larger context. Although limited by a small subset, data developed through this study align to what many WPAs have personally identified: that while writing studies might engage in more GTA preparation than other disciplines, it continues to be designed and delivered *ad hoc* and is highly affected by local contexts.

## REPORTING DATA

### *Program Demographics*

Importantly, the WPE characteristics reported in these data are undoubtedly affected by the selection criteria: institutions with doctoral degrees in rhetoric and composition. Almost all of the survey's respondents characterized their GTA WPE programs as small with the GTA population being primarily from English (generally literature, creative writing, and rhetoric and composition). Just over half of respondents (21 institutions) had 20 or fewer individuals participating in WPE at one time. Twenty-nine percent (11) had 20 to 40 individuals participating. Ten percent (4) had 40 to 60 individuals participating. Two institutions had more than 60 individuals participating; these programs referenced mass orientation meetings and pre-semester workshops or practica that included the full composition staff.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents (28) reported that only GTAs participated in WPE while 21% (8) had populations mostly consisting of GTAs. Two institutions (5%) had populations comprising at least half GTAs ( $n = 38$ ). Besides GTAs, some programs were inclusive of contingent or part-time faculty, incoming instructors, post-docs, and visiting professors (the survey did not ask about forms of faculty development beyond GTA WPE). Of the GTAs participating in WPE, almost all included PhDs (95%), with MAs (82%), and MFAs (55%) also represented. Two institutions did not identify PhDs as participants because (as they later clarified)

PhDs had likely experienced WPE at their MA institutions, and, therefore, were not required to engage with WPE as doctoral students.

Thirty-two institutions (87%) housed WPE within English departments, four institutions housed WPE within rhetoric and composition departments, and two institutions housed WPE within independent writing programs. Unsurprisingly, the disciplinary backgrounds of GTAs were most often English with literature being most widely represented (81% or 31 institutions), followed by rhetoric and composition (73% or 28), and creative writing (63% or 24). Thirty-two percent of institutions (12) had GTAs from outside of English, including GTAs in education, theatre, communications, anthropology, information studies, Middle Eastern studies, Spanish and Portuguese, philosophy, history, sociology, and linguistics.

### *WPE Timing and Length*

When it comes to the timing and delivery of GTA WPE, a considerable number of institutions reported ending WPE before the end of year one, as figure 1 illustrates. Twenty-three institutions offer a summer preservice component. Fifteen institutions offer WPE components in the fall semester of a GTA's first year and 13 institutions offer WPE components in the spring semester of a GTA's first year ( $n = 38$ ). Some of these components were continuing (e.g., a summer preservice followed by a fall practicum course) while others were discrete. Eight respondents noted that GTAs with prior experience in postsecondary teaching could opt out of GTA WPE altogether. In total, 76% of institutions (29) characterized their GTA WPE programs as ending before GTAs enter their second year with only nine institutions continuing WPE throughout GTAs' graduate careers.

### *WPE's Purpose and Goals*

WPAs identified that WPE most commonly prepares GTAs to teach FYC. Nineteen institutions connected WPE to one FYC course while 20 institutions connected WPE to two FYC courses. Five institutions linked WPE to preparing GTAs to teach advanced composition courses, including intermediate composition and 200-level composition courses.

When asked to explain their goals for WPE, 38 respondents produced a total of 113 phrases, which were inductively coded across ten categories. The goal most-often articulated by WPAs related to learning the local curriculum and policies: this includes teaching GTAs a standard curriculum, procedures for participating in programmatic assessment, or institutional policies and resources (e.g., Title IX policies). Twenty-three WPAs mentioned this purpose across 29 phrases, which means that 25% of all coded

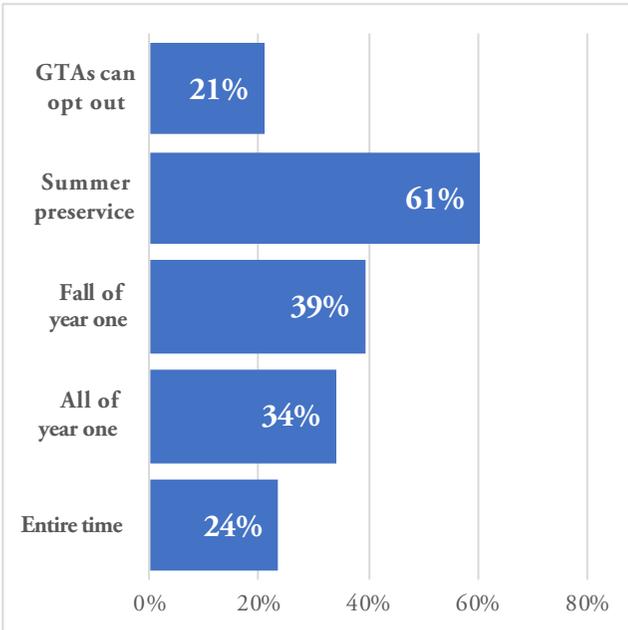


Figure 1. Reported timing of WPE at responding institutions ( $n = 38$ ).

responses to this question mentioned local curriculum and policies. Example responses coded as local curriculum and policies state WPE helps GTAs “understand the outcomes of FYC,” “prepare . . . to teach our common syllabus,” gain “familiarity with the curriculum” and develop “familiarity with program outcomes, assignments and assignment sequences.”

The next goal most frequently mentioned was general teaching preparation. Unlike instances that were coded as writing-related pedagogy, these responses focused on preparing GTAs to manage the nuts-and-bolts of a classroom, including “classroom management,” “general pedagogical prep,” “problem-solving in the classroom,” and “practical teaching methods.” Other codes were present in the goals reported for WPE including composition theory (15 instances or 13%), teacherly ethos/identity (15 instances or 13%), practices tied to the teaching of writing (13 instances or 11%), curriculum/course development (8 instances or 7%), development of student-writers (4 instances or 3%), rhetorical theory (4 instances or 3%), mentorship (3 instances or 3%), and technology (2 instances or 1%).

### *WPE Components*

When asked what components—or elements of WPE such as practica, course work, orientations, workshops, mentoring programs—comprised

their GTA WPE, every WPA identified multiple components. On average, institutions identified 6.7 components in their GTA WPE programs, with the greatest number being 11 and the fewest being 3. The survey's length did not offer space for WPAs to explain why they used each of these components, which is a limitation of these data. The distribution of these components is visualized in figure 2. As figure 2 indicates, the most popular components were observations (used by 35 institutions), followed by workshops (31), coursework (27), and resources like teachers guides (27). When asked to describe the coursework being offered, respondents connected coursework to pedagogy (25 institutions), classroom practices (24), composition theory (17), and rhetorical theory (12). Teaching practica were present in 26 institutions. Twenty-five institutions reported using mentorship with 25 institutions listing peer mentorship and 25 institutions listing faculty mentorship. The less frequently used components were symposia (7 institutions), online training/modules (8), and tutoring assignments in a center/studio (8). One respondent added that GTAs participated on advisory committees as part of WPE.

### *WPE Practices*

Within these components, a variety of practices were reported. In completing the survey, WPAs identified the practices used in their GTA WPE but then also how important each practice was, with responses ranging from "very important," "somewhat important," "of little importance," "not at all important," to "not used." Respondents also had the ability to add practices. The range of practices used in GTA WPE is presented in table 1. The most valued practices according to these reported data included designing classroom activities, response activities, reflection activities, syllabus design, and classroom assignment design. Table 1 also identifies several practices that WPAs found to be generally valuable—and what I mean by this is that no respondent using the practice characterized it as "of no importance." These include responding to composition theory, participating in peer response groups, presenting to peers, participating in reflection activities, conferencing, observing more experienced teachers in the program, designing syllabi, designing assignments, designing classroom activities, participating in library orientation, being introduced to classroom/instructional technologies, and participating in response activities in which GTAs assess/respond to samples of student work.

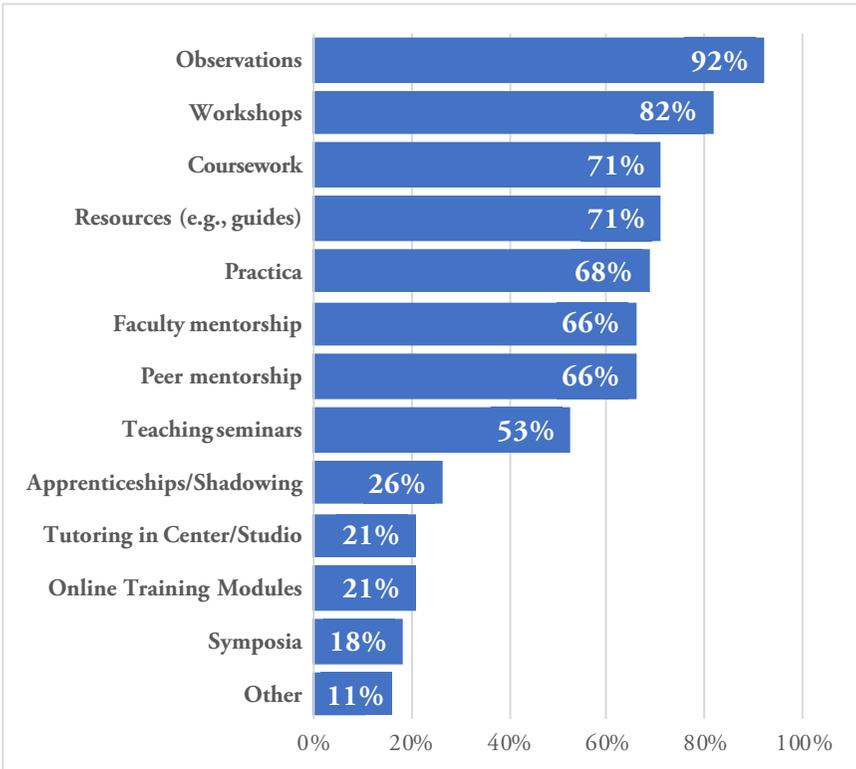


Figure 2. Portion of respondents reporting WPE components ( $n = 38$ ).

Equally interesting are the practices that are almost uniformly not used. Of the 23 practices listed, the practice least used in GTA WPE was writing a literary analysis with only 25% using this practice, 14% identifying it as “not at all important,” and 11% identifying writing a literary analysis as “somewhat important”—no respondent ranked the practice above “somewhat important.” Another infrequently used practice was “tutoring observations or sessions in a reading/writing/learning center or studio,” with 34% using this practice. Of the 13 institutions that did use this practice, however, just over half (7) regarded it as “very important.” Since I did not collect regional identifiers, it is unclear as to why tutoring experience was regarded in such a polarized way. For programs that include tutoring as a part of their GTA assignments for whatever reason, tutoring preparation can become a relevant aspect to WPE.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1

Portion of respondents reporting WPE practices, by assessed importance (1 = very important; 2 = somewhat important; 3 = of little importance; 4 = not at all important; and NU = not used).

Practice ( <i>n</i> = 38)	%				
	1	2	3	4	NU
Designing classroom activities	92	8	0	0	0
Response activities in which GTAs assess/respond to samples of student work	84	13	3	0	0
Reflection activities	71	26	3	0	0
Designing syllabi	68	24	3	0	5
Designing assignments	66	24	5	0	5
Observing more experienced teachers within the program	63	24	3	0	11
Responding to composition theory	58	37	3	0	3
Peer response groups	58	32	3	0	8
Conferencing	50	45	3	0	3
Presenting to peers	47	32	18	0	3
Multimodal composing	45	26	11	11	8
Writing a rhetorical analysis	42	32	8	3	16
Portfolio construction	42	13	18	3	24
Introduction to classroom/instructional technologies	34	55	11	0	0
Library orientation	32	45	13	0	11
Guest speakers	24	39	18	8	11
Role-playing/narrative exercises	21	42	18	3	16
Plagiarism/cheating activities	18	61	16	3	3
Journaling	18	47	16	8	11
Tutoring observations or sessions in a center or studio	18	3	11	3	66
Responding to education theory	16	47	24	3	11
Participation in programmatic assessment including exit/entrance exam assessment	0	26	21	11	29
Writing a literary analysis <sup>a</sup>	0	0	11	14	75

<sup>a</sup> Percentages reflect the number of respondents answering this question (36).

### *Limited Resources*

Lastly, WPAs were asked what they would change about their GTA WPE if they were given additional resources. Sixteen respondents acknowledged issues related to time. These time-related responses took three forms: (1) issues of timing; (2) a lack of time; and, (3) a list of additional topics which could be covered with more time. The first set of these responses included

making changes to the timing of the WPE program and/or its components, including comments such as:

- “I wish we could figure out a way for them to take the pedagogy course before they start teaching . . .”
- “I would like to experiment with teaching the GTA training course in its entirety before GTAs enter the classroom . . .”
- “We would have graduate students take the course before teaching rather than concurrently”

Additionally, comments related to time requested expanding the overall time devoted to WPE or components of WPE:

- “I would have a two-week orientation in the summer, rather than one week”
- “New graduate instructors need more than a week of preparation . . . I would like to have a full month in the summer or a full semester in the fall to work with them before they begin teaching”
- “we would increase the length of orientation so it was less intense and more complete”

Finally, respondents also mentioned the different practices and components they could include with more time, such as:

- “I would build in more opportunities for GTA-focused professional development . . .”
- “I’d do more work with them around fy writers’ experiences with and attitudes towards writing, the challenges they face in the transition to college; how the GAs can manage their workload effectively”
- “I’d love to have students work as writing center tutors for year [one] before putting them in the classroom”

Outside of time, three respondents mentioned they could do more with an increase in money with intentions to add more staff, pay GTAs to attend professional development, and fund peer mentors. Two respondents wanted GTAs to take coursework in rhetoric and composition identifying disciplinary knowledge as a constraint. Lastly, two respondents answered that they would not change anything about their WPE.

### *Summarizing Responses*

In all, these data describe GTA WPE programs as being small, often housed in English departments, and mostly made up by GTAs from Eng-

lish departments. WPE generally prepares GTAs to teach one or two FYC courses. GTAs participate in WPE throughout their first year, including the summer before their first year. Roughly one in four WPE programs do have GTAs participate throughout their graduate careers but many do not. Major goals for WPE included developing local knowledge and preparing GTAs with the general pedagogical information needed to manage a classroom. Moreover, WPE was unanimously multifaceted with most institutions employing about seven components. The most popular components were observation, workshop, coursework, and resources (e.g., teachers' guides). The most popular practices were the design of classroom activities, activities that practice response, reflection activities, and the design of syllabi and assignments. Finally, when asked about constraints, WPAs most frequently pointed to issues of timing including when and for how long GTAs experienced WPE.

#### PATTERNS IN THESE DATA

Four patterns characterizing GTA WPE emerged from these data. First, WPE is heavily constrained by time, whether that alludes to the brevity of the program or the timing of its delivery. Second, GTA preparation most often is linked to teaching GTAs about local curriculum and policies. Third, WPE is multifaceted and employs a variety of components and practices, with some emphasizing composition theory. Finally, WPE provides GTAs with a chance to develop general teaching practices.

##### *Pattern One: The Issue of Time*

Timing was a recurring theme across responses. First, with regards to when GTAs experienced WPE, nearly three-quarters of the institutions surveyed (74%) end WPE in a GTA's first year in a program with two in five institutions (40%) concluding WPE earlier (at the end of the first fall semester). While it is also true that a quarter of institutions (24%) extended WPE throughout a GTA's entire time in a program, for a majority of the institutions surveyed, this was not the case. Second, when WPAs were asked what they would do with increased resources for WPE, nearly three-quarters (73%) gave answers related to time—changing the timing of the WPE program, adding more time, or including more components and practices which, in turn, demand an increase in time. Time is perhaps the greatest constraint in the delivery of WPE across institutions with doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition.

One reason timing is so significant is because of the way in which it affects GTA development and shapes how GTAs come to understand pro-

fessional development. Scholarship suggests that during their first semester in the classroom, GTAs are looking to survive teaching in a discipline with which many are unfamiliar—in addition to facing a number of personal and professional challenges, GTAs are also adapting to new environments, competing their coursework, and learning to balance teaching and student personas while taking on the responsibilities related to leading a classroom, often for the first time. Restaino (2012) wrote that first semester GTAs “have little room for thinking critically about existing scholarship and little time and space for thoughtful, pedagogical decision making” and, instead, “desire . . . survival tools for [their] day-to-day classroom existence” (p. 26). When GTAs do encounter WPE as a preservice or early-program resource, many are looking for a “one-time process of gaining a discrete and readily transferable set of skills and techniques” (Duffelmeyer, 2005, p. 50) instead of realizing WPE as an ongoing, recursive, and integrated need (Lamonica, 2011).

In their study of GTA’s continuing needs in PhD programs, Obermark, Brewer, and Halasek (2015) argued that “as TAs develop, they often express an increasing interest in composition theory and pedagogy that they do not articulate in their first year” because “Experienced TAs’ interest in composition theory and pedagogy was a marked shift from inexperienced TAs who sometimes were outwardly frustrated by (what they viewed as) theory presented during their early TA FYW training, teaching, and coursework” (p. 39). Because scholarship suggests that GTAs make space for theoretical knowledge over time, time constitutes a crucial factor in and a substantial argument for continuing GTAs pedagogical preparation time in their graduate program instead of ending GTA preparation just as GTAs are getting acclimated to theoretical knowledge that should inform their approach to teaching composition. By ending GTA preparation preemptively and primarily supporting theoretical knowledge in preservice elements, we do not provide GTAs with ample opportunity to see how their teaching should be connected to theoretical knowledge—an argument that is not new (Estrem & Reid, 2012). These issues in timing, in turn, can be correlated with the next three patterns relating to the articulated purposes of WPE programs.

*Pattern Two: WPE and An Emphasis on Local Knowledge*

The second pattern showed that GTA WPE often unequally supports the development of local knowledge. To be clear, no discrete division should exist between theoretical knowledge, local curriculum and policies, and general teaching practices, and I imagine many WPAs would argue that their local curriculum is informed by compositional theory and scholarship

in rhetoric and composition and education. That being said, when local curriculum is presented to GTAs as policies or standards for local practice without exposing them to the theoretical underpinnings of said curriculum, GTAs are not reflecting on how their daily practices are linked to compositional theory nor are they recognizing that this approach to teaching writing is more theoretically sound than other approaches (e.g., a current-traditional or a literary approach to composition).

When asked to articulate the goals of WPE, WPAs most often mentioned local practices and policies. These responses pointed to “orient[ing] them to the curriculum” or gaining “familiarity with university resources such as disability [sic] services, veteran’s services, counseling, writing center, student advocacy, etc.” In all, local curriculum or policies were referenced 29 times in total across the 38 respondents—almost twice as often as composition theory (15) and the development of a teacherly identity (14), but even more than general teaching practices (21). This emphasis on local policies and knowledge is interesting given that GTAs are, by design, a transient population who will leave their local environments. However, an understanding of local curriculum is necessary if WPAs are to administer coherent programs and offer undergraduate students similar experiences across sections of writing. This is especially challenging when one considers that GTAs must be constantly re-prepared as each year veteran GTAs graduate and new GTAs are admitted.

This revolving-door context often results in the creation of standard curricula which GTAs re-enact in their classrooms—this re-enactment is uniquely different from curricular design. Standard curriculum serves as a point of consistency across the program’s sections as well as a scaffolding tool for GTAs new to the classroom. Standardized curricula were referred to in the survey responses as “our common syllabus,” “the curriculum at our university,” or the “assignments and assignment sequence.” One might argue that these standardized resources can “compel” GTAs “to experiment with models and strategies for effective composition instruction that are informed by scholarship in the disciplines . . . so that their capacity to reflect critically on their pedagogical practices, to enact appropriate practices in future contexts, and to articulate the rationale behind those practices will grow” (Dively, 2013, p. 47). However, as articulated in my first-identified trend, timing is a major constraint in WPE. Thus, GTA WPE seems to mostly occur when GTAs need specific directions for surviving the classroom but ceases before GTAs are ready to use their theoretical knowledge to develop their own composition curriculum. If we consider these GTAs to be emerging faculty, it becomes a question of where and how these teachers of writing learn about curriculum design if not in through WPE

and how this local curriculum both can and cannot serve them as future faculty in a different local context.

*Pattern Three: WPE and Theoretical Knowledge*

Scholarship on GTA WPE suggests that theory should be prevalent in GTA WPE (Gebhardt, 1977; Farris, 1996; Stancliff & Goggin, 2007; Estrem & Reid, 2012; CCCC, 2016; Bourelle, 2016). To some degree, this holds true in practice. For instance, 71% of those surveyed reported using coursework to prepare GTAs—an ideal vehicle for the learning of theory. However, when asked to characterize that coursework, only 11 of those 27 respondents identified the course as including an emphasis on compositional theory with most respondents stating the course emphasized pedagogy (17 respondents) or classroom practices (16). Latterell (1996b) noted the importance of pedagogy courses, writing that they “imbue GTAs with practical teaching strategies, pedagogical texts, and most of all, a language for talking about teaching” (p. 15). Although some GTAs pursue degrees in rhetoric and composition, the demographic data collected in this study shows that far more have disciplinary backgrounds in other areas of the humanities—most commonly literature. Thus, GTA preparation becomes a way to introduce these teachers of writing to the theories guiding writing studies as a discipline. Again, because it bears repeating, these GTAs are teaching composition and, thereby, represent the writing studies discipline to undergraduate students in their classrooms. Yet many of them do not engage with any kind of composition teacher preparation after their first year and the courses they do take during that time tend not to emphasize theory according to these data.

*Pattern Four: WPE as General Teaching Preparation*

Finally, respondents noted that GTA WPE supports the development of general teaching strategies, like classroom management. GTAs do need forms of practical support as many have never taught, and GTA preparation is, perhaps, the only preparation they receive taking up classroom instruction during their graduate careers. This emphasis on general practice emerged through these data in three ways. First, in describing the goals of WPE, WPAs referenced general teaching practices directly or indirectly 21 times, making it the second-most articulated goal. Practices of teaching, secondly, were visible in the components WPAs most identified: with observations and workshops being most frequently reported. Third, the practices most identified by WPAs as “somewhat” or “very” important supported the development of general teaching practices: designing classroom activities,

responding to samples of student work, designing syllabi, conferencing, and peer response groups.

General teaching practices are significant in that they can develop GTAs' knowledge in important ways: helping them discover the logistics of running a classroom; leading them to discover multiple pathways to achieving the objectives of a course; and, when combined with theoretical knowledge, supporting them in reflecting on "how knowledge is produced through specific practices and processes, as well as the values and assumptions that inform those interactions" (Stenberg & Lee, 2002, p. 328). However, without theoretical knowledge working in tandem with knowledge of general teaching practices, GTAs are vulnerable to regurgitating practices they have been exposed to instead of critically considering practice. This can be seen in observations, in particular—a component of WPE that was frequently reported by the survey's respondents. Observations have been said to give a good understanding of "the surface features of the master teacher's work" but lack "the fundamental theoretical assumptions that shape a teacher's lessons" (Haring-Smith, 1985, p. 34). In other words, observations can show GTAs the practices used by a particular teacher on a particular day or, conversely, might show how a GTA teaches on a particular day, but they do not serve as conveyers of theoretical knowledge. The practices that were recognized as being most important for WPAs (designing classroom activities, responding to sample papers, conferencing, etc.) were similarly practice-focused instances of mock teaching. It is important to note that theory-building practices were also present—albeit less present—in these data including responding to compositional theory and reflection. However, other theory-building practices like responding to rhetorical or educational theory, writing a rhetorical analysis, or constructing a teaching portfolio were less reported in these data, leading me to ask if GTAs are aware of the theoretical knowledge that should be guiding their day-to-day classroom practice.

## CONCLUSION

These data represent a first step in understanding large-scale practices for WPE design and delivery.<sup>2</sup> While this study describes WPE programs across 38 doctoral-granting institutions, a doctoral-granting institution is a particular subpopulation of our very large discipline and only 40% of that subpopulation is represented in these data. There needs to be continued efforts to identify and describe institutional practices across larger populations, including MA programs and graduate programs without rhetoric and composition tracks.

Despite the limitations of these data, some clear patterns in how the WPAs surveyed practiced GTA WPE emerged. First, WPE at these institutions was typically smaller in the number of GTAs included and focused on GTAs within the humanities, especially English tracks. Second, for a majority of institutions, WPE was delivered during a GTA's first year, raising serious concerns about the importance of time and GTA development with time being named by WPAs as the largest constraint. Third, within that year, GTAs were likely to encounter multiple sources of development with some components opening spaces for learning about theory (such as courses emphasizing composition theory) and others taking up mentorship (peer and faculty) or supporting the development of local and procedural knowledges. Fourth, the goals of these programs, as articulated by WPAs, included the development of local knowledge, general teaching knowledge, and theoretical knowledge.

The findings of this study have implications for those designing or re-vamping GTA WPE. First, most WPE programs can develop by extending their timing and delivery to engage GTAs throughout their graduate careers. Undoubtedly, in order to deliver the theoretically rich, ongoing support that Estrem and Reid (2012) describe in their definition of WPE, institutions need to extend GTA education beyond the first year to ideally work across a GTA's entire experience within a program. Finally, given that WPE works to support GTAs in developing local, general, and theoretical knowledges, WPAs must reflect on the designs of their programs to see how these multiple purposes are being supported and balanced. Put differently, are GTAs understanding when theory has informed general teaching or local practices? Based on these data, it seems reasonable to suggest that WPAs should engage in a recursive process of reflecting on the goals for their GTA preparation, they should align these goals to contemporary scholarship, and they should conduct regular assessment.

As a field, writing program administrators should move in the direction of developing evidence-based best practices for GTA WPE. To do this work, there needs to be increased knowledge of the measures programs are taking to prepare GTAs to teach writing as well as evaluative knowledge that assesses the how effective these measures are in preparing GTAs. In order to determine how the description provided here compares to a representative sample of varying institutional types of graduate programs, more empirical data must be collected specific to GTA WPE. Those empirical data must be in conversation with multi-institutional, qualitative research that can capture the depth and rationale behind WPE designs, such as a deeper understanding into how each component of WPE is enacted through specific practices—an understanding which is missing in these

data. Finally, GTA WPE programs should be regularly evaluated using programmatic assessment so that the effects of such programs and their practices can be measured. Those assessments should be published and shared with the field. These three steps—increased empirical research, increased qualitative research, and increased assessment—would result in a more robust knowledge of GTA preparation across the field and make possible the identification of best practices in GTA WPE.

## NOTES

1. To learn more about the practice of having GTAs work in a writing/learning center before teaching, see Ianetta, McCamley, and Quick (2007).

2. This study was approved by Florida State University's Office for Human Research Protection under file IRB00000446.

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# Enacting Bricolage: Theorizing the Teaching Practices of Graduate Writing Instructors

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*Drawing on empirical research on graduate student instructors (GSIs) across the US, I use the concept of bricolage to examine how GSIs act as pedagogical bricoleurs, piecing together their teaching practices from various sources like formal writing pedagogy education (WPE), scholarship, personal experience, and other teachers. I make suggestions for restructuring WPE to prepare GSIs as thoughtful bricoleurs who engage in reflective experimentation, transparency, and collaboration.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the same month I received my BA, I began work as a graduate student instructor (GSI).<sup>1</sup> I arrived too early on the first day, clutching an overly scripted lesson plan and feeling unqualified. To manage my imposter syndrome, I borrowed—heavily—from the writing program’s assignment sheets, conversations in the graduate offices, and syllabi developed by more experienced GSIs. These fragments formed my pedagogical bricolage. I wanted to develop sound teaching practices, but even more pressingly, I needed to fill fifty minutes of class each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

My experience of pedagogical scrambling is not an isolated one (see Good and Warshauer; Restaino; Taylor and Holberg; Bramblett and Knoblauch; Ebest). Teaching is often a bricolage of patchworked materials; this feels obvious. But the truth is that our field does not know much about the pedagogical knowledge and resources GSIs collect, deploy, and circulate. GSIs must build their ethos and practices relatively quickly—often without a theoretical foundation—from whatever is at hand. This might lead to courses that are coherent mosaics or misshapen Frankensteins. Existing, as they do, in the liminal space between supervised student and autonomous instructor, between disciplinary newcomer (to their supervisors) and disciplinary expert (to their students), GSIs must be resourceful. Bricolage, as a theory of inventing from limited resources, is a powerful way to understand how GSIs enact resourcefulness in their pedagogical decision-making. To help GSIs become effective teachers, teacher educators must understand what resources GSIs depend on and how they select those resources.

In this article, I share empirical data from a national study of GSIs to propose bricolage as both a metaphor for how graduate students develop their teaching practices and a theory for understanding and supporting the growth of these practices. I also share the implications of teaching-as-bricolage for structuring writing pedagogy education (WPE), including the importance of reflective experimentation, transparency, and collaboration.

#### BRICOLAGE AND TEACHING WRITING

The concept of bricolage stems from Claude Levi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind*. Levi-Strauss describes the bricoleur as "someone who works with his hands" and draws on a "heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited" (17). The bricoleur is always able to "make do with 'whatever is at hand'" (17), and, in piecing together a new collage, the bricoleur

has to turn back to an already existent set made up of tools and materials, to consider and reconsider what it contains and, finally and above all, to engage in a sort of dialogue with it . . . to index the possible answers which the whole set can offer to his problem. (18)

The bricoleur catalogs, dialogs with, and then deploys existent materials into new configurations. Levi-Strauss contrasts the bricoleur with the engineer, a sort of pure scientist who works in an uncontaminated realm of ideas, "always trying to make his way out of and go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilization while the 'bricoleur' by inclination or necessity always remains within them" (19). While the engineer employs specialized tools for specialized purposes, the bricoleur employs a closed set of heterogeneous tools that can be reimagined for many purposes (17–18).

Scholars employ Levi-Strauss's conception of bricolage as a method, a theory, and a metaphor in fields as varied as education, sociology, management, nursing, and cultural studies. Christopher Johnson, a scholar of French and critical theory, claims that the extensive use of bricolage by varied disciplines demonstrates "the status of *bricolage* as a kind of universal concept" (356). He claims bricolage is "a two-way (retroactive, feedback) process of projection and retrospection, thought and action, abstraction and application" (368), a process "no different to that of (natural) evolution itself" (368–69). Bricolage involves ongoing shaping and reshaping, influenced by context.

Bricolage resonates with theories of writing as remediation and remix (Shipka; Banks), but teaching and administrating are equally well suited to the idea of the bricolage: As teachers or administrators, composition profes-

sionals creatively make new and make do within limited contexts. In many ways, the act of teaching is an act of writing: an act of composing and remixing. Both writing and teaching involve repeated practice, revision, and reflection. Both require some “disciplining” into a discourse community. And novice teachers, like novice writers, often struggle with preconceived notions about what teaching is and how it is to be done. In fact, one could easily take the list of threshold concepts from the landmark collection *Naming What We Know* (Adler-Kassner and Wardle), and replace the word “writing” with “teaching”: “Teaching Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity,” “Teaching Involves Making Ethical Choices,” “All Teachers Have More to Learn,” and so on. Empirical research demonstrates “that instruction is a complex, paradoxical task—one that requires a savvy instructor to navigate effectively” (Thompson et al. 24). As newcomers attempt to navigate this complexity, they enact bricolage: balancing pressures, performances, skills, audiences, and expectations—all while simultaneously piecing together something that works.

Others have observed how teaching is like bricolage. Teacher education scholar Elizabeth J. Hatton uses bricolage as a metaphor for uncritical, untheorized teaching. The teacher-bricoleur, she says, may bypass theory while inventing practices to “suit his or her purposes” (“Teachers’ Work” 341). Practical concerns can lead teachers to developing strategies “to get through a planned lesson with minimum disruptions and minimum loss of face” (342) rather than focusing on larger educational objectives. Although Hatton notes that bricolage is not inherently bad, she recognizes it must be accompanied by critical self-reflection to avoid the pitfalls of atheoretical, survivalist approaches to teaching (“Teacher Educators” 246). Other researchers argue for bricolage as a positive metaphor for teachers who flexibly and artfully create learning experiences that achieve larger goals or respond to student needs (Campbell; Reilly; Scribner). Both conceptions of teaching-as-bricolage are useful in understanding how novice writing instructors develop.

## METHODOLOGY

Research on GSIs of writing focuses primarily on the experience of the first semester or year of teaching, the period where WPAs are most involved in preparing new teachers. Methods employed by this research fall into several general categories: ethnographies, narratives, or case studies following small numbers of new instructors (see Bishop, *Teaching Lives*; Ebest; Farris; Rankin; Restaino); personal storytelling from GSIs (Bramblett and Knoblauch; Good and Warshauer); theory, description, and analysis of

approaches to GSI preparation (Bridges; Dobrin; Hesse; Morgan; Pytlik and Liggett; Qualley; Stenberg and Lee; Stancliff and Goggin); and survey and interview research seeking to understand GSIs' perspectives on their preparation and needs as new instructors, primarily authored by WPAs (Grouling; Estrem and Reid; Reid et al.; Taggart and Lowry; Weiser).

My study falls into this final category and builds on work by E. Shelley Reid and Heidi Estrem, although it differs somewhat in scope, participant population, and author subject position. Much previous research valuably focused on local, contextualized sites of GSI preparation. I investigate GSIs' experiences across a large section of the GSI population, including master's- and doctoral-level graduate students, first-semester and experienced teachers, and GSIs in programs across the US. At the time I conducted this research, I was a doctoral student not working in teacher preparation (although I had previously done WPA work). Participants saw me as a peer and observer to the programs in which they taught. My subject position presumably allowed them to speak openly with me about their experiences in ways they may not have done with their WPAs.

I chose a national scope for this project, partly in response to Reid et al.'s multisite, multiyear study of graduate writing instructors (Estrem and Reid; Reid et al.). Although they hypothesized institutional context and instructor experience level would influence findings, they found few significant differences between the study's two sites and two experience levels (first-year vs. second- and third-year). They argue that although local contexts do matter, the field must consider general concerns about how we prepare new instructors. They call for more data on how GSIs process their formal WPE. Examining GSIs as a national population means the loss of some context-specific data, but it offers insight into what GSIs share across the field.

I designed an eighteen-question survey and an eleven-question semi-structured interview protocol, drawing some questions from Reid et al.'s study.<sup>2</sup> Noting that "our field still does not value replication as much as originality" (4), Tricia Serviss has called for writing studies researchers to "develop our research findings together rather than striving to do alone what none have done before" (5); this includes creating research designs "that live beyond their original incarnation and evolve" (13). This methodological perspective allows for adaptation while claiming the possibility of aggregating knowledge across contexts and building on previous research. According to this transcontextual perspective, "RAD research in writing studies ought to be continuously evolving rather than simply being reproduced and verified via replication" (28). Here I build on previous research while making revisions and additions to the research design.

I distributed the survey through an email to the WPA-Listserv, a post to the WPA Graduate Organization Facebook group (WPA-GO), and individual emails to sixty-four WPAs at institutions that employ GSIs. In each distribution method, I encouraged WPAs and graduate students to share the survey with eligible GSIs in their network (GSIs were eligible if they had taught a first-year writing (FYW) course in the previous calendar year).

### *Participants*

Survey participants totaled 132 GSIs; twenty-four participated in follow-up interviews. Table 1 shows the breakdown of participant characteristics.<sup>3</sup> Survey participants were not asked to name their institutions. The twenty-four interview participants came from fifteen different institutions located throughout the US. Of the fifteen universities represented by interview participants, eleven are classified by the Carnegie Classification as R1, two as R2, one as R3, and one as M1.

### *Coding*

I employed grounded theory and constant comparison to code open survey responses and interview transcripts (Glaser). Specifically, I used open coding by reading through the data multiple times, marking instances where participants named resources that influenced their teaching principles or practices, categorizing those resources by type, and assigning codes to each type. I narrowed codes into broader categories of resources, debriefed codes with a peer, and examined the data again, assigning all mentions of resources to one of four categories outlined below. I also conducted member reflections by asking all twenty-four interview participants to read preliminary results and check them for how well they resonated with their experiences. The fifteen who responded all felt the results accurately represented their individual experiences and their sense of their peers' experiences.

Below, I share the coded results of participant responses to two survey questions, drawn from Reid et al. Survey participants were asked to 1) name three to four principles that guided their teaching and 2) identify where those principles came from; the results below represent 115 responses to this second question (not all 132 survey participants answered every survey question). To expand on survey data and highlight participant voices, I also share responses from interviewees, reflecting on how and with what resources they developed their course design, assignments, and plans for daily class time.

Table 1

## Participant characteristics

Participant characteristics	Survey participants ( <i>N</i> = 132)	Interview participants ( <i>N</i> = 24)
Age (years)	61% (81) 20–29	63% (15) 20–29
	25% (33) 30–39	16% (4) 30–39
	14% (18) 40+	21% (5) 40+
Gender	71% (93) female	67% (16) female
	27% (36) male	29% (7) male
	2% (3) other gender identity	4% (1) other gender identity
Racial/ethnic identity	85% (112) White	79% (19) White
	1.5% (2) Black or African American	4% (1) Asian
	1.5% (2) Asian	8.5% (2) Hispanic/Latino
	6% (8) Hispanic/Latino	8.5% (2) other racial/ethnic identity
	6% (8) other racial/ethnic identity	
Native language	97% (128) English	96% (23) English
	3% (4) other language	4% (1) other language
Degree type	50% (66) PhD	63% (15) PhD
	11% (14) MFA	13% (3) MFA
	36% (48) MA/MS	16% (4) MA/MS
	3% (4) other (MAT, MPP, etc.)	8% (2) other (combined MA/PhD, MPP)
Field of study	39% (51) literature	29% (7) literature
	34% (45) rhet/comp	25% (6) rhet/comp
	16% (21) creative writing	13% (3) creative writing
	11% (15) other (TESOL, tech comm, education, comparative studies, public policy, etc.)	33% (8) other (TESOL, tech comm, education, comparative studies, public policy, etc.)
Experience teaching FYW	39% (51) in first semester	41% (10) in first semester
	39% (52) taught 2–7 semesters	38% (9) taught 2–7 semesters
	22% (29) taught 8+ semesters	21% (5) taught 8+ semesters

## RESULTS

GSIIs relied on resources in four categories: formal WPE; theory, readings, and coursework outside of formal WPE; individual experiences, intuition, and beliefs; and other teachers.

*Formal WPE*

Formal WPE included all resources structured and sponsored by the writing program, including composition theory and practicum courses; professional development workshops; summer orientations; shared electronic resource banks; learning objectives; and required or encouraged common syllabi, course design, and assignments. Forty-one survey respondents referenced formal WPE as a source for the development of their key principles as teachers (in a separate question, 126 participants overall described participating in some formal WPE).

Since many surveyed GSIs did not explicitly reference or acknowledge the formative impact of formal WPE on their key teaching principles, we might be tempted to conclude that WPE was not an important influence. All twenty-four interview participants, however, said WPE influenced their course design, assignments, and daily work in the classroom. Rosa, a PhD student in literature, said composition theory from a graduate course was “just kind of in my head,” impacting her choices as a teacher in undefined ways. Ray, an MFA student in creative writing, articulated more specific connections between his formal WPE and his theoretical approach to teaching. When his composition theory professor connected composition “to contemporary theories like queer theory and feminist theory and critical theory,” Ray saw how writing courses could help students “think about how language and writing are used in power spaces.” For Ray, WPE provided a foundation for thinking theoretically about teaching that supported his personal experiences, identity, and commitments as a teacher.

Writing programs shape the context that the teacher-as-bricoleur “always remains within” (Levi-Strauss 19), prompting creative adaptation from the bricoleur. Charles, an MFA student in creative writing, saw program objectives as “a skeleton, and it’s still up to an instructor to figure out how to breathe life into that skeleton.” Lillian, an MFA student in creative writing who taught in another writing program prior to beginning her MFA, drew on and merged elements of both programs’ assignments to design a new assignment. These GSIs demonstrated how the teacher-as-bricoleur dialogs with materials (including program resources) to create something new through integration and adaptation. Importantly, their own objectives and agency as teachers “breathed life” into those materials, but the possibilities available for “breathing life” were shaped, in part, by what the program provided.

*Other Theory, Readings, and Coursework*

In the survey data, forty-one participants described how materials outside of formal WPE influenced teaching principles, including concurrent or past coursework (graduate or undergraduate), readings from various academic fields, writing studies courses outside of required pedagogical courses, popular readings from non-scholarly texts, and texts used in FYW courses. (Although some participants were required to use specific textbooks, many GSIs chose their own texts. Those using required texts also still brought in their own “texts”: videos, news, poems, etc., as resources. As a result, I determined that textbooks suited this category better than formal WPE.)

Jack, a master’s student in rhetoric, “was converted” to collaborative writing after studying it in a graduate course outside WPE. He redesigned one of his FYW assignments midsemester to require students to write collaboratively. Diana, a PhD student in literature, reworked her literacy narrative to include concepts from her studies in eco-composition, requiring students to be “attentive to the geography of [their] literacy.” By participating “in a sort of dialogue with” their materials and “index[ing] the possible answers which the whole set can offer” (Levi-Strauss 18), these GSIs discovered new uses for the materials they encountered. Instructors also drew on FYW textbooks, news articles, YouTube videos, documentaries, and literature. Lucy, Ken, and Ray all described relying on textbooks or outside readings to shape their daily work in the classroom. Web sources were also important: Jessica pulled from teaching blogs; Gabrielle and Sarah used ideas found on other institutions’ FYW program websites; Frances used open educational resources, teaching blogs, and a Facebook group for writing teachers. As bricoleurs, GSIs draw from “whatever is at hand” (Levi-Strauss 17).

“Whatever is at hand” is a limited category; it includes not only what GSIs specifically seek out for a pedagogical purpose, but also what GSIs are exposed to in the course of their regular activities. Anything becomes usable material for creating pedagogy, but the possibilities are limited by what GSIs happen to encounter. The variety of sources that a bricoleur engages does not, however, indicate the quality of those sources or, even more importantly, how those sources are deployed to serve sound pedagogical objectives. What matters most is not what resources are employed (after all, the bricoleur is inventive), but *how* those resources are employed to achieve pedagogical goals.

*Instructors' Experiences, Intuition, and Beliefs*

Eighty survey participants said personal experiences, intuition, or beliefs influenced their key teaching principles. Twice as many participants attributed the development of their teaching principles to this category than any other. This reliance on the self is typical of the bricoleur, whose “first practical step is retrospective” (Levi-Strauss 18) and who “always puts something of” themselves into the bricolage (21).

This category included GSIs' personal theories of writing; their gut instincts; their own experiences as students, writers, and professionals; and their impressions of the students and the classroom. GSIs developed an awareness of students' needs, a sort of teacher's intuition that required bricolage-like tinkering and experimenting as a response. Ruth, a PhD student in rhetoric and composition, said teaching was “kind of rolling the dice and being like, ‘Well, a lot of people think that this is working. Let's just see how it goes, and if it works horribly, I'll redesign my syllabus in the middle of the semester.’” Ruth's answer makes clear how risk and improvisation were perceived as unavoidable, perhaps desirable, elements of creating a workable pedagogical bricolage. Similarly, Anne, a PhD student in rhetoric and composition, created a revision assignment because she felt her “students weren't getting an opportunity to really work through a major revision in their writing.” Frances, a PhD student in literature, designed an autoethnography assignment in response to her perceptions of students:

They come into the college setting thinking—with all these rules in their head that I want them to get away from, like, “I can't use first person,”—that everything has to be super scholarly, like their own impressions don't matter.

Frances hoped to “catch them off guard” at the beginning of the semester by beginning with “something that they're genuinely interested in writing about.” These examples demonstrate how frequently students were sources of information for shaping pedagogical bricolage.

We cannot know how accurately GSIs were analyzing students or how effective their interventions were, but their reliance on intuition is typical of a bricoleur, who continually adapts within an immediate context (Levi-Strauss 17). Bricoleurs constantly reimagine the uses of their heterogeneous tools; as they reimagine and reuse, they reduce the necessity of adding new tools. GSIs' reliance on their own intuitions and experiences may make them inventive, but it may also keep them from adopting new tools, like research and theory on teaching writing. This resistance will be discussed in further depth below.

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*Learning from Other Teachers*

Finally, thirty-four GSIs described how learning from other teachers (both peers and mentors) influenced their teaching principles.

In the interview data, participants described regularly borrowing materials from peers. Jessica, a PhD student in rhetoric and composition, shared how she “stole or borrowed or used existing assignments for a lot of what I did,” implemented “a lot of reflective practice throughout the semester, which I totally took from somebody else in the program,” and regularly talked to peers “to get ideas from them about how they do things.” Gabrielle, an MA student in rhetoric and composition, described how her cohort shared ideas and energy: “We always could go to each other, ‘Oh hey, I heard you talked about this assignment in class. Can I get that assignment sheet?’ And it was always like that. It was always very reciprocal.” Isabella, a PhD student in comparative studies, described creating teaching partnerships with peers to share lesson-planning responsibilities: “I feel like it gives me more time to write a really good lesson, as opposed to having to write three lessons and maybe not having such a . . . high-quality level lesson.” In this way, novice teachers benefitted from the ingenuity of other bricoleurs, bricoleurs with a different set of tools and materials.

GSIs also valued mentors. Isabella contacted a pedagogy professor from a past program for help. She pointed to “having a sense of community, not just in the classroom, but as instructors, as being a really critical part” of her teaching practice. Ruth, Alex, and Allison also valued mentors as resources. Jack and Anne appreciated talking with experienced teachers who were not their direct supervisors because they could be more open about their teaching concerns. Sharing may lead to useful conversations about pedagogical goals and an expansion of GSIs’ access to pedagogically sound materials or, alternatively, it may lead to the quick spread of undertheorized or ineffective lesson plans. GSIs must learn sound teacher decision-making to avoid the latter.

*Discussion*

These categories represent the “limited” but “extensive” materials (Levi-Strauss 17) from which GSIs create their pedagogical bricolage. In theorizing bricolage, Johnson writes that “it could be argued that it is *bricolage* which thinks, or operates, through the *bricoleur*, rather than the reverse—as we shall see, (s)he is never entirely in command of his or her means of production” (360). As employees working for a program that in some ways *thinks* and *operates* through them, GSIs do not have autonomous control over their teaching. They often enact pedagogies and course designs not of

their own making. As they navigate possibilities and constraints, GSIs may struggle to fit all these pieces together, resulting in unintended incoherence in their courses. This is in part due to GSIs deviating from the normative expectations of their program or the field. Levi-Strauss writes that the bricoleur may employ “devious means” (16) that take them on circuitous paths. The resistance GSIs sometimes show toward their formal WPE (Hesse; Ebest; Welch) may be part of their dialogue with the materials of their teaching and the assertion of their identities as emerging teachers.

Since the work of the bricoleur is always situated, GSIs’ choices are influenced both by their own agency and the constraints shaping their work, constraints that include a compressed learning context; specific programmatic mandates and philosophies; their own experiences and attitudes toward teaching and writing; the identities of themselves, their students, and their administrators (including identity markers like race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, etc.); family and personal relationships; material spaces such as classrooms and offices; financial and material resources; professional and educational pressures outside of teaching; and an academic culture that identifies them as students but assigns them the labor of colleagues.

All teacher-bricoleurs deal with constraints that limit the possibilities of their bricolage, but GSIs are often more constrained and managed than other faculty. Graduate students have minimal control over what courses they teach, how they teach them, and minimal access to teaching resources (like private office spaces). These limitations on their work and environment influence what they can create as bricoleurs. GSIs may respond with compliance or resistance as they balance carrying out program objectives *and* enacting their own teaching principles. Andy, a PhD student in rhetoric and composition, described it this way: “Imagine two rivers coming together and forming a single one, so on one hand I’ve got the course requirements, what I’m supposed to do in the class, and in the other hand, I have my own desires.” Diana, however, described easily adapting to and accepting her program’s philosophies:

I think if I didn’t believe in the writing-about-writing philosophy, then I might have a harder time sticking to it. But since I totally understand it and I am on board, I—anything that I’ve changed that is from my own interest or that I want to do, I definitely tried to connect it.

Other GSIs were more ambivalent about their navigation of program structures: April, an MA student in literature, appreciated her program’s efforts

to ensure all sections of FYW taught “the same things,” but also noted that “it can be, I think, a little stifling.”

Unlike Levi-Strauss’s engineer, who creates *ex nihilo* on an abstract, scientific plane, GSI bricoleurs’ innovation is limited (or “stifled”) by the contexts in which they work. In response to such “stifling,” GSIs sometimes resisted program structures as a distinct pedagogical choice. For example, Vanessa, a student pursuing a combined MA/PhD in linguistics, resisted her WPA’s recommendation that first-year students meditate on their writing because of Vanessa’s own disciplinary orientation. Although not opposed to the practice of meditation, Vanessa found the idea of incorporating it into the classroom “stressful” because of her orientation as a “social scientist,” a “very math-y” person, and “not your usual English type of student.” Vanessa felt that classroom mediation might be similarly off-putting to her students who also were not the “usual English type.” She made a deliberate choice *not* to incorporate this programmatic suggestion into her pedagogical bricolage, a choice shaped by her experiences.

Although it is easy for administrators to feel frustrated with GSIs’ resistance, we should encourage this kind of teacher-driven decision-making. Much of GSIs’ work is outside their ability to choose, and yet we are preparing them for a profession which demands sound, ethical decision-making. Eggleston argues that “decision-making is probably the central feature of the role of the teacher” (1). If bricolage works through individuals as much as individuals work through bricolage, to what extent are we preparing GSIs to exercise their agency as teachers, and on the other hand, to what extent are we imposing our own pedagogical decision-making on them? To some extent, all professionals (including WPAs) must balance meeting the objectives of larger entities (programs, departments, colleges, or universities) while maintaining their own values and integrity. When GSIs teach courses they have not designed, they are experiencing that struggle in microcosm. But if GSIs are to become effective teachers, they must also develop their agency to make judgments as teachers. Our efforts in WPE should support that opportunity.

How much should novice teachers be left to make their own inventive decisions, and how much should they be guided or supervised? Not all their decisions will best serve their students, nor will GSIs always know what to do. Although teaching-as-bricolage can be positive (flexible, inventive, purposeful), it can also be negative (undertheorized, uncritical, survivalist), as Hatton noted (“Teacher Educators”; “Teachers’ Work”). Often, the GSIs in this study fell into survivalist mode because they did not yet have the foundation to create an effective pedagogical bricolage by themselves. While April, an experienced GSI, described sometimes feeling “stifled” by

an overly structured program, several interview participants struggled with too much autonomy: Jessica, a first-time teacher, valued the freedom offered by her program but sometimes felt she was “an acrobat without a net. And sometimes it starts to really feel like you don’t know what you’re doing and you’re totally failing.” Similarly, Lucy, a master’s student in public policy, wished the program had given her a syllabus instead of asking her to write one because she “did not feel qualified to be writing that syllabus,” having never taught before. Lucy also shared that she felt “very stressed” about class time: “Like what do I literally do in the classroom?” Similarly, Vanessa said,

When I started teaching, I didn’t have an idea of what I was teaching, much less how to teach it. And so it was really not cool sort of being thrown into having to teach this thing that you don’t really know what you’re teaching.

The feeling of being “thrown into having to teach” puts pressure on GSIs to practice survivalist bricolage, either out of practicality or urgent need.

GSIs also wanted a balance of theoretical foundation and practical instruction as they found their way as new teachers. Jessica felt frustrated that her WPE was “really at a high thinking-level and not at a practical, hands-on level.” In contrast, more experienced GSIs wanted *more* theory and transparency from their programs. Anne, who had years of teaching experience, was frustrated that her program’s emphasis on multimodal composition had “no good theoretical justification.” When she asked for justification, she “didn’t really get a good justification for it,” and so started doing her “own research and reading on how [to] better incorporate multimodal composition” into writing instruction. Similarly, Ruth, teaching at a different institution, was frustrated with her program’s directions to “do more digital stuff”:

I feel like I’m pretty open, like if you can tell me why we’re doing something, you can show me some scholarship that suggests this is going to be really helpful for students, and you either tell me what we’re removing, or how this links or builds on what we’re doing, I’m pretty open to it.

Because Ruth felt her program did not theoretically justify the use of digital assignments, she was skeptical of implementing those assignments.

How can WPE respond to these tensions between autonomy and guidance, theory and practice? Reimagining the role of WPE in light of bricolage suggests ways to provide a supportive foundation for GSIs while also encouraging them to be agentive and thoughtful bricoleurs.

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## IMPLICATIONS FOR WPE

Recognizing GSIs as bricoleurs asks us to see new instructors not as trainees but as craftspeople, each carrying with them a toolbox of perspectives, materials, and experiences from which they will shape their work as teachers. WPE can prepare GSIs to reflectively engage with the unique materials they bring with them, question those materials in light of disciplinary knowledge, and then adopt new tools and orientations as needed to shape those materials into purposeful bricolage. This means positioning new instructors as budding pedagogical theorists and contributing insiders instead of resistant, apathetic, naive, or “managed” outsiders. I suggest three ways formal WPE might help graduate instructors engage in thoughtful bricolage: reflective experimentation, transparency, and collaboration.

### *Reflective Experimentation*

To become agentive bricoleurs, GSIs must be able to critically select materials to create effective learning experiences for students. This requires the ability to see or imagine the possible ways materials could be used effectively in the classroom. To foster the development of this ability and invite GSIs into pedagogical knowledge-making, teacher educators might encourage proposals for experimental courses, create awards for innovative teaching, or host a resource bank of theory- and research-based lesson plans to which GSIs can contribute.

Many WPE scholars have emphasized the importance of reflection to engage GSIs in the complexities of teaching (Bishop, “Places to Stand”; Dryer; Hesse; Morgan; Reid, “Teaching Writing Teachers”; Reid, “Uncoverage”; Stancliff and Goggin; Stenberg and Lee), and reflection is also a creative tool of the bricoleur. Reid suggests one way to measure GSIs’ preparation is by “how many variables [they] can identify in a dynamic situation and how many reasonable alternate paths [they] can imagine” (“On Learning to Teach” 137). This process of identifying and imagining what can be done with a bricoleur’s “tools” might prepare GSIs with the rhetorical and pedagogical competence needed for “considering multiple possibilities rather than settling on a right answer” (137). In other words, the limited resources of the bricoleur must be opened to a more abstract plane of potentiality. If GSIs are inclined to latch on to a familiar solution to a pedagogical problem, WPE might encourage them to instead brainstorm a dozen responses and account for the affordances of each possibility. In formal courses and beyond, GSIs must engage in regular reflection that probes their reliance on various resources, encourages them to see possibilities, and strengthens their inventive muscles.

### *Transparency*

Teacher-bricoleurs must balance creativity with accountability, becoming answerable for the choices they make within their situated context, answerable to stakeholders like administrators (within and beyond the writing program) and to undergraduate students who have a right to pedagogically sound writing instruction. We expect researchers to evaluate and account for their sources; we can ask teachers to do the same for the materials of their bricolage by answering questions like “What is your rationale for bringing this film or poem or assignment to your students?” or “What makes using this resource a good pedagogical choice?” In return, WPAs should be equally prepared to provide a transparent account of program decisions, making explicit to novice instructors the institutional, historical, and disciplinary factors that have shaped their programs’ philosophies and course designs. The GSIs discussed above who felt that their programs were either too theoretical or not theoretical enough shared one thing: both groups wanted their programs to make clear, transparent connections between theory and practice. Effective programs must help GSIs learn how to connect the tools of their bricolage—connect the theory they encounter in their formal preparation with their day-to-day work in the classroom, and vice versa. Teaching GSIs to critically evaluate their various sources will make explicit the often implicit process of pedagogical bricolage. Asking GSIs to question their choices—using questions like “Why am I using this resource? What kind of learning experience is it creating for my students?”—will show them how to theorize their bricolage.

### *Collaboration*

Research, including this study, indicates that GSIs count their peers as valuable resources (Taggart and Lowry; Reid et al.) and that cross-tiered mentoring and communities of teaching help new teachers (Fedukovich and Hall; Stenberg and Lee). The concept of bricolage suggests these collaborations might be most effective when they prepare new GSIs as flexible teacher-bricoleurs who purposefully collect, share, and evaluate materials for teaching. WPAs might invest in creating formal and informal experiences for GSIs to learn teacher decision-making, such as pairing GSIs with mentor teachers, inviting GSIs to participate in curriculum design, creating “teaching office hours” where teachers can visit each other, designing office configurations that put teachers of varying experience levels in proximity, or inviting GSIs to observe and be observed by veteran teachers. Whatever form these collaborations take, they should focus on developing GSIs as agentive teacher-bricoleurs. Such collaborations will not only expand GSIs’

toolboxes, helping them see more possibilities as bricoleurs, it will also allow GSIs to see how their experienced colleagues practice pedagogical bricolage, often in better theorized ways than a novice instructor is ready to do.

## CONCLUSION

GSIs act as bricoleurs, drawing on sources inside and outside their formal preparation. Writing pedagogy educators can play a role in determining whether this patchwork is haphazard or purposeful by understanding how GSIs practice bricolage and by helping GSI bricoleurs to experiment reflectively, design transparently, and engage collaboratively with their work as teachers. As a result, new teachers will understand teaching as dynamic, complex work requiring a bricoleur's ingenuity to master.

## NOTES

1. Long et al. argue the term *teaching assistant* “misrepresents the kind of classroom work graduate students actually do” (77). “TA” implies someone assisting an authorized instructor, not someone acting as sole instructor of record. I adopt the term graduate student instructor (GSI) as more accurate.

2. This research was conducted under North Carolina State University's IRB protocol #11862.

3. GSIs studying in a field “other” than literature, rhet/comp, or creative writing are overrepresented in interview data. One key research question, reported on in an article in *Composition Forum*, was how disciplinary affiliation affected GSIs' experiences with WPE. For this reason, all willing respondents studying an “other field” were invited to be interviewed.

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#### APPENDIX A: GSI SURVEY QUESTIONS

Questions 1–9 asked participants to identify type of degree pursued, area of study, age, gender, racial/ethnic identity, native language, previous teaching experience, number of semesters taught, and type of training received.

10. Please rate the following to indicate whether/how well they have helped **build your confidence** as a composition teacher. Use a 1–5 scale, where 1 indicates "didn't help much at all" and 5 indicates "helped quite a lot." Use "0" for anything you haven't encountered yet.

- Experience as a writer
- Experience as a tutor
- Experience as a teacher
- Observing other teachers and/or being mentored by other teachers
- Role plays, presentations, guest- or practice-teaching
- Composition pedagogy/theory course activities or assignments
- Reading professional articles
- Reflective writing/thinking about teaching
- Discussions/exchanges with other peer teachers
- Discussions/exchanges with mentors or advisors
- Orientation or professional development workshops
- Other (please specify)

11. Please rate the following to indicate whether/how well they have helped build your skills as a writing teacher. Use a 1–5 scale, where

1 indicates “didn’t help much at all” and 5 indicates “helped quite a lot.” Use “0” for anything you haven’t encountered yet.

Experience as a writer

Experience as a tutor

Experience as a teacher

Observing other teachers and/or being mentored by other teachers

Role plays, presentations, guest- or practice-teaching

Composition pedagogy/theory course activities or assignments

Reading professional articles

Reflective writing/thinking about teaching

Discussions/exchanges with other peer teachers

Discussions/exchanges with mentors or advisors

Orientation or professional development workshops

Other (please specify)

12. When you face a challenge or a problem as a tutor/teacher, how well do the following help you address that problem? Use a 1–5 scale, where 1 indicates “doesn’t help much at all” and 5 indicates “helps quite a lot.” Use “0” for anything you haven’t encountered or tried yet.

Drawing on my experience as a writer

Drawing on my previous experience as a tutor

Drawing on my previous experience as a teacher

Observing other teachers (or consulting their course materials)

Consulting a mentor or advisor

Remembering strategies from composition pedagogy/theory course activities and assignments

Reading and/or remembering previously read professional articles

Writing/thinking reflectively about teaching

Discussing the issue with other peer teachers

Drawing on orientation or professional development workshops

Other (please specify)

13. What do you see as 3–4 key principles for your teaching of writing? (In other words, what do you think is important for you to do as a writing teacher? What do you try always to do or not do?) (Open Response.)
14. Could you say where those principles come from, or are related to? (Were they from something you read or learned, something you

- heard of or saw someone doing, some experience you had?) (Open Response.)
15. If your graduate work is in a field outside of rhetoric and composition, what concepts (ideas, theories, scholarly literature, disciplinary practices) from your primary discipline shape the structure and content of the way you teach writing? (Open Response.)
  16. What impact, if any, has teaching writing had on your own research and writing practices as a graduate student?
  17. How do you plan to use your degree after graduation? What role, if any, do you imagine teaching playing in your career after you complete your degree? (Open Response.)
  18. What is the biggest challenge you face in your teaching? (Open Response.)

#### APPENDIX B: GSI SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Could you describe your university context (size and type of school, a little about the student population, number of graduate programs and students, etc.)?
2. Could you describe a bit more about your program context? What discipline is your program in, what emphases are available, what is the population of graduate students like (MA and PhD, etc.)?
3. Describe your process for designing your first-year writing course and syllabus. Why did you design the course the way you did? What resources (people, books, websites, graduate coursework notes/lectures, etc.) did you draw on in designing this course?
4. Think of one of the assignments you created for your course this semester. What are the origins of this assignment? What resources (people, books, websites, graduate coursework notes/lectures, etc.) did you draw on in designing this assignment?
5. How do you see your course design carrying out or responding to your first-year writing program's philosophy and policies?
6. Describe your process for preparing for a typical day in class. What resources (people, books, websites, graduate coursework notes/lectures, etc.) do you rely on to prepare for class?

7. In what ways do you feel most qualified to teach this course, and in what ways do you feel least qualified to teach this course?
8. Describe the central principles or ideas you want your students to take away from your course this semester. Why do you think these principles or ideas are so important?
9. What is the most influential piece of scholarship you've read in terms of your own teaching?
10. What connections, if any, do you see between what/how you teach first-year writing and what you are learning in your coursework and research as a graduate student?
11. What are your plans for your career after graduation? What elements of your graduate experience do you feel are best preparing you for your postgraduation plans?



# (Dis)similarity and Identity: On Becoming Quasi-WPA

Andrew Hollinger and Jessie Borgman

*This article examines WPA positions that are non-tenured, part-time or otherwise under-supported. Drawing on previous discussions of this precariously-situated WPA position, the authors introduce the term “quasi-WPA” and explore how WPAs in this position face three critical issues in their position as administrator: (1) authority and power dynamics, (2) identity, and (3) resources. Due to the dynamics these WPA positions come with, the authors argue that these critical issues are magnified for quasi-WPAs. The authors investigate how the quasi-WPA position is made problematic by their positionality. They are holding a position of responsibility while also occupying a position of uncertainty. The quasi-WPA does everything a regular WPA does and deals with all the same issues that any other WPA must navigate, but they must do so through the complications contingent employment present.*

*It's not about choosing the job or not choosing the job. That's a false and binary understanding of the choices we face for employment and academic responsibility. It's about not letting the job choose you, and not letting it alone define your identity.*

—Colin Charlton, Jonikka Charlton, Tarez Samra Graban,  
Kathleen J. Ryan, Amy Stolley Ferdinandt, *GenAdmin*:  
*Theorizing WPA Identities in the Twenty-First Century* (3)

We are contingent faculty and writing program administrators, a both/and construction that attends to an intersectional and problematic positionality. Fully contingent and fully WPA, we sometimes find it difficult to enact and embody both identities simultaneously—and so find ourselves quieting one role in order to represent the other. In this way, each identity-role becomes a situational performance rather than a full embodiment and acknowledgment of our physical and scholarly labor. And though some may argue that role suppression is more emblematic of the everyday movement through life (sometimes I'm being parent, sometimes I'm being spouse/partner, sometimes I'm being teacher, sometimes I'm being little league coach, and so on), it feels rare that any of these roles actively inhibit enacting and embodying another role. Andrew, for example, has had to bring his son to work when the school district had a day off but the university did not. On that day, he was both teacher and parent simultaneously as he taught classes while his son sat in the corner of the classroom, doodling on the whiteboard. How-

ever, Andrew's contingency seems to occasionally interfere with and inhibit his work as WPA: when the National Census of Writing was conducted, he was not able to add the information for his campus until responses were again called for after the first deadline. The link for the survey had not been sent to him, but instead to another tenured rhet-comp faculty member (someone on campus more likely to be WPA?). This small incident certainly wasn't malicious or intentional. He simply was not on the radar as the WPA, not even (at the time) on his own department's website. Jessie, likewise, is both a part-time adjunct employee and a writing program administrator overseeing online first-year writing courses. And at one point she was also a full-time student. Some days she functions as both adjunct and administrator or adjunct and student and on some days she functions as all three simultaneously.

Contingency and administrative work do not necessarily imply complication. In practice, though, the two identity-roles duel, fragment, coalesce in piecemeal fashion that feels like being both WPA and not-WPA. What is it to be both contingent and WPA, then? We are naming people in our position quasi-WPAs (qWPA). The quasi-WPA is a WPA, but without the traditional accouterments that often accompany administering a writing program. The qWPA addresses the same issues any other WPA must and does so through the complications that contingent employment presents. For us, the inclusive identity-role of the qWPA is identified through three complicating strands that we discuss in the sections that follow:

1. **Identity**, in which we discuss why we use the term "quasi" as opposed to simply owning our WPAhood or using the more common term of "NTT-WPA";
2. **Authority and power dynamics**, in which we describe the variety of difficult spaces and situations our positionality inheres within;
3. **Resources**, in which we suggest that administrative resources are largely developed for those functioning in more traditional roles.

Although we treat these areas individually, each area finds strength and complexity when considered together. For example, the usual kinds of problems associated with peer review (scheduling, content, addressing opportunities for growth, feedback) become more complicated viewed through the lens of authority dynamics and identity when the WPA is contingent/NTT and the faculty member being observed is tenured or tenure track. To be clear, however: we thrive in the duality of our roles.

## ON BEING qWPA: OUR OWN CONTEXTS

The details of our own quasi-ness are further confirmation of the complexity of being a qWPA. Jessie, for instance, experiences her quasi-ness as an act of precarity, continuously in limbo because she is a “full-time” adjunct, building her own full-time schedule and salary from several different institutions, including large state universities and smaller colleges. She is a digital “road warrior” because her instruction is entirely online. As an adjunct, she holds little real power and technically little obligation toward building an annual review portfolio: at none of her institutions does she have voting rights (does this mean she lacks academic citizenship?); neither is she required to complete service or do any scholarly or professional labor and yet she does (lots of both!). Her continuing employment is based on enrollment numbers. And yet, she has found herself in a position overseeing online ENG 101 and 102 composition courses, developing curriculum, and co-founding one of the field’s most robust resources for online instruction (<https://www.owicommunity.org>). Jessie’s role as quasi-WPA was the result of the relationships she built. As qWPA, she facilitates a college goal to standardize the content, design, and rigor of online instruction across the institution. Her department chair keeps her in this position because it alleviates some of his own workload finding adjuncts with online teaching experience and ensuring that all the online adjuncts teach the same course (in terms of content, design, and rigor).

Andrew’s quasi-ness, on the other hand, appears much more like a traditional WPA position. In fact, before him, the WPA was a tenured rhetoric and composition professor. When the then-WPA became chair of the newly formed writing and language studies department, Andrew began coordinating the writing program. The circumstances of his stepping into the role, however, are less traditional. Andrew works at University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, an emergent R1 university with an FYW enrollment over 6000 students each year. In 2015, the institution merged, restructured, rebranded and suddenly the then-WPA found himself chair of a new department. At the time, the other senior rhetoric and composition faculty had administrative appointments (for example: graduate coordinator, office of student engagement director) and the junior faculty were blocked by the university from holding administrative positions like WPA because their focus should be on tenure, research, scholarship. Andrew had already been working as the assistant WPA (a common lecturer position) and so was appointed as the coordinator for first-year writing, responsible for forty-three full-time lecturers and ten more part-time lecturers and graduate part-time instructors.

Andrew's quasi-ness is different than Jessie's. For instance, though "contingent," Andrew is a full-time lecturer on a renewing contract. His quasi-ness is also characterized by supportive faculty and administration and may serve as an example for how to develop successful working ecologies for quasi-WPAs and the writing programs they administer. However, the agreeableness of his situation is more probably the result of good relationships with other contingent and T/TT faculty and administrators than deliberate systemic features—though an environment where good relationships thrive and enable the success of those within the ecology is often, as is the case here, the result of purposeful program building. What might happen, though, if his supportive chair is promoted to another position, or is offered a job at another institution, or retires? Is it possible that the support and relationships that were so deliberately encouraged and grown disappear? Or what happens when junior rhetoric and composition faculty are no longer "junior" and want administrative responsibilities? Could he be removed from his position? Because his situation is the product of interpersonal work rather than institutional measure, continued success is always in jeopardy.

So, we position ourselves as quasi-WPAs—having some, but not all, of the features common to WPA work, not to be conflated with "pseudo," which communicates false and fake. The features the qWPA shares with a traditional WPA are about the work we do: developing mission and vision for a writing program, managing and scheduling, developing curriculum, providing (for) professional development, assessment, peer review and observation, occasionally mediating disputes, acting as liaison between the writing program and other departmental and institutional entities. The features we do not share are the focus of our three complicating strands.

Our own experiences are not the only definitions for qWPA. We know assistant WPAs (lecturer position) who do the work of the WPA while the WPA functions as the director of a university writing program or chair of rhet-comp. We know lecturers who do the bulk of their program's WPA work without any title, recognition, or accommodation. But that's the point of quasi-WPA: our experiences are both emblematic of being a qWPA and unique to our own ecologies. Questions of identity, access, responsibility, authority create a discourse community marked by how individual and situational all our experiences are. Beyond our own experiences and observations, though, the National Census of Writing (2013) confirms a significant representation of those in quasi-administrative roles. According to the census, of four-year institutions, 10% of writing programs are coordinated/administered/run by NTT-FT faculty (like Andrew); 1% by NTT-PT (like Jessie); 3% by those on hybrid faculty/staff contracts; and 2% by full-time

staff positions. That's 16% of reporting writing programs at four-year institutions supervised by qWPAs. Also according to the census, at reporting two-year institutions, 7% of writing programs are supervised by NTT-FT faculty and 14% are administered by those with hybrid faculty/staff roles: that's 21% of writing programs at two-year institutions with some form of qWPA. What's more, only 42% of invited four-year institutions and 24% of invited two-year institutions responded to the first round of the survey. It is not unreasonable to imagine that qWPAs might be even more represented in future iterations of the survey, especially considering that the researchers "discovered that the term [WPA] was fraught with misunderstanding as many who administer different sites of writing do not consider themselves WPAs" (Gladstein 2013). Although our qWPA argument is primarily about first-year writing programs, we see quasi-WPA as a productive and inclusive term for other marginal sites of writing administration.

Theorizing and establishing the qWPA is not exactly an argument about tenure, though we might call tenure the inciting incident. Tenure represents approval and institutional consent for the work being done. In a job where little actual authority exists, tenure (-track) at least represents an in to the rest of the university. For example, at many institutions, contingent faculty, including full-time lecturers, may not vote on certain issues. Since most writing programs are composed of contingent faculty, the T/TT WPA often represents one of the few voices allowed and available to advocate for the program.

The difficulty is that, in naming the qWPA, we are arguing for the qWPA. One of the conclusions we are directing our discussion to is that a quasi-WPA is an important and meaningful position, one likely to be increasingly represented in institutions. We can't help but notice, however, that our contingency creates odd power dynamics such as when tenured and tenure-track rhetoric and composition faculty teach in the writing program (as we agree they should): is the WPA their supervisor? Advocate? Colleague? Scheduler of sections? All of the above? None of the above? The answer, to us, seems a gray area. While we want to create a space to discuss and theorize the qWPA, we are also aware, as Phillips, Shovlin, and Titus (2014) suggest in their discussion of their experiences as graduate WPAs, that "when we focus on an administrator's relationship to the tenure track, we minimize the work of those who are not currently on a tenure track appointment or may plan never to be on it and increase the likelihood that administrators with fewer resources and more complicated relationships to power will be unsupported by the profession" (p. 45). Part of the paradox of the qWPA is that we must at least acknowledge our positionality in regards to tenure in order to maximize awareness of the spaces in which we work

and might thrive. So, while our qWPA-ness may not focus on our “relationship to the tenure track,” that relationship is inarguably part of the rhetorical ecology in which our work takes place. Part of our purpose, here, is to normalize the quasi-WPA so that support and recognition are given rather than maybes. That is, support, recognition, and resources should be built into the infrastructure a quasi-WPA labors in rather than the result of good (yet precarious) interrelationships.

#### HISTORY IN BRIEF

The field is not silent about contingency or even non-tenured writing program administration. For example, the edited collection *Contingency, Exploitation and Solidarity* (Kahn et al., 2017) does important work for lecturers and contingency; and, Phillips et al., with their discussion of “liminal” WPAs (2014; 2018), bring much needed attention to the work of graduate WPAs. Nayden (2018) discusses the transition between contingency and tenure; and, the 2019 CWPA call for papers (Blaauw-Hara, 2019) is another good example of recent consideration given to “radical inclusion,” asking questions about what counts as WPA work. However, compared to the sheer breadth and scope of WPA literature, there isn’t much from or for non-tenured WPAs. In fact, the literature that responds to important questions like “What are we doing?” or “Who are we?” is usually by T/TT faculty to and for other T/TT faculty. Our theorizing has a special interest in the positionality of non-tenure track administrators. What happens (to the job, the writing program, the stakeholders) when, as is the case for us, the administrators are themselves contingent faculty? What happens, for example, to Bousquet’s critique of Harris (2002) and to Harris’s vision of WPAs (2000) when the WPAs in question are not eligible for tenure, are not part of the middle management, are more like team captains than coaches or team owners? That is, whatever authority the team captain has is largely the result of the rest of the team agreeing to the leadership. Practices and meetings called by the team captain are attended because the team has acknowledged that person’s leadership (as opposed to authority). Leadership skills and qualities are, of course, necessary for being a good WPA. We are not arguing authority over leadership. We do observe, though, that leadership without some built in authority is precarious. Again, how do nontraditional WPAs fit within WPA definitions, inquiry, scholarship, and the field? These questions are difficult and the possible responses equally complex.

In 1973, professors of design and planning Rittel and Webber defined “wicked problem” not as something “ethically deplorable” (p. 160) but as a complex problem with a significant social component that has, essentially,

an unlimited number of solutions that are not right or wrong but, instead, effective or ineffective. Working as a quasi-WPA, the existence of qWPAs, their relationships to their institutions, their programs, the field are all “wicked problems.” Quasi-ness is a design problem, and figuring out how non-tenured, contingent, scholarly laborers and administrators fit within established infrastructure, schema, and conventions is particularly complex, unique, connected to other problems, urgent—thus, “wicked.”

The field has attempted to respond to versions of this wicked problem for more than thirty years. If we entertain that the first recorded effort began with the Wyoming Conference Resolution (Robertson, Crowley, & Lentricchia, 1987) and continued through the Portland Resolution (Hult, Joliffe, Kelly, Mead, & Shuster, 1992) and the Indianapolis Resolution (Cox, Dougherty, Kahn, LaFrance, Lynch-Binieck, 2016), then this issue has been on our radar for thirty years. Many of those efforts begin by pointing out how prior understandings of the contingent labor narrative were incomplete or ineffective, then they present new ideas or solutions, and end with a call for action that this time will be the best and smartest way to fix things. Why can't we determine a long-term, satisfactory solution? Perhaps because solving wicked problems is always contextual and what might have been effective for one time and place does not remain so. We need new insights for instructors and administrators on the issues quasi-WPAs face. We need to revisit this particular wicked problem. Yet, working on the same issues for so long can be exhausting. Thirty years is a long time. An entire generation has passed between the Wyoming Conference Resolution and this article—the names on those first articles have retired (or come nearer each passing semester). It would be easy to become discouraged about the state of “things” (teaching writing, program administration, job security, for-profit education, and so on). We feel differently, however. The state of “things” is ripe for a new generation of empowered contingent labor. Rather than be discouraged, we believe it is now more important than ever to make the invisible visible, to testify, to assert our presence and positions. Contingent labor and contingent administration are increasing realities in our institutions and our writing programs. To ensure productive and meaningful work, we need to fully theorize what it means to be a quasi-WPA and what that kind of position means for our writing programs more generally.

### *Complicating Strand 1: Identity*

Necessary to unpacking the identity problems related to work as a quasi-WPA is resolving terminology. Why the identifier *quasi-WPA* and not *contingent WPA* or *NTT WPA* or *liminal WPA*, especially since we have

already introduced work from Phillips et al. (2014, 2018) and will rely on their scholarship for our discussion of authority and power? For us, *contingent* and *NTT* do not embody the rhetorical heft we were looking for: *NTT* is education-style initialism jargon and does not mean anything. It certainly does not communicate the emotional and professional incompleteness that often attends non-tenured WPA work. Further, *NTT* is an institutional classification, category, not a name. There's something important and powerful about shaking off a perfunctory term and choosing something more descriptive and apt. Then, *contingent* sounds to us like *probationary* or *interim*, as though one might be the contingent WPA until paperwork is finalized or a full-time replacement is found.

On the other hand, we like *liminal* quite a bit. But following the old "a square is a rectangle but a rectangle is not a square" logic, we see *liminal* WPAs as quasi-WPAs, but not all quasi-WPAs are *liminal*. Liminality suggests transition or transience. Phillips et al. (2014, 2018) discuss being graduate WPAs and junior WPAs. The gWPA eventually graduates and may or may not find more work as a WPA. However, the gWPA was never intended to be a long-term position or a career in itself. jWPAs also exist on a hierarchy, and part of that hierarchy implies movement. jWPAs often have the opportunity to become senior WPAs (sWPA). None of these situations are true for us. We are the full-time, singular administrators of our writing programs and we do not embody all the traditional definitions of WPA. In fact, for us to become *traditional* WPAs, we would have to apply for different jobs (not promotion) than the ones we have.

Perhaps the most significant counterargument to establishing the quasi-WPA comes from those who would encourage us to own our WPA-ness. If we're doing the work of a writing program administrator, why not fully embrace that term and its definitions? This is one of the possible solutions to the wicked problem of NTT-WPA work. It is also true that neither of us has been overtly dismissed, redirected, or otherwise personally insulted for applying "WPA" to our work and our positions within our writing programs and the field more generally. Part of the answer is that just as Phillips et al. needed "liminal" to accurately and adequately describe their situation, we need "quasi" to more fully describe ours. We need a way to articulate not the kind of work we do (that's the "WPA" in "quasi-WPA"), but the way we do that work, the environments we find ourselves laboring within, and the changes that make NTT-WPA work a different job and position than T/TT-WPA. More to the point, WPA and quasi-WPA feel, to us, similar but not identical.

In 1977, the soon-to-be-eminent psychologist Amos Tversky suggested that "similarity plays a fundamental role in our theories of knowledge and

behavior” (p. 327). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) would make similar arguments later using metaphor as the linguistic and cognitive vehicle. Tversky, however, empirically demonstrated that “similarity should not be treated as a symmetric relation” and that similarity judgments have “directionality and asymmetry” (p. 328). In this way, it makes sense, for example, to say that a Tonka dump truck is like a dump truck rather than a dump truck is like a Tonka truck. Tversky argues that the directionality of a relationship correlates with our ability to map and match features between objects or situations. He also acknowledges that “changes in a context or frame of reference correspond to changes in the measure of the feature space” (p. 340). More importantly, the consequence of the features of similarity is understanding that “the variant is more similar to the prototype than the prototype is to the variant” (p. 333). The full answer to why the term *quasi-WPA* is necessary is this: although a quasi-WPA is like a WPA, a WPA is not like a quasi-WPA. In fact, we are owning our WPA-ness completely—and part of owning our WPA-ness is recognizing that it is unlike traditional notions of who a WPA might be.

Much has been written defining, understanding, and articulating WPA identity, mostly as it pertains to jWPA and sWPA (George, 1999; Weiser & Rose, 2002; Strickland & Gunner, 2009; Charlton et al., 2011; Malenczyk, 2016). Quasi-WPAs, however, often struggle with additional identity issues. Who is the quasi-WPA to the program and department? Part, of course, depends on the local context. For example, at a community college a WPA may hold dual positions as WPA and department chair (51% according to the National Census of Writing). A WPA who is fully remote and supervises other instructors, designs courses, and facilitates courses online could hold the title of program chair or course coordinator. Local titles aside, the quasi-WPA, though fully contingent and fully administrator, may feel like they exist in the interstices of contingent lecturers, T/TT faculty, and staff.

As we move between our responsibilities, we identify with each group in turn. When we teach, receive our workload for the semester, react and respond to university policy regarding lecturers, we stand with our contingent colleagues. When we develop curriculum, present at conferences, research and write, we enact the same roles and disciplinary authority as our T/TT colleagues. Then, when we schedule, mediate between and for faculty, request and spend money, we embody staff roles. With the exception of contingency, this identity shifting is common to WPA work more generally. What becomes problematic is whether the groups we identify with, in turn, claim us. For some contingent faculty, the WPA is an “other” and so stands outside of the “pure” experience of contingency. Our T/TT colleagues have different contracts and status within the university. It may

be natural for them not to claim us as we are outside their experience and status. Furthermore, as administrative roles can often be part of someone's post-tenure promotion application, the roles we occupy may be seen as poaching important outlets for obtaining full professor. The full and complex truth of our rhetorical ecology is that we aim to work side by side both our contingent and tenured colleagues. Written out like this, it seems like we are uniquely positioned to collaborate and liaise with all groups. This is the case, most of the time, for Andrew. There are other times, though, when it feels like we don't have full membership in either group.

A large part of what is problematic for a qWPA's identity is that it is difficult to locate ourselves in the field. Roozen (2015) argues that because "our participation with our multiple communities involves acting with their texts, writing serves as a key means by which we act with and come to understand the subject matter . . . as well as the beliefs, values, and interests they reflect" (p. 51). If we look around and find ourselves un(der)represented in the literature, does that mean we are somehow valued less? At the very least, it is difficult to understand the subject matter of the quasi-WPA (or NTT-WPA/contingent WPA) because it is seldom addressed. If, as we've suggested, "quasi" does not qualify the kind of work being done, what is the separate subject matter we need addressed? That separate subject matter includes how to lead, how to advocate, how to model while within a contingent ecology. Advocating—for the program, its courses, its faculty (also contingent), a budget, policy, workload—is simply different when the advocate cannot leverage their own university status or research agenda and they are always one contract non-renewal away from unemployment. Is it possible that the squeaky wheel doesn't get the grease, but instead gets replaced?

### *Complicating Strand 2: Power/Authority Dynamics*

Quasi-WPAs have power (read: responsibility) because they function as the WPA. In what has become a professional commonplace, contingent faculty do not have power in the same way as tenured or tenure-track faculty. And because quasi-WPAs are contingent, they operate in the same uncertain employment status as many of the instructors they are responsible for training and supervising. They, like their contingent peers, face the challenges of low wages, renewing contracts, lack of resources, as well as lower cultural capital within the university system. This positionality can create a bizarre power dynamic in the department and a confusing dynamic between instructors and administrator: recall our earlier example of a quasi-WPA completing the peer observation of a tenured rhetoric and composi-

tion professor. While we recognize that power dynamics exist whether or not we acknowledge them, we can also attest that discussions of power are often problematic. We are not arguing for a Draconian WPA. We do think that having the authority to lead the writing program is important, and so we foreground these difficult conversations of power and leadership in our programs, departments, and disciplinary scholarship.

To illustrate, Phillips et al. (2014), exploring the wicked problem that is “quasi-WPA,” introduce the “liminal WPA” which they define as WPAs outside of the tenure track “who work at the margins without the protection of a degree and/or job security” and must “locate power in unusual places and use it to benefit their programs and institutions” (p. 62). Locating power in unusual places, however, is difficult and becomes part of the narrative of quasi- and liminal WPAs. Since power and authority are not conventionally available, we piece together our authority using a number of leadership and relational strategies: we shake hands or show up with donuts, anything that helps develop genuine rapport and trust. We don’t mean that quasi-WPAs have to be good leaders because their positions do not have any real authority and that traditional WPAs get to be poor leaders because their roles have authority built in. It is not a stretch, however, to suggest that nontraditional WPAs have to rely more on leadership and interpersonal skills because they lack institutional authority. It’s the proverbial *who died and made you boss?*—truthfully, most of the time, we don’t know either. What happens, for example, when good program stewardship requires tough decisions or difficult actions? Sometimes “power” is the security that making an unpopular but necessary decision will not result in losing the administrative position—or the whole job. Unpopular decisions are endemic to WPA work: course scheduling, course rotation, professional development meetings, faculty evaluation, office space, culture building, and so on.

Sometimes power is the ability to assert value. Long have those in WPA positions struggled with tenure and promotion because the work of the WPA is/was not seen as valuable. For the quasi-WPA who has no or little opportunity for promotion, the value of the position and the program are called into question. Surely, so-called “real” writing programs would have “real” faculty administrators. The hierarchy of the university creates a system of value. The projects of those with the most prestigious positions (in this case, the full professor) are imbued with the most value. What is being communicated about a program of contingent lecturers run by a contingent administrator? This value is echoed in another unfortunate reality that many WPAs deal with: the belief from so many stakeholders that writing can be taught by anyone. Our difficulty moving past this misconception

may be attributable to the value ascribed to our contingency. Still, we do not believe anything undesirable must necessarily be communicated by contingent faculty and contingent leadership. We read authority and power as the confidence and skill and vision to develop a purpose-driven, student-centered writing program. We read it as experience and expertise. The trick seems to be having others, including faculty and staff across the university, recognize and understand our experience and expertise.

The challenges of authority and power the quasi-WPA faces are about positionality in the program, the department, the university, and sometimes in our field. A clear and ever-present fact remains true of many (if not most or all) universities and colleges: tenure represents status and consent, and that matters for administrative positions. In the recent collection *WPAs in Transition*, Phillips, et. al. (2018), reiterate their arguments about power and authority by noting that “Liminals are asked to engage in work incommensurate with their institutional status—an institutional status that marks them as impermanent and thus lacking the power senior WPAs have to do their jobs effectively” (p. 70). This impermanency is manifest in the day-to-day work of WPAs who are contingent labor. Like many of the instructors they supervise, their position in the university is also impermanent. This is a difficult reality to contend with, but we do not believe this to be absolutely disenfranchising. We recognize that much employment outside academia is “at will” and that it is not unreasonable that maintaining a particular position requires consistent and continued effectiveness. Any impermanence inherent to the nature of employment is not what we are engaging with here.

What is problematic is that the nature of contingent employment, being so marked as “contingent,” carries an identity of ephemerality more felt and palpable than what usually attends. The truth is that many of us are perpetually contingent. Andrew, for example, has a three-year rolling contract that does not require re-applying for the position. It is as steady a job as any within or without the academy—still contingent. Jessie, as an adjunct, literally signs a contract each semester. It is as precarious a job as any within or without the academy, even with her responsibilities coordinating ENG 101 and 102 classes—still contingent. Embodying contingency communicates something lesser and brief and incomplete. This is how our work is “incommensurate with [our] institutional status” (Phillips et al., 2018, p. 70). The lesser quality of our status is not reflected in our responsibilities, less status for full work. What makes this even more complicated is we do not seek a solution that requires less of us so that our responsibilities match our status; we want our status raised to match our responsibilities. What that means, we’re not exactly sure.

Conscientious bridgebuilding may be an important element to resolving this wicked problem (Nayden, 2018). Perhaps continually having these conversations, not just about contingent faculty, but also about contingent administrators can create forward movement. Recognizing the limitations that one faces in a quasi-WPA position and acknowledging the positionality that comes with this type of role allows for the thirty-year narrative to continue with new and different details, further making an impact on the power dynamics involved between contingent and tenured faculty in administrative activities.

### *Complicating Strand 3: Resources*

Traditionally, WPAs continually face two major issues: (1) having enough people to teach the courses and (2) having enough resources to support these instructors and the writing program. These are fairly typical concerns and there is wide representation of these issues in writing program literature. The difference in looking at these issues through a quasi-WPA lens is that issues involving resource management are suddenly magnified. Having enough resources to successfully run a program as a contingent employee while also supervising many other contingent employees is doubly challenging, and in program ecologies increasingly marked by austerity measures (Welch & Scott, 2016), finding and managing resources are difficult regardless of program size or institutional affiliation.

What's more, however we discuss the operations and scholarship of program administration, one primary function is to empower faculty and students to engage with our content, theory, and to find ways for all stakeholders to think more critically and carefully about composition, rhetoric, literacy, language. Creating a program that meets the needs of diverse student populations is a more pressing need for the quasi-WPA because of the complicated identity and authority structures that enmesh quasi-WPA work. Directing resources to hiring and training instructors is difficult in itself—programs today respond to multi- and translingual students, first generation students, nontraditional students, students with disabilities, underprepared students, global students, among others—but the infrastructure to managing and employing resources is often tied to entrenched hierarchical structures. Contingent faculty often do not have access to account numbers or the portals to post job ads. Quasi-WPAs then find themselves beholden to department chairs and administrative assistants who do have access to funds and staffing portals. Without direct access to resources, time- and relationship-management become added aspects of the job. Work moves slower for quasi-WPAs.

Quasi-WPAs also may not be personally equipped in all areas of student and faculty need, yet they must supervise faculty and help them teach to/for those student needs. This means professional development opportunities for all faculty, including the quasi-WPA, become imperative. But where do the resources come from for this professional development? Providing professional development is often part of the WPA's job description. Traditional WPAs usually have a 1/1 (maybe a 1/2 or a 2/2) workload and receive course release equivalents for providing PD and assessment. Quasi-WPAs may not have these releases. Jessie has no releases because none of her institutions recognize the work she is doing elsewhere. Andrew, as a FT lecturer, teaches a 4/4 course load. He receives no official releases from the university. His department chair, however, sometimes provides a graduate student instructor for one of his courses. Other times, he teaches a developmental writing course that functions as an unofficial course release because that course has the same students across two sections. This is the type of wrangling and creative problem solving that is the everyday situation for quasi-WPAs.

These working conditions and lack of resources can make it difficult for qWPAs to participate fully in professional activities. That doesn't mean that quasi-WPAs lack the desire to be part of their institution or the field writ large. To that end, Lind and Mullen (2017) are worth quoting at length:

Contingent faculty often have the same experience and research curiosities as their tenure-track counterparts, but rarely have the same opportunities to continue their professional growth. Reduced workloads, access to travel funds, and other internal resources are seldom available to non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty, even those with terminal degrees: contracts usually specify their primary responsibility as teaching, and workloads leave little time for extensive scholarly pursuits. (p. 13)

We know from our own experience that many contingent faculty and quasi-WPAs want to present at conferences, publish, and obtain advanced degrees, but qWPAs often lack the time or access to resources like funding for conferences to fully participate. Doe and Palmquist (2011) remind us that sometimes the field assumes that contingent labor is somehow subpar and that contingent faculty are doing less than their tenured counterparts, but they note, that their "findings suggest that contingent faculty members are engaged in the same forms of work carried out by tenure-line faculty, leading us to argue that the essential role of non-tenure-line faculty within higher education must be taken into account as we move toward a new understanding of academic labor" (p. 354). The implications are distress-

ing: the system in which quasi-WPAs work is designed to keep them contingent, struggling for resources, and underperforming in the field. To be clear, we do not believe that this is the plight of the qWPA at the hands of traditional WPAs or rhetoric and composition as a field. Rather, this is a result of austerity measures that pigeonhole qWPAs into being contingent middle management.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

We believe the quasi-WPA to be an important, productive, and meaningful job and positionality. We don't believe that contingency must be something negative or that working as a contingent administrator must be seen as a sort of detriment to one's career or future opportunities to gain a tenure line position, if that happens to be a goal. We have argued that the quasi-WPA faces magnified challenges and we've identified and discussed three complicating critical strands: (1) identity, (2) authority and power dynamics, and (3) resources. We also acknowledge that many may not now feel empowered in their quasi-WPA positions or that their work is meaningful and productive. Our hope is that by acknowledging that these "quasi" positions exist, by beginning a new chapter to a narrative that has been told and retold for thirty years, and by rehashing the particularly wicked problems of these three complicating strands that we can keep the conversation going and help others in our positions develop the theory, literature, resources, and community of other WPAs and quasi-WPAs that they can rely on for support. We want quasi-administrators to feel like they are not alone and that they have the power to participate in and contribute to the field in ways that make a real difference. We want that for ourselves, too.

Theorizing the work of quasi-WPAs is complicated. Perhaps for some we have not been critical enough of contingency or about labor conditions, for example. We feel we must directly say that we have not bought in to the neoliberal austerity measures that keep so many lecturers as perpetual adjuncts (Welch & Scott 2016). At the same time, what we are advocating here is not some Stockholm Syndrome version of employment. And this also isn't an argument to "play the game" so that "we can at least make our own rules." The conditions of contingent employment—including the label "contingent"—need to improve. We feel that way for education and teaching in general. Class size, support, professional development, compensation, public perception, all these things need our attention and continual improvement.

However, it is equally problematic to suggest that all contingency is wrong or bad for the system. For Jessie, contingency is a choice, one that

provides flexibility, change, a wider network than most. For Andrew, contingency is not the same as semester to semester or emergency employment. Sometimes too many conversations are wrapped into one overlarge argument, and that is part of our problem with “contingency” as a label. It does not account for lecturers who are simply non-tenure track (though we find this label unsatisfying as well). It does not account for those who choose a peripatetic lifestyle (or in our current educational ecology, what amounts to digitally peripatetic—in fact, cobbling together online employment is much different than the “highway warriors” of yore). Quasi-WPAs exist, and we must be able to support and theorize this work without affirming or subverting the systems in which they exist. For us, this work is not about the system, but about the people in the positions.

When people end up as quasi-WPAs, whether by choice or circumstance, we want the position to be meaningful and productive. We are interested in developing knowledge for and about nonstandard administrative work. About knowledge, Janet Atwill writes that “[p]roductive knowledge is defined by three characteristics: its concern with the contingent, its implication in social and economic exchange, and its resistance to determinate ends” (as cited in Charlton et al., 2011, p. 108). Although Atwill was not referring to contingent labor, we find this to be inspiring and worth developing as a variation on a theme. The quasi-WPA is situated to be a site of productive and meaningful knowledge. We recognize in the quasi-WPA a resistance to determinate ends, a significant role in the social and economic exchange of a writing program and its relationship to the university and community, and a deep and enduring concern with the contingent. WPA work is often discussed in the literature as a marginalized position, work on the edge of what is seen as meaningful to the university or our field. We see evidence of this time and again in the numerous resolutions published about WPA work as scholarly work. If WPA work is work on the margins, how much more so is quasi-WPA work? The prospect seems almost too daunting to address.

But if “productive knowledge is defined by . . . its concern with the contingent,” (Charlton et al., 2011, p. 108) maybe quasi-WPAs are not on the margins of the margins. Maybe quasi-WPAs are an emerging site of unique productive scholarship. The relationship of WPA to quasi-WPA might be the relationship of north pole to south pole on a magnet: each pole attracts the other; and, without the relationship, the magnet does not exist.

Our contribution to the narrative, then, is about becoming and not being a WPA. As we affirm our roles as quasi-WPAs, we find inspiration worth quoting at length:

we are always in the process of becoming—not in the sense of our arriving at a particular WPA identity or becoming the WPA but becoming in the sense that we aren't asking to arrive or survive. We are seeking to rhetorically thrive and continually change . . . we must choose this philosophy of change as our goal, how systematically we must live it out, and how necessary it is that we re-imagine the production of knowledge as rhetorical in the administrative positions we inherit, adapt, create, and work through with such a philosophy. (Charlton et al., 2011, p. 106)

Narratives of becoming don't end. They aren't meant to. Instead, these stories get fuller, more detailed and robust. We call for more narratives, more theorizing about quasi-WPA work—not so that we can put this behind us once and for all, but so that we can “rhetorically thrive and continually change” for the better. Roozen (2015) reminds us that “our identities are ongoing, continually under-construction product[s] of our participation” and that our writing is “about becoming a particular kind of person, about developing a sense of who we are” (p. 51). Our contribution to establishing the qWPA, and those that will come after ours, make the narrative more developed, harder to ignore, more representative of the shifting ecologies in which we participate—it's about cultivating a more material sense of our selfhood, looking into the field and recognizing others like us.

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## The Importance of Documenting Oft-Unspoken Narratives

Sheila Carter-Tod

Perryman-Clark, Staci M., and Collin Lamont Craig. *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration: from the Margins to the Center*. NCTE, 2019. 167 pages.

Elder, Cristyn L., and Bethany Davila. *Defining, Locating, and Addressing Bullying in the WPA Workplace*. Utah State UP, 2019. 212 pages.

Like millions of others, I have been working from home, adhering to Virginia's response to COVID-19. To stem the spread of the virus, Executive Order Number Fifty-Three states that "all individuals in Virginia shall remain at their place of residence . . . [and] . . . To the extent individuals use shared or outdoor spaces, whether on land or on water, they must at all times maintain social distancing of at least six feet from any other person . . ." ("Governor Northam"). While writing this review, the number of deaths in the US, as a result of the virus or complications thereof, was on a steady incline. And, in the process of on-line teaching, advising, and Zoom sessions for other professional responsibilities, I have been following the news. I, like many others, have been working hard to balance my living situation and my overall emotional state in the "new normal" of life during a pandemic.

Many researchers have published on the isolation and the social effects of this "new normal" particularly in respect to mental and emotional health. For example, Dani Fallin, a professor and chair of the Department of Mental Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, states the following:

In the past few weeks, efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 such as self-quarantine and the closing of public spaces have dramatically reordered our social and interpersonal experiences. . . . There are a couple of angles to consider[ing] . . . the effects that isolation and social distancing can have on individuals' mental health. There's a lot of evidence showing that social isolation can increase symptoms of mental illnesses like depression and anxiety, among others. . . .

all of this is happening at the same time that we're receiving a barrage of difficult news about the pandemic itself. The wave of anxiety from the pandemic, plus the additional consequences of social isolation, can be a difficult combination. ("Managing and Understanding Mental Health")

Reading these books, while working virtually and following the news of the pandemic created a situation in which I could not help but consider each situation in relation to the other. One key point that resonated with me as overlapping was made by Fallin when he states that the one key to navigating the unknowns surrounding the anxiety, social isolation, and mental stress associated with this pandemic is that it is "important to name any of these challenging feelings and to be aware of them." It is this same concept of naming or making visible that which has been overlooked, hidden, or oft unspoken of that is the focus of both of these texts.

Through their edited collection, *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration: From the Margins to the Center*, Staci M. Perryman-Clark and Collin Lamont Craig name how "making race visible in our intersecting administrative and curricular practices, creates opportunities to both explore and problematize writing program administration as a framework for institutional critique" (1). And, much like Fallin's conversations and subsequent publications go beyond simply naming the complex mental health and emotional complications associated with the COVID 19 pandemic, Perryman-Clark, Craig, and the ten other contributors to the collection provide a "breadth of practical takeaway strategies that could address the complexities of structural racism and enact change" (2).

Responding to a multiplicity of calls for exploring the ways in which race and writing program administration intersect (Burrows; Craig and Perryman-Clark, "Troubling the Boundaries: (De)Constructing"; Craig and Perryman-Clark, "Troubling the Boundaries: Revisited"; Craig; García de Müeller; Inoue; Grijalva; Carter-Tod; Sanchez; Tang and Andriamalina; and others), *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration: From the Margins to the Center* not only names/acknowledges and addresses the "political and theoretical implications associated with Black perspectives of WPA work" but also "address[es] the pedagogical imperative" that accompanies such calls to action (101). In doing this, the text successfully "moves from sharing microaggressions toward sharing successes by black WPAs and WPAs whose work represents a strong commitment to students of color" providing "concrete and specific models for taking action to confront and resist racist microaggressions (11)."

Beginning the book with Vershawn Ashanti Young's informative, instructional, and performative piece "A Forenote from an Angry Black

Man: Blackness Should Always be Center,” Perryman-Clark and Craig provide a personal, professional, and national foundation for, as they state, “venturing into the weeds” bringing “experiences and narratives that are less familiar to readers[;] narratives that position black experiences more directly in relation to WPA work” (16). One such narrative is Carmen Kynard’s powerful piece “Administering While Black: Black Women’s Labor in the Academy and the ‘Position of the Unthought’” which, as she states, “uses the black body as a critical source of sociological imagination of what WPA work has looked like, what it could become, and how we could challenge and resist a neoliberalist higher education within its terms” (28). Kynard uses “Afro-pessimism as a narrative lens and intellectual foundation . . . [to] take up a series of significant memories that have shaped [her] racialized experiences of management and organization in higher education” (28). Next, David Green Jr’s chapter “A Seat at the Table: Reflections on Writing Studies and the HBCU Writing Program” continues this narrative venturing, adding “to the body of WPA scholarship by considering how black rhetorical practices aid formal composition instruction and theories of WPA work” (51).

Considering the majority of WPAs are not minorities, the text then takes an action-based turn in Scott Wible’s chapter “Forfeiting Privilege for the Cause of Social Justice: Listening to Black WPAs and WPAs of Color Define the Work of White Allyship.” As Wible states, his chapter explores white allyship by “analyzing specific contexts in which white WPAs can work alongside black WPAs and WPAs of color to support their research and administrative work to promote a new vision of the field grounded in antiracists principles” (75). This concept of allyship, which is also explored later by Perryman-Clark in the context of bullying in *Defining, Locating, and Addressing Bullying in the WPA Workplace*, provides practical guidance on how White program administrators can more “critically examine and personally acknowledge” their own positions of privilege and be willing to put those positions of privilege on the line in supporting Black program administrators at both the institutional and national level (79).

As mentioned earlier, *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration* “address[s] the pedagogical imperative” in the concluding chapter “Reflective Moments: Showcasing University Writing Program Models for Black Student Success” by Alexandria Lockett, Shawanda Stewart, Brian J. Stone, Adrienne Redding, Jonathan Bush, Jeanne LaHaie, Staci M. Perryman-Clark, and Collin Lamont Craig, by critically showcasing faculty reflections and African-American student work from Spellman College, Houston–Tillotson University, and Western Michigan University. In addition to focusing on common themes, such as black labor and black bod-

ies, curriculum development, antiracist assessment practices, institutional power dynamics and decision making, this chapter highlights the wealth of supporting documents: “sample syllabi, and assignments [that] appear in the online resources associated with this book, found at [black-perspectives-in-WPA-resources.ncte.org](http://black-perspectives-in-WPA-resources.ncte.org)” (116). These resources and this entire text provide readers with a more nuanced understanding of writing program administration by giving voice to a range of oft unspoken experiences and providing models for considering African-American perspectives in programmatic structures and curriculum.

Navigating the social isolation of living and working online is challenging. My personality and the culture in which I was raised is steeped in human interaction—personal, physical, contact. As my mind kept merging my current situation with the narratives in the texts, the concept of isolation emerged as a salient approach for beginning the review of *Defining, Locating, and Addressing Bullying in the WPA Workplace*. Shirley Rose’s foreword confirms this connection when she states “This is a difficult subject to discuss because people are often unwilling or afraid to discuss their own experiences . . . Silence about these incidents can also have the result of isolating those who have experienced bullying” (x). This concept of exclusion and isolation is also later addressed by Davila and Elder as a common theme from their survey research. However, in much the same way that *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration* provided narratives to better understand the ways in which race and program administration intersect, the chapters in this text go about naming, explaining, analyzing, and theorizing what bullying is and does in the WPA workplace, and in so doing “empowering all . . . readers to take an active role in . . . addressing bullying in their own workplace” (5).

In both the introduction and “‘Shocked by the Incivility’: A Survey of Bullying in the WPA Workplace,” Davila and Elder define bullying, and based on “survey data collected from stakeholders in WPA workplaces across the United States . . . use these data to establish the scope and patterns of bullying in the WPA workplace” (13–14). These data establish the theoretical foundation of their work and that of the eleven chapters that follow. And, similar to *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration*, the narratives in *Defining, Locating, and Addressing Bullying in the WPA Workplace* move beyond merely documenting the oft unspoken aspects of WPA work to “the theoretical grounding of the experiences, the naming of patterns of behaviors, . . . the resistance against ideologies of normalcy, and, most of all, the agentive responses . . . that readers can apply to their own contexts” (Elder and Davila 13).

Also similar to *Black Perspectives in Writing Program Administration*, the volume *Defining, Locating, and Addressing Bullying in the WPA Workplace* responds to the need for WPA scholarship to including perspectives from underrepresented social groups and analyzing how identity politics play a role in who is bullied and how. In “Of Sticks and Stones, Words That Wound, and Actions Speaking Louder: When Academic Bullying Becomes Everyday Oppression,” Harry Denny reflects on a previously published piece where he explores his experiences as a gay man, a writing center director, and a pre-tenure faculty member and his immersion “in a local culture of harassment whose roots were in homophobia and heteronormativity and also dovetailed with a repertoire of institutional and workplace bullying” (36). Staci Perryman-Clark’s chapter “Race, Teaching Assistants, and Workplace Bullying: Confessions from an African American Pre-Tenured WPA” builds on her previous work on the intersection of race and writing program administration, by discussing “the role of racialized and gendered bodies as [a] WPA practitioner who must confront racism from tenured faculty advisers and graduate teaching assistants” (Perryman-Clark 126). Perryman-Clark again “identifies the possibility of white ally-ship to address the bullying of WPAs of color . . .” (15).

Andrea Dardello’s chapter “Breaking the Silence of Racism and Bullying in Academia: Leaning in to a Hard Truth,” as she states, “demonstrates how bullying—another form of oppression—operates alongside racism and classism to disempower”(103). Through her story and analysis, Dardello’s “hope [is] that her story might clarify . . . the ways racism is endemic to academic culture and the subtle forms oppression might take . . .” moving readers “not only to acknowledge its existence but to do something about it” (103–04).

Erec Smith’s chapter “A Barbarian within the Gate: The Detriments of Insularity at a Small Liberal Arts College” provides yet another voice of the underrepresented WPA by analyzing the “crisis of insularity” he experienced “based on his embodiment of otherness” analyzing bullying as “mobbing” (144). Smith notes that “this kind of bullying, unlike the general definitions, often involves a group of bullies attacking a single target” (Smith 139). Amy Heckathorn’s chapter “The Professional Is Personal: Institutional Bullying and the WPA” further explores mobbing at the disciplinary and institutional level citing “three underlying reasons . . . (1) ignorance of the field, (2) unwillingness to accept disciplinary expertise, (3) fear of growing disciplinary prominence as resulting in the diminish of other fields” (155).

Further situating bullying in the WPA workplace as systematic, institutionalized, and gendered, Aurora Matzke, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Bre Garrett’s essay “‘Nevertheless, She Persisted’: Strategies to Counteract

the Time, Place, and Structure for Academic Bullying of WPAs” locates bullying in “their experiences as three female WPAs at different institutions and at various stages of tenure, complicating traditional notions of power that center on top-down bullying between tenured faculty or administrators and pre-tenure WPAs” (14). Their chapter along with Dawn Fels’s “Quiet as It’s Kept: Bullying and the Contingent Writing Center Director” illustrate the complexities of how environment and academic status are often a foundational factor of accepted systematic cultures of bullying. And much like Denny, Perryman-Clark, Smith and Dardello, and others, Fels’s data from her study of contingent writing center directors further theorizes how “being bullied [is] often related to other systems of oppression” (Davila and Elder 15).

Moving from systemic to cyclical, Sarah Allen’s essay “The Making of a Bully Culture (and How One Might Transform It)” complicates the discussion by analyzing the ways in which those who are bullied may in turn bully. Allen moves beyond simple analysis to offering recommendations on breaking the cycle and working towards better civility in the WPA workplace. Examining yet another dimension of bullying, Academic Systemic Incivility (ASI), W. Gary Griswold’s chapter “Remediation via Mandate: The California State University’s Early Start Initiative as Manifestation of Systematized Bullying” explores ASI as “a multi-level, top-down administrative behavior that uses low intensity bullying tactics to achieve a specific end or ends without regard to academic employee (faculty or professional staff) expertise or resistance”(174). These chapters provide both a personal and an institutional view of the systemic nature of bullying. In providing this perspective, readers can not only avoid perpetuating the cycles of bullying but also be able to identify cases of bullying in larger cross-university and state-based initiatives.

By concluding with “I Can’t Afford to Lose My Job,” Elder and Davila make a poignant acknowledgment that, while the chapters in their book have significantly added to the conversation concerning bullying in the WPA workplace, there are indeed so many more who weren’t able to speak. This chapter, consisting solely of the title and a blank page, illustrates the perfidious nature of bullying in the WPA workplace.

As I was reading both of these texts, I was reminded of how as co-coordinators of WPA workshops at CWPA, we would revise the curriculum to address current emerging WPA concerns. At the time, we added a session on emotional labor and writing program administration because of the growing body of research in the field and the nature of program administration. While not labeling it as such, both of these books are extremely useful to any program administrator or anyone considering program administration

because they provide the reader with analyzed, and theorized perspectives through multiple forms of data with a cacophony of voices expanding WPA scholarship on emotional labor—specifically as it relates to race and bullying—in immeasurable ways.

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## Non-Essential: Adjuncting During COVID-19

Christine Cucciarre

Childress, Herb. *The Adjunct Underclass: How America's Colleges Betrayed Their Faculty, Their Students, and Their Mission*. UP of Chicago, 2019. 208 pages.

The world has changed dramatically since I began drafting this book review in November 2019. As we all cope with the COVID-19 outbreak, and unemployment is at levels not seen since the Great Depression, higher education will likely be changed forever. Few institutions know what the 2020–21 academic year will look like, but all know there will be acute financial implications. Many colleges are furloughing staff and faculty, cutting pay, and announcing hiring freezes. This new landscape makes Herb Childress's book, *The Adjunct Underclass: How America's Colleges Betrayed Their Faculty Their Students, and Their Mission* considerably more important and more ominous than when the book was released last year. His text percolates with numbers, personal stories from adjuncts, Childress's own experiences, and little hope. His message is that the system is built on injustices and erroneous public perceptions of higher education. In his own words, Childress says that this is "a book that grows from fundamental questions of what college is, what college teaching is, and why some participants—both students and teachers—are secure while other remain ever uncertain" (18). Those questions lead the reader to accepting that only systematic and widespread change would alter the way higher education currently operates. A cataclysmic disruption to the structures of these institutions is necessary for any change. The COVID-19 pandemic will create dramatic change in our institutions; that is certain. Reading Childress in the pandemic's shadow adds exigency and hesitant anticipation.

The book goes further than the stack of periodic articles sounding the alarm about the plight of adjunct faculty. Childress reviews the more public adjunct stories and reminds us of the bad pay, long hours, questionable working conditions, lack of benefits and job security, and the silencing of the dissenting voices; but this book is really about what higher education has become as a result of "systematically eliminat[ing] an entire class of professionals" (ix), those who are full-time, secure, and tenured. The COVID-19 crisis might draw back the ornate curtain made of the public perception

of teaching in college, the popular culture-created perfection, isolation, and reverence of the clichéd ivory tower elitism. If the public pays attention, they may discover “things about the college experience that are never included in the recruitment material” (Childress 4–5) The reorganization of faculty and teaching during this pandemic may reveal that, “your daughter’s early courses in academic writing, mathematics, and world languages will almost certainly be taught by someone other than a permanent faculty member” and that at “innumerable lesser-tier schools . . . the majority of your son’s faculty will be temp workers” that go by a variety of titles such as “adjunct faculty, part-time lecturer, visiting scholar, postdoctoral fellow, professor of the practice, artist in residence” (5), all to mask their contingency. Childress writes “once we go beneath the surface, we discover an ecosystem and mix of species entirely unlike what we might have expected” (2). Of all the unknown long-term financial effects of this crisis, for college faculty the worst will likely fall upon adjuncts. Their easily terminated contracts, if they have them at all, will force institutions to rethink who is doing the pedagogical work in the university.

Childress is writing about the adjunct underclass, but smartly puts it within the entire academic system that created and continues to feed it. This is a well-researched book with a thorough appendix of collected data, a long and wide-ranging bibliography, and a survey for graduate students that assesses the likelihood of them becoming an adjunct instead of getting a full-time faculty position, a back-of-the-magazine feature that is tongue-in-cheek, but deadly serious. Much of the book reads this way. The mix of narrative, commentary, data, and Childress’s indignation and sarcasm makes the text compelling. But as a WPA, it’s not good bedtime reading. These are the realities that make WPA work difficult and sleeping soundly impossible. You wake up startled, mind racing, feelings of hiring dread. Your fevered dream caused by enrollment numbers, ideas of how to fix the system and the voice in your head that tells you it won’t work, new initiatives that your night-brain concocts and the naysaying administrator who tells you it’s not in the budget. And then the alarm goes off at 5:00 a.m. and you get ready for working conditions for yourself or others that you just can’t change.

Reading this book as an insider who works with adjuncts daily, you will nod and maybe chuckle uncomfortably; we know all that rings true from our own experiences. Most of us understand or have lived the plight of the adjunct: the freeway-flyer of long commutes rushing to several different schools with varied curricula and expectations, and little to no support from colleagues who are also struggling. But when the reader is outside academia and not privy to the everyday of an academic institution, the anecdotes, exposition of how things work, and the manner in which Chil-

dress writes about higher education would make even the most generous of collegiate spirit pause and grimace. He concludes a chapter called, “The Comforts of Those Inside the Castle,” professing that the “tenured and tenure tracked faculty, administrators and managers . . . have every reason to protect their own turf, and ignore the needs of those beyond the moat” (112). Childress says that the university is made up of faculty “worthy of full membership in the community. But it’s easy to move quickly from that understanding to an unwarranted opposite statement: the people on the outside are unworthy” (113). And Childress doesn’t let us forget that the separation and unworthiness creeps beyond the full-time and the part-time divide and into the research and teaching missions of most universities. There are those who teach and there are those who do research. The disparity between the two widens as more universities rely on sponsored research grants and less on state funding because of the politically “manufactured public suspicion about intellectual life” (72). Those whose main responsibility is teaching are marginalized and devalued in an era where grant money is privileged.

Childress begins his second chapter: “Adjunct (n): something joined or added to another thing but not essentially a part of it” (19) quoted from the online dictionary, *Merriam-Webster*. Most instructors have told their students at some point to avoid using a dictionary definition as a way to introduce a topic in their research papers. But the strategy works here. Adjuncts are a part and apart. Childress expands adjunct contingency saying that in “higher education, the willingness to settle for less in the one area that matters most, is the outcome of a vast shift in our beliefs about who should go to college, and what kinds of experiences they should expect to find there” (17). He argues that contingent goes beyond how we categorize faculty saying, “College, especially college designed for those less than elite, is profoundly contingent. It’s contingent upon enrollment, contingent upon funding shifts, contingent upon consumer demand, contingent upon national educational and employment trends.(17) Couple that contingency with the absurd adage “Those who can, do. Those who can’t, teach,” Childress reminds us of the cheapening of teaching and the “transactional consumer culture” that “reinforces the suspicion that college faculty are interchangeable content providers, that pretty much anybody can do it well enough as long as they have a little more knowledge than their students” (115–16). And in writing studies, this maxim is magnified by the belief that since everyone writes, anyone can teach writing. While Childress is speaking to all of higher education, his background and most of his examples center squarely on writing programs which “are often among the worst examples of imbalanced ecosystem” (27). And we know we are somewhat

culpable given that we are the ones who offer courses to most of or all students on our campuses; Childress highlights that the first-year student is most exposed to the contingent faculty. As WPAs, we might argue that colleges should staff the best teachers during a student's first year in college. It is first-year students who need the most support. But even as many adjuncts are great teachers, the system puts up roadblocks in every direction for them to have meaningful relationships with their students (37). Childress argues that tenure-track faculty take the best courses with the best students (usually advanced students in Junior and Senior year) saying, "when 70 percent of all American high school grads go off to college . . . great number of college classes won't be much fun to teach" (48). These required, get-them-out-of-the-way classes are given to the "contingent community" (49).

Childress reminds us of the system that produces the adjunct underclass: the glut of Ph.Ds with schools continuing to produce them along with the diminishing number of available tenure-track positions. Part-time teaching is the new normal. In writing studies, graduate programs have confidence for rhetoric and composition students because job ads in our discipline often outnumber the ads of subdisciplines in English studies. Even then, Childress argues, the conditions still have to be just right to secure those coveted positions. He compares getting a tenure-track position to Malcolm Gladwell's explanation of what it takes to become a professional hockey player in *Outliers*. The conditions have to be perfect. Candidates are at a disadvantage if they haven't gone to a strong undergraduate institution, moved directly into doctoral study at an elite program, completed the program quickly with published articles, book deals, lucrative grants from respected agencies, strong connections to noted scholars and done it all no later than their early thirties (60–64). Perfect conditions are required to secure the paltry number of faculty positions available.

Reminding us that tenure-track faculty make up only about a quarter of today's college faculty, the eager, freshly minted masters and PhDs have heard the woes of the academic job market, yet the most optimistic among us opt for part-time teaching to get their foot in the door. I know that any adjunct hiring offer I make at my institution includes the disclaimer that adjuncting for us will not lead to a permanent position. Childress would say that even with that reality, the system of hiring adjuncts who want to move into full-time positions is always a "bait and switch" (65–67). When one, with degree in hand, has no offers, being a temporary faculty member—that Childress defines as including "adjunct faculty, part-time lecturer, visiting scholar, postdoctoral fellow, professor of the practice, artist in residence" saying that they all work "course-by-course or year-by-year, with no guarantee of permanence, often for embarrassingly small stipends,

and often for no benefits” (5)—seems like a better career choice than taking work outside of academia.

Childress’s book deserves its place in the library of higher education books. Most have some chapter or section devoted to the issue of adjunct teaching. Next to texts such as *Our Higher Calling: Rebuilding the Partnership between American and Its College and University* by Holden Thorp and Buck Goldstein, *Academically Adrift* by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, Childress believes that the teachers of the students are at the heart of any reform. Even Cathy Davidson’s compelling and optimistic book, *The New Education* only mentions part-time labor a handful of times. She says, “the situation of adjunct and contingent labor threatens the future of the university, and so we must insist that full-time positions be replaced with full-time faculty,” but then curtly writes it is “doable” (Davidson 249). Our own WPA shelves on contingent labor that might include: the Modern Language Association’s *Statement on Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members*, and a video copy of *Con Job: Stories of Adjunct and Contingent Labor*, *The Adjunct Underclass* reminds WPAs that we are on the frontline. Especially important to writing programs is the 2017 edited collection, *Labored: The State(ment) and Future of Work in Composition*. The authors are writing their chapters in response to the *Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing* from 1989. This statement borne directly from 1987’s *Wyoming Conference Resolution* raised the flag on part-time instruction more than 30 years ago, when the tenure-track and non-tenure-track imbalance was less severe. In Joseph Harris’s “Afterword” in *Labored*, he summarizes this retrospective of how far we’ve come, saying, “I was moved in reading this book by how so many of the authors in it seem to write out of a continuing sense of pain and exclusion” (287–88). And Childress’s book, writing more generally about adjuncts in higher education, echoes this pain and exclusion.

Contingency isn’t going away; if anything, we are becoming even more of a gig economy as more folks work from home. Independent contractors, the side-hustle, and 1099s are imbedded in our vocabulary about the evolving work force. And with COVID-19 and the increase of online instruction, the discussions about the high cost of college are only going to intensify the conversations about how colleges used to function.

The last chapter of *The Adjunct Underclass* offers four principles that offer a framework of how to move forward and jettison contingency. Childress believes that if we can reasonably agree that colleges should not “privilege content knowledge over the people who carry it,” that managers should not shape and steer the business of education, that employees are not in “fixed roles of fixed expertise,” and that “an internal disciplinary audi-

ence” should not evaluate programs (154), contingency is not an option. These final principles don’t offer a fix for the inequalities of faculty positions in higher education, but it is important to read or reread Childress’s book while academia grapples with the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic reveals or reminds us how we teach, pay for instruction, and how we treat and consider contingent faculty. The long-term fiscal-tightening that all universities are now under is an opportunity for institutions to look at instruction and staffing in ways that are fairer and more moral than the system that we have inherited and that we as WPAs begrudgingly perpetuate.

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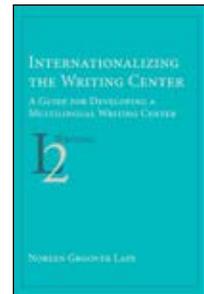
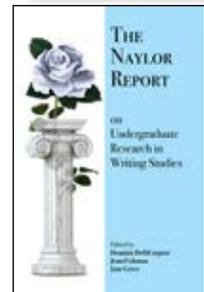
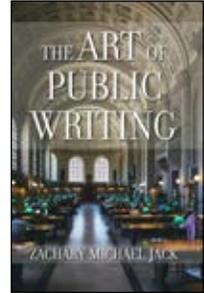
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