

Introduction

Black Lives Matter and Anti-Racist Projects in Writing Program Administration

Sheila Carter-Tod and Jennifer Sano-Franchini

We begin with a land acknowledgement. We have worked on this special issue from Virginia Tech, which occupies the traditional homelands of the Tutelo/Monacan people, who have a continuing connection to this land. Contributors and others who have worked on this special issue are situated at postsecondary institutions across the United States, which was established through colonization, forced displacement, and genocide of Indigenous people. Virginia Tech also sits on former plantation land worked by enslaved Black people including the Fraction, McNorton, and Saunders families amongst numerous others, who contributed to the creation and emergence of Virginia Tech as a major land-grant university. Although a land acknowledgement alone is not enough, we offer it to make visible the history and ongoing effects of systemic inequality in our society. With this recognition, we commit to educating ourselves about the local histories of the places we occupy, contextualizing our learning by deeply engaging with Indigenous and Black intellectual traditions, and attending to the impacts of our actions and our work on Black, Indigenous, and other minoritized communities.

This special issue brings together a range of perspectives on how the global Black Lives Matter movement and other anti-racist efforts have affected the administrative practices of writing program administrators. As Christina Stanley and Marilyn Mobley suggested, university administrators can and should play a significant role in dismantling institutionalized racial injustice. In their August 2020 article, “‘Time to Get Real’: What Black Faculty Need from White Faculty and Administrators to Interrupt Racism in Higher Education,” they state that “Substantive change begins earnestly and cross-culturally when White faculty and administrators, with access to the tower and its benefits, relinquish the propensity to guard and protect others from entering and begin to engage in the serious work of connecting intellectual heft with the emotional intelligence this moment demands.” In their list of actions that would lead towards this “earnest change” they list two actions that we see as particularly pertinent to the work done by writing program administrators: (1) reflecting on how scholars of color are used to advance research and (2) breaking silence by speaking the truth. As two

mid-career women of color academics (one African American, the other Asian American) who are also experienced writing program administrators (one of a first year writing program, the other of a professional writing program), and both of whom are working during a time of racial unrest, protest, and calls for change, we are positioned to take on a range of interconnected roles, with responsibilities for and to a network of stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, university administrators, and local communities. Writing program administrators of color may find negotiating these interconnected roles professionally and personally challenging as we try to figure out how to enact change, advance our own scholarship, and speak truth, while supporting the people in our programs.

Historically, *WPA: Writing Program Administration* has published several symposia and articles that have been instrumental in taking up race and writing program administration. The 2009, “Symposium on Diversity and the Intellectual Work of WPAs,” included articles that dealt with race as it “purposefully engage[d] diversity as an area of intellectual administrative work” (163). In the subsequent 2010 “WPAs Respond to ‘A Symposium on Diversity and the Intellectual Work of WPAs,’” Collin Lamont Craig and Perryman-Clark narrated and challenged racialized practices in writing program administration in their article “Troubling the Boundaries: (De)Constructing WPA Identities at the Intersections of Race and Gender,” where they presented a “framework for understanding an identity politic in WPA scholarship that is constructed along an axis of multiple intersecting identities” (53). Six years later, the 2016 “Symposium: Challenging Whiteness and/in Writing Program Administration and Writing,” explored “a variety of topics, addressing race-based issues pertaining to WPA work such as supporting faculty and graduate students in writing studies, choosing textbooks, de-normalizing whiteness, and in general, becoming more thoughtful and attentive to issues of race as administrators” (7).

Outside of symposia, the journal has published specific articles on race. For example, Inoue’s 2016 CWPA conference’s plenary address, “Racism in Writing Programs and the CWPA,” challenges attendees to consider and address “the problem of whitely ways of administering writing programs and judging the languages of non-white others” (151). In that same issue, García de Müeller and Ruiz’s “Race, Silence, and Writing Program Administration: A Qualitative Study of US College Writing Programs,” addressed the ways race functions within and writing programs, and García de Müeller’s “WPA and the New Civil Rights Movement” challenges WPAs to ground their administrative practices in “work [that] must be relocated in an activist context aimed at advocating for the rights of students of color” (36). A key underlying theme in all of this work has been giving

voice to racialized practices in writing program administration as well as WPAs being agents for change.

In summer 2020, as Black Lives Matters protests resurged, this time across the globe in response to the unjust murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and too many others, we saw many professional organizations making efforts to speak out against anti-Blackness and racist police violence. That fall, the editors of *WPA* invited Sheila to edit a symposium that examines race and the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement possibly complementing, critiquing, and/or building upon previous publications. Sheila then invited Jennifer, who was at the time director of the Professional Technical Writing program at Virginia Tech working on anti-racist efforts within the program, to co-edit the symposium with her, in the hopes that the issue might be inclusive of anti-racist perspectives in technical and professional communication as it pertains to program administration. Together, we were excited about continuing with the two themes of giving voice to racialized practices in writing program administration as well as WPAs being agents for change. We articulated this point in our call, which we shared widely in late September 2020. In addition, we hoped to hear from WPAs in a broad range of programs across writing studies and from diverse institutional environments. With this in mind, we crafted the call in such a way as to be as inclusive as possible. We acknowledged a range of statements by various writing studies professional organizations, while also acknowledging the absence of material actions and curricular and/or policy changes writing program administrators have taken to make Black Lives Matter within writing programs. Our goal was to curate a collection of pieces that addressed this absence.

The response to our call was incredible. With almost 60 submissions, we found it almost impossible to consider how we would select the limited number of submissions given the number of words we were allotted for the symposium. We began brainstorming other possibilities for publishing the pieces that we would have accepted, if given more publication space. Thanks to the journal editors Lori Ostergaard, Jacob Babb, and Jim Nugent proposing (and the CWPA Executive Board approving) a special issue, we were able to expand our acceptances—crafting a more expansive and inclusive project. We are thankful to the journal’s assistant editors, Eric Brown, Emily Jo Schwaller, and Katelyn Stark, for facilitating the peer review process, as well as to the editorial board members and all others who participated in the review of submissions. Their assistance was crucial because we wanted to ensure that each article was able to go through the process of double anonymous peer review.

Reading across the many essays and vignettes included in this special issue was not only educational, but it also helped us to see just how many WPAs are wrestling with, reacting to, challenging and changing institutionalized responses to the ongoing racial injustices that WPAs have historically reinforced. From programs based in HBCUs, HSIs and PWIs, the submissions in this issue show WPAs proposing, instituting and reflecting on anti-racist work—professionally, curricularly, pedagogically and collaboratively. We looked across the entries for emerging themes. Then, much like a research project analysis, we began grouping the pieces based on what we saw as six emerging themes:

- centering Black perspectives in anti-racist writing program administration
- anti-racist leadership and representation
- anti-racist programmatic and professional development
- anti-racist curricular work
- anti-racist classroom practices
- anti-racist collaborations, resources, and support

While many of the pieces in any one of our categories could easily fit into another as there are a range of topical intersectionalities, our goal with this arrangement is to highlight key areas of writing program administrative work that require anti-racist interventions.

We begin the special issue with essays on centering Black perspectives in anti-racist writing program administration. In this section, authors offer perspectives from a range of positionalities about the ways that WPAs “interested in Black studies, and cultural rhetorics might begin to rethink the work of writing programs,” as David F. Green and Michelle Bachelor Robinson explain. In their essay, “Writing Program Administration ‘For Us, By Us’: Two HBCU WPAs Testify,” Green and Robinson share their experiences performing the role of WPA in environments that historically focus on Black and Brown students. Utilizing Black feminist research and pro-Black praxis, Natasha N. Jones, Laura Gonzales, & Angela M. Haas’s essay “So You Think You’re Ready to Build New Social Justice Initiatives?: Intentional and Coalitional Pro-Black Organizational Leadership in Writing Studies” makes the case for anti-racist organizational change through pro-Black ethics of community and care. Next, moving to the embodied situation of Black female tutors facing sessions where their tutees challenged their authority and knowledge, Zandra L. Jordan’s essay “Flourishing as Anti-Racist Praxis: ‘An Uncompromised Commitment’ to Black Writing Tutors,” chronicles decolonizing practices to create anti-racist tutor training in writing centers. To encourage students to understand and challenge racial, and

power structures, Trent M. Kays' vignette, "What James Baldwin Taught Me About WPA Work" situates his anti-racist work in Baldwin's writing and his direct approach in his FYC course to get his students to consider the relationship between language, access, and perceptions of reality. This section concludes with James Eubanks' vignette, "Am I The Problem?" which reflects the author's anxieties about his ability to enact anti-racist change as a Black graduate student WPA in a English department at a predominantly white university in the South. He describes the experiences that have shaped why he wants to be a WPA and how he hopes to further enact change in that role.

We follow these essays with perspectives on anti-racist leadership and representation and the need to directly redress the problem of low numbers of faculty of color—and even lower numbers of administrators of color in postsecondary institutions. Considering the broader issues related to the discipline and broader themes of racial representation, Sheila Carter-Tod's essay "Why So Few of US: Addressing Larger Issues of Systemic Exclusions that Limit the Numbers of Black Writing Program Administrators" narrows in on two structural challenges that limit the numbers of Black faculty in academic positions: racism in hiring practices and epistemological exclusion, which relates to hiring as it influences how hiring committees evaluate scholarly research in ways that disproportionately affect Black faculty in particular and faculty of color more broadly. Also related to the issue of hiring and representation of faculty of color in leadership positions is Al Harahap's "The Promise and Perils of a Disciplinary and Organizational Pipeline," which draws on his experiences as a WPA-GO chair of color to analyze the challenges associated with the pipeline metaphor when applied to WPA-affiliated graduate students and early career scholars. As the numbers and venues for FOC in WPA positions are limited, Octavio Pimentel's vignette "The Push for the 1974 Statement . . . Once Again" reiterates the need for a larger presence of FOC as WPAs as he historicizes the problem. Moreover, Pimentel points out the need to seriously consider the important contributions of faculty of color who have firsthand experience of the impacts of racism and white supremacy and how they are so needed to lead the creation of anti-racist and Black Lives Matter efforts across universities in writing programs. However, advancing the idea that the burden of change should be shared, Stephen Monroe's vignette "White Supremacists and Urgent Agency: Memories from a Writing Program Administrator" challenges all WPAs to be prepared programmatically to respond to crisis moments when acts of racism have dangerous and violent consequences.

The next set of essays consider how anti-racist programmatic and professional development are necessary parts of the work writing program admin-

istrators can and should do to advance anti-racist teaching and learning and to appropriately prepare graduate students and faculty of color for leadership positions. As an update to their 2016 *WPA* symposium essay “The Role of Composition Programs in De-Normalizing Whiteness: Programmatic Approaches to Anti-Racist Pedagogies,” Tyler S. Branson and James Chase Sanchez’s essay “Programmatic Approaches to Antiracist Writing Program Policy” goes on to argue for pedagogical interventions to “combat normative whiteness.” Similarly, Michelle Bachelor Robinson’s vignette “A WPA Reflects on Assessing Black Women’s Writing During Intersectional Pandemics” is her meditation on her work to invoke a pedagogy and a practice of compassion as a WPA at Spelman during COVID-19. Extending this theme of programmatic change to consider faculty professional development, Amy J. Wan and Christopher John Williams’ vignette “Beyond Crisis Moments: Mediating Instructor-Student Conflict through Anti-Racist Practice” discusses how as BIPOC WPAs, they negotiated the tensions that come when working with mostly racialized students and mostly white contingent faculty. Prioritizing the need to “minimize immediate harm to students” while also supporting their contingent teachers, they discuss their focus on helping teachers “reflect on and ethically inhabit their power in the classroom.” Further considering the role of professional development in creating and sustaining anti-racist efforts, Gabriel Morrison and Kathleen Tonry’s vignette “Racism in the Margins” identifies margins as sites of vulnerability for students, and the places where faculty reveal assumptions about the intellectual superiority of “standard” English, which are rooted in racist ideologies and disproportionately affect students of color. Similarly considering sites in which students of color are systematically harmed, Joe Cirio and Heather McGovern’s “Countering Equivocation: The Moves Used to Thwart Anti-Racism Work” documents their institutional efforts to implement program-wide anti-racist classroom policies. As does Bradley Smith’s vignette “I’m Just Following the Policy’: The Last Line of Defense for ‘Standard English’” where he reiterates the point that WPA efforts towards programmatic linguistic justice is difficult ongoing work as he reflects on his own actions and reactions to enact change.

While programmatic change is important, unless the institutionalized racist practices that are inscribed into curriculum are challenged, sustainable change can not occur. Connecting faculty development with anti-racist curricular change is Rebecca Hallman Martini and Travis Webster’s “Antiracism Across the Curriculum: Practicing an Integrated Approach to WAC and Writing Center Faculty Development,” which provide strategies for faculty development across which overviews writing assignments, language choice, evaluation/assessment, and peer work. Lucy Del Col, Ana

Fowler, Sabrina Mohamed, Dylan Nordstrom, Alex Onuoha, Sarah (Raph) Raphael, Emily Tamkin, Celia Tolan, Cherrysse Ulsa, and Stephanie Wade's "Do Something!: Forging Constellations of Curricular, Co-Curricular, and Community Opportunities for Anti-Racist Writing Pedagogies at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine" outlines a co-curricular effort to facilitate campus wide conversations about racism, with a discussion of the roles of allies in systemic structural change and student reflections on their experiences. Katherine Fredlund and Angela Morris's essay "Collaborating Toward an Anti-Racist Writing Curriculum" chronicles their efforts, at the University of Memphis, to revise their first-year writing curriculum to better reflect Memphis's Black language and celebrated cultural traditions, while Daniel Summerhill, Kelly Medina-López, and Sam Robinson's essay "Confronting the Comp Classroom: Implementing Anti-Racist Pedagogy and Navigating Opposition" explores curricular change in a stretch course by redesigning their FYC curriculum using anti-racist practices and culturally sustaining pedagogies. Next, narrating their experiences instituting a race and ethnicity requirement at a PWI, Cynthia Pengilly and M. O'Brien's "Telling It Like It Is: A Narrative Account of Designing a Race and Ethnicity Requirement at a PWI in the Middle of Black Lives Matter" describes the varied responses to the proposal and new requirement, some of which were positive while others more resistant. They outline three types of responses that reinforced a race-neutral status quo: hands in the cookie jar, same ol' same ol', and not enough melanin. Similar to Pengilly and O'Brien's vignette, Erica Cirillo-McCarthy and Erica M. Stone's vignette "Recursive Interventions: A Coalitional Approach Anti-racist Pedagogy at Middle Tennessee State University" is a narrative of their attempts to institute pedagogical practices that decenter whiteness at a PWI.

Understanding that change at all levels—programmatic, curricular, and classroom—Felicitia Arzu Carmichael's essay "Teaching Anti-Racist Reading Practices in First-Year Writing" argues that WPAs and FYW teachers need to create policies and pedagogy that allow students to develop awareness of systemic racism and social injustice. Next, Sherri Craig's vignette "Your Contract Grading Ain't It" problematizes the tendency to treat contract grading alone as an anti-racist instructional effort. Sonya Barrera Eddy, Katherine Bridgman, J. Ione Matthews, Randee M. Schmitt, and Autumn Brooke Crane's "Narratives from a Writing Center: Actively Engaging in the Process of Anti-Racism" furthers this discussion using multiple narratives to describe and reflect on their experiences of taking their writing center practices online using an anti-racist approach during the pandemic. Melvin Beavers's vignette, "Reimagining the Possibilities: A Narrative Account of a Journey Toward Anti-Racist Administration,"

describes his journey as a Black WPA faced with his own personal and professional reactions to the Black Lives Matter movement, and his mindful approach to ensure that students better understand language diversity beyond conventional approaches. These accounts are followed by Kathleen Turner Ledgerwood's "Interventions Foregrounding and Honoring Black Language in FYC from a HBCU/PBI Perspective," wherein she describes how she, as a WPA at an HBCU in the midwest, has revised their writing program to address students' feelings of failure. In her essay, she discusses how through rhetorical listening and collaborating with students they are beginning programmatic changes that foreground and honor Black Language in the first-year writing classroom.

The final group of essays span anti-racist collaborations, resources, and support. First, Meghan Kwast, Jolivette Mecnas, and Yvonne Wilber's "Aligning Practice with Belief: Bringing Anti-Racist Information Literacy and Writing Instruction to an HSI Lutheran University" chronicles the collaborative efforts of a writing program and the library to create and implement, anti-racist curricular revisions. Similarly, Mara Lee Grayson and Siskanna Naynaha's "Collaboration at the Center: Anti-Racist Writing Program Architecture at California State University Dominguez Hills" co-narrates their collaborative experiences developing an "explicitly anti-racist writing program architecture" at California State University, Dominguez Hills. While WPA, Megan McIntyre's vignette, "Curating a Place to Begin: Creating Resources that Center the Work of Black and Indigenous Scholars and Other Scholars of Color," explains her anti-racist curatorial practices, which she sees as, "critical, anti-racist praxis because it offers a starting point for those new to anti-racist teaching and administration without burdening Black scholars and other scholars of color who are too often asked to do the time consuming and uncompensated labor associated with this work."

We have concluded this issue with two pieces both responding to the larger national issues around Black matters and the more local disciplinary discussions. Patti Poblete's blog post, "How to Respond When You're BIPOC and Your Organization is Called Out for Racism," insightfully addresses her personal response to the ongoing debates and discussions around racist practices within CWPA and *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. And, Carmen Kynard's afterword, "'Troubling the Boundaries' of Anti-Racism: The Clarity of Black Radical Visions amid Racial Erasure," historicizes Black matters in writing program administration while questioning if the field will utilize the present as a time for real reform. Taken together, these essays, vignettes, blog post, afterword, and bibliography provide resources and multiple strategies for taking action in the service of

anti-racist writing program administration from a number of positionalities and institutional and regional contexts. We are confident that readers will find these perspectives as enlightening, informative, and empowering as we did.

So much has changed since we began the project. Attention has been drawn to the inherent structural and systemic racism within the Council of Writing Program Administrators as well as the journal. It was important for us to thoughtfully consider the discussions, and calls to action, while also respecting our work and honoring the work of the many authors included in this issue. With this in mind, we reached out to contributors for input, insight and guidance. We have both greatly appreciated the thoughtful consideration, and feedback we received. We agreed with our contributors in acknowledging the importance of this publication, especially in light of recent events. We also agreed with our contributors' recognition of the inclusive nature of the special issue and the ways in which many of the essays speak directly to the concerns expressed in Asao Inoue's reasons for the boycott. With this feedback in mind, we decided to move forward with the publication of this special issue of *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. With this decision, we are making distinct efforts to distinguish the work that we see being done by and through the publication of this special issue. To identify this publication as outside the normal boundaries and scope of the journal we have done the following:

- worked with an artist, Alvin Miller, to design a specific cover that speaks to Black Lives Matters and anti-racist projects (his cover art contextualizes black racial issues nationally and more locally in the “ivory tower.” As he describes, “The cover art has hidden meanings and “read between the lines” elements incorporated . . . But it also screams the problems with America upon first glance.”);
- included Patti Poblete's thoughtful response to the situation;
- included reflective positionality statements, in the table of contents, for each issue entry; and
- compiled a bibliography on Black Lives Matter and Anti-Racist Projects in Writing Program Administration.

While we are aware of the need for change and the challenging journey ahead for CWPA and *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, we both honestly believe that this special issue speaks to and provides insight that will guide this journey forward.

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Sheila Carter-Tod is the incoming executive director of writing and associate professor of English at Denver University. She has chaired the NCTE's Racism and Bias committee, and held leadership roles on CCC and CWPA's executive boards. She has published works in *College Composition and Communication*, *Enculturation*, *Composition Studies*, *Council of Journal of Writing Program Administration* and oth-

ers. Her research/teaching/service/outreach focuses on writing program administration, race and rhetoric(s), composition theory, and writing pedagogy.

Jennifer Sano-Franchini (she/her/hers) is the incoming Gaziano Family Legacy professor of rhetoric and writing and associate professor of English at West Virginia University. She co-edited *Building a Community, Having a Home: A History of the CCCC Asian/Asian American Caucus*, which documents the contributions of Asian/Asian American teacher-scholars to NCTE and CCCC since at least the 1960s. Her work has also appeared in *College Composition and Communication*, *Technical Communication*, *Rhetoric Review*, and *Enculturation*, among others. She serves on the CCCC Executive Committee and is an at-large member of the Consortium of Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition.

