Writing Program Administration

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Assembling Multi-Institutional Writing Programs: Reimagining the English Major While Expanding Writing Studies

Examining Retention at the SLAC: The Impact of Race, Class, and Resource Use on First-Year Writing

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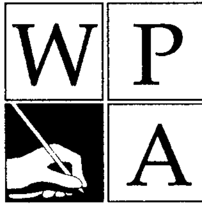
How Writing Teachers' Beliefs about Learning Transfer Impact Their Teaching Practices: A Case from L2 Academic Writing.

Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators



Writing Program Administration

Journal of the
Council of Writing Program Administrators

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Land Acknowledgment: We acknowledge that much of the work of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* is done on the traditional lands of the Tuscarora People, the Steh-Chass band of the Squaxin Island Tribe and Nisqually Indian Tribe, the Dakota Nation, the Cherokee People, and other Indigenous Peoples. While the work of a journal is multivocal, collaborative, and now often virtual, we believe it is important to recognize that each participant labors within space that was often unceded by its ancestral peoples. We do this to reaffirm our commitment and responsibility to mindful and equitable scholarship. We also invite you to review the list of resources used to craft this statement on the WPA website.

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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:

- article submissions should be a maximum of 7,500 words. Submissions for the "Everything Is Praxis" section should be a maximum of 5,000 words. Please see the WPA website for full details on submitting to the "Everything Is Praxis" section.

- be styled according to either the *MLA Handbook* (9th 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.

Announcements and Calls

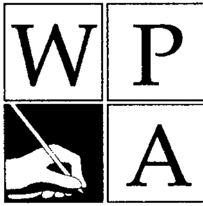
Relevant announcements and calls for papers may be published as space permits. Announcements should not exceed 500 words, and calls for proposals or participation should not exceed 1,000 words. Submission deadlines in calls should be no sooner than January 1 for the fall issue and June 1 for the spring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

Correspondence

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

Subscriptions

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



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Editors' Introduction

Minding the Gap

Tracy Ann Morse, Patti Poblete, Wendy Sharer, and Kelly Moreland

In assuming the editorship of *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, we want to mark the gap of editorial leadership for the journal as a significant moment in the journal's and CWPA's history. Spring 2021 brought a pause to the organization to allow for work to be done to recognize, acknowledge, and begin to address its white supremacy culture. In his April 18, 2021, personal blog post titled, "Why I Left The CWPA (Council of Writing Program Administrators)," former CWPA Executive Board member and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force co-chair, Asao Inoue, called for a "boycott [of] the CWPA until they address their Whiteness and White supremacy in their organization." Shortly thereafter, the previous editorial team decided to end their term early. They sent personal notifications to authors who had submitted manuscripts, posted to social media their resignations, and completed the summer issue as their last official work as editors. What many readers may not have realized is that the special summer issue, *Black Lives Matter and Anti-Racist Projects in Writing Program Administration,* was the last issue with the previous editorial teams' names on the masthead. The proceeding two issues, fall 2021 and spring 2022, were edited by different teams of volunteers organized by the CWPA leadership, with the fall 2021 issue including articles selected by the previous editorial team.

As we begin our editorship with this issue, we are grateful for the dedicated work of the talented previous editorial team, Lori Ostergaard, Jacob Babb, Jim Nugent, and book review editor Courtney Adams Wooten, who selected the articles for this issue (with the exception of the book review here included) and guided authors through the review and substantive revision processes. As we took up the task of copyediting the issue and composing this introduction, we saw clear and consistent evidence of their efforts to include a range of voices and research methods and to publish scholarship that values diversity, accessibility, and inclusivity. Lori, Jim, Jacob, and Courtney strove for openness and collaboration in as many ways as possible. Throughout the challenges of COVID and the turmoil of CWPA's much-needed self-examination, they were stalwart in providing supportive scaffolding for us, the next editorial team.

Our gratitude extends to numerous others as well. We want to acknowledge the significant work done on the three most recent issues. The summer 2021 issue, *Black Lives Matter and Anti-Racist Projects in Writing Program Administration*, was guest edited by Sheila Carter-Tod and Jennifer Sano-Franchini and included a striking cover by the artist Alvin Miller. The fall 2021 issue was editorially coordinated by Lisa Mastrangelo and Mark Blaauw-Hara. Most recently, Angela Clark-Oates, Aurora Matzke, and Sherry Rankins-Robertson edited the spring 2022 tribute issue, *Mike Rose: Teacher and Scholar, Writer and Friend*. Also, we'd like to recognize the dedication of the journal's editorial board and honor Peter Vandenberg (DePaul University) who has ended his term. As the incoming editorial team, we've benefitted tremendously from the shepherding done by these folks, without whose contributions we would not have been able to fully prepare for the work of the issue you now read.

Who We Are

The four of us bring significant and varied WPA scholarship and experience to our new editorial roles. Tracy Ann Morse has directed the Writing Foundations Program at East Carolina University for the past 10 years. She has also been a member of the Executive Board of CWPA, has held the position of President of the Carolinas WPA affiliate, and has served as chair of the CWPA Disability Committee. With Wendy Sharer, Meg Morgan, and Marsha Lee Baker, Tracy has recently published "The Affiliate as Mentoring Network: The Lasting Work of the Carolinas WPA" in *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 44.1 (fall 2020). Additionally, the book she co-edited with William P. Banks, Wendy Sharer, and Michelle F. Eble, *Reclaiming Accountability: Using the Work of Re/Accreditation to Improve Writing Programs* (Utah State UP, 2016), received the Outstanding Book Award from CWPA.

Patti Poblete, who recently joined the faculty at South Puget Sound Community College, has served on the CWPA Executive Board and has held positions as a WPA at Henderson State University and as assistant director of the Writing and Media Center at Iowa State. She has authored or co-authored two recent articles in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*: "How to Respond When You're BIPOC and Your Organization is Called out for Racism" (44.3, summer 2021) and "Sustainable Becomings: Women's Career Trajectories in Writing Program Administration" (with Louise Wetherbee Phelps, Sheila Carter-Tod, Jessie L. Moore, Casey Reid, and Sarah Elizabeth Snyder, 43.1, fall 2019). The collection *Toward More Sustainable Metaphors of Writing Program Administration*, which she

co-edited with Lilian Mina and Lydia Wilkes, is forthcoming from Utah State University Press.

Wendy Sharer held the post of associate director of composition from 2001 through 2006 and then director of composition from 2006 through 2012 at East Carolina University. From 2011 until 2018, she directed ECU's "Quality Enhancement Plan," a university-wide initiative to bolster support for student writers and for writing instructors as part of the university's re-accreditation process with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The experience of directing the QEP inspired her participation in co-editing the award-winning collection, *Reclaiming Accountability: Using the Work of Re/Accreditation to Improve Writing Programs* (Utah State UP, 2016). Similar to Tracy, Wendy has held the position of president of the Carolinas WPA affiliate and, as noted earlier, co-authored the recent *WPA: Writing Program Administration* article, "The Affiliate as Mentoring Network: The Lasting Work of the Carolinas WPA," about the impact and ongoing challenges of that group.

Kelly Moreland, book review editor, is assistant professor of English at Minnesota State University, Mankato, where she currently holds the post of director of first-year writing. From 2017–2019, she served as assistant editor for *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. In this role, she helped maintain a social media presence for the journal, assisted with copy editing and formatting articles, and co-authored an interview with Christine Hult for the summer 2019 special issue, *WPA at Forty*. As explained further below, Kelly brings a valuable perspective on how to involve graduate students more fully in the processes and scholarship of the journal.

Our many and different experiences with WPA scholarship and practice have influenced, and no doubt limited, our perspectives as journal editors. For this reason, we rely on many wonderful colleagues who serve as manuscript reviewers and members of the editorial board. We thank those of you who have already helped us by agreeing to review new submissions to the journal, and we invite anyone interested in serving as a reviewer to contact us at wpaeditors@gmail.com.

Changes to Expand Access and Diversify Contributions to Our Conversations

As we assumed the responsibilities of editing the journal, we knew we wanted—indeed, we needed—to make some substantial changes to "business as usual." Considering the pointed and substantive critiques expressed about the CWPA's complicity with practices that bolster systemic racism, we knew that the journal's editorial practices, particularly the ways in

which submissions to the journal are evaluated and valued, had to change. Thus, one of the first things we did was revise the journal's guidelines for manuscript reviewers. Fortunately for us, a sizable group of smart, dedicated colleagues[1] had already taken up Angela Haas's "Call to Action to Redress Anti-Blackness and White Supremacy" and Miriam Williams and Natasha Jones's challenge to the field to engage the "Just Use of Imagination," resulting in the incredibly useful and influential *Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices: A Heuristic for Editors, Reviewers, and Authors*.

We drew on this most valuable document as we incorporated new questions for reviewers to consider, questions that specifically address the white frameworks and traditions within which much scholarship has been judged and circulated. We now ask reviewers, for example, to comment on how a submission "contributes in socially just ways to knowledge in the field and/or to practice in research, teaching, or administration." It's also a reviewer's responsibility, under these revised guidelines, to consider if the piece "meaningfully engage[s] relevant perspectives and scholarship from diverse authors, including BIPOC, multiply marginalized (gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual identity, etc.), and underrepresented scholars." Further, we ask reviewers to provide suggestions to strengthen submissions in this area and direct them to the resources Dr. Cana Uluak Itchuaqiyaq has curated in the "Multiply Marginalized and Underrepresented (MMU) Scholar List" and the "MMU Scholar Bibliography." We request that reviewers pay close attention for potentially harmful or trauma-inducing materials in manuscripts, and we invite specific suggestions for how the submission "might be revised to better achieve the goals of the author(s) and promote anti-racist, inclusive, accessible conversations and practices in the field." We also want to be transparent with our reviewing practices and have thus made these guidelines accessible on the journal's "Information for Authors" webpage so that potential contributors know to consider them in their contributions.

We know that there is much more we can do to invite and amplify BIPOC and multiply marginalized voices in the field, and we will continue to interrogate and change these guidelines as we gain more experience through our use of them. We welcome any feedback as we continue to examine and challenge exclusionary practices in WPA scholarship.

In a spirit of invitation, we've made some other changes that we hope will expand access to the "scholarly conversation" in which the journal participates. First, we are now accepting submissions year-round, including over the summer. We recognize that, from an editorial perspective, it might be harder to find people who are available and willing to review submissions over the summer, but, at the same time, the summer is also a time when some people actually have time to work on items and submit

them for consideration. Thus, with the caveat that reviews may take a bit more time over the summer, we are happy to provide a more widely open window for contributions.

Another way we hope to expand the number of voices and perspectives in the journal is through a new submission type, "Everything is Praxis." While the scholarship of WPA has remarkable breadth, many WPAs will tell you the best way of learning is by doing. However, taking the leap can often be daunting. In those cases, we find it beneficial to rely upon the wisdom and experience of others within the WPA community. In the vein of the "And Gladly Teach" section of *College English* and the "Praxis Wiki" of *Kairos*, we hope to offer our community articles of applied wisdom. By allowing folks to zoom in on the specifics of their own circumstances, we hope to spotlight the variety of contexts in which WPA work is done, as well as the amount we can learn through the experiences of others facing challenges parallel to ours, but in different—perhaps vastly different—circumstances.

We are also committed to including more graduate student, non-tenure track, and contingent faculty voices in the journal's book review section, where we will mentor new authors through the process of writing the review. We understand book reviews as a space to celebrate diverse approaches to theorizing, studying, and doing the work of WPA. We encourage prospective reviewers to query the journal before submitting a review, and to focus the work on how the text could be applied in WPA contexts. Please send book review queries to wpabookreviews@gmail.com.

Moving forward, we are committed to continuing the work of directing much needed attention to the scholarship of those who have been, for far too long, on the periphery of published WPA scholarship. Given the important role of the journal in writing studies, we want to find ways to include even more authentic and emerging voices and perspectives. To that end, we are in the planning stages of an additional type of contribution: shorter, more narrative pieces to be featured on the online platform for the journal that raise important questions about topics such as pedagogy, working conditions, and administrative philosophies and strategies. Such vignettes won't rely on extensive research but will instead focus on self-standing experiences or examples. We intend such vignettes to encourage broader representation of perspectives and voices, such as graduate students and those from two-year colleges or institutions with heavier teaching loads.

In This Issue

We are excited to share the articles in this issue with you. The first two pieces examine student enrollment and persistence relative to writing

program administration. In "Assembling Multi-Institutional Writing Programs: Reimagining the English Major While Expanding Writing Studies," Steven Accardi, Nicholas Behm, and Peter Vandenberg share a process they used to establish partnerships between multiple institutions in response to decreasing enrollments in the English major. The authors argue that the partnerships between their two-year and four-year institutions have reciprocating benefits. With clearly articulated agreements between the institutions, students benefit from incentives to transfer, enrollments at the institutions improve, and connections between the writing program personnel at the institutions expand our field. Accardi, Behm, and Vandenberg encourage their readers to replicate their process of building multi-institutional partnerships.

In "Examining Retention at the SLAC: The Impact of Race, Class, and Resource Use on First Year Writing," Erin M. Andersen and Lisa S. Mastrangelo explore reasons students weren't succeeding in the writing classroom at their institution, a predominantly white institution (PWI) and small liberal arts college (SLAC). Their exploration includes a discussion of how students use (or do not use) resources at their institution, as well as their findings regarding students' race and first-generation status correlating, if at all, with students' struggles in composition courses. They include an overview of current scholarship on persistence and specifically consider research on race and class to understand how they may best support their students.

In an effort to promote persistence and greater success among those taking on positions as WPAs, Justin H. Cook and Jackie Hoermann-Elliot share narratives about things that went awry in their WPA work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their goal in sharing these vignettes of failure, however, is to move the field toward an understanding of failure that considers imperfections, mistakes, and misjudgments as common situations that WPAs should openly share rather than trying to minimize or hide. Sharing moments of failure in this way, the authors demonstrate, can create a more welcoming environment for all WPAs, but the acknowledgement and acceptance of failure is particularly important for new and future WPAs. Normalizing failure counterbalances what Cook and Hoermann-Elliott call the "success-oriented preparatory steps" that currently inform most graduate training in WPA and can thus also reduce emotional labor and feelings of shame among beginning WPAs.

Brian Fitzpatrick, Lourdes Fernandez, Ariel M. Goldenthal, Jessica Matthews, Brandon Biller, and Courtney Adams Wooten also direct readers' attention to insights gained during the pandemic. When the authors set out to study how instructors adapted to unfamiliar, hybrid modes of

instruction, they discovered that most instructors did not have an informal support network in place and were thus not able to draw and build on the experiences and resources of other instructors. Instead, the majority of instructors sought assistance from a few program administrators or figured out what to do based on their own past experiences, ultimately relying on trial and error to determine what effective hybrid writing pedagogy entails. The authors apply Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's theory of communities of practice to highlight the importance of informal networks for inexperienced practitioners and conclude with suggestions for how WPAs might more effectively foster these kinds of informal networks within professional communities of writing instructors.

In "Directed Self-Placement and the Figured World of College Writing," Kristine Johnson delves into what it means when students are given the opportunity for directed self-placement—not just in terms of their self-perceived abilities, but in terms of what they think "college writing" actually means. These perceptions, however, are formed according to the roles students think will be recognizable by the institution. In order to create equitable writing programs, then, it falls upon programs to consider what norms are being constructed not only from within their courses, but according to what's portrayed to those outside of them.

Assumptions about writing and learning also play a major role in Dorothy Worden-Chambers and Ashley S. Montgomery's "How Writing Teachers' Beliefs about Learning Transfer Impact Their Teaching Practices: A Case from L2 Academic Writing." The authors consider how writing teachers' understandings of transfer can change learning experiences for L2 (and beyond) students as they continue in their scholarly growth. Curricula, particularly when following institutional mandate and disciplinary guidance, is often formed without on-the-ground implementation taken into account. In order for pedagogy to be fully effective, it's key for WPAs to consider the beliefs about transfer held by individual instructors within the program. Working on only the assumption of buy-in means that instructors might not always be all-in.

Finally, in "Everything is Connected: A Review of Institutional Ethnography," AJ Odasso shares a graduate student perspective on Michelle LaFrance's *Institutional Ethnography: A Theory of Practice for Writing Studies* (2019). Odasso encourages WPAs, instructors, and students to consider how institutional ethnography as method imbues our everyday academic practices and how all involved in the work of a writing program might employ institutional ethnography to better understand the networks that inform that work.

Closing Invitation

We hope that the pieces in this issue encourage and challenge you as they did us, and we invite you to share your insights, your expertise, and your submissions with us at wpaeditors@gmail.com.

Note

1. Contributors include Lauren E. Cagle, Michelle F. Eble, Laura Gonzales, Meredith A. Johnson, Nathan R. Johnson, Natasha N. Jones, Liz Lane, Temptaous Mckoy, Kristen R. Moore, Ricky Reynoso, Emma J. Rose, GPat Patterson, Fernando Sánchez, Ann Shivers-McNair, Michele Simmons, Erica M. Stone, Jason Tham, Rebecca Walton, Miriam F. Williams.

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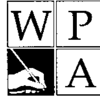


Essays

Assembling Multi-Institutional Writing Programs: Reimagining the English Major While Expanding Writing Studies

Steven Accardi, Nicholas Behm, and Peter Vandenberg

At our institutions, we are all experiencing decreases in enrollment, especially the English major. The Association of Departments of English's report recommends including more writing studies courses, a growth area, as well as professional writing certificates to increase enrollments, but such a revision to the major is not enough. To sustain programmatic viability, undergraduate writing programs must collaborate across institutional boundaries, cultivating partnerships with two-year colleges that create pathways to facilitate degree completion and leverage faculty expertise and institutional resources to offer appealing, relevant curricula. Such multi-institutional partnerships reimagine the English major and expand the reach of writing studies at the undergraduate level. The authors come from varied institutions—university, liberal arts college, and two-year college—yet, over the past five years, they have negotiated and sustained 2+2 direct transfer agreements between the two-year college and the four-year institutions. In this article, they detail how and why they made these agreements and their effects on their programs and enrollments. They hope their discussion provides a generative heuristic for four-year college and university WPAs to invent partnerships with nearby two-year college writing faculty that address their enrollment and programmatic needs.

In the United States, we are witnessing continuous declines in birthrates (Stack) and college enrollments (Fain), and a "precipitous decline in undergraduate English majors" ("A Changing Major" 1). In the preface of the Association of Departments of English's (ADE) report on the English major, MLA Executive Director Paula Krebs exhorts the discipline "to use the data we have to make real changes," such as linking the study of reading and the study writing in ways that engage students ("A Changing Major"). The report also details "enrollments in rhetoric courses remain strong [. . .], and rhetoric and composition, including professional and technical writing, still constitute promising areas for students to broaden and diversify their understanding of writing and to develop as writers" (20). The ADE Ad Hoc Committee on the English Major goes on to say that "professional

writing (modules, certificates, minors, parts of concentrations) may well offer departments an area for expansion and increased enrollments" (20). As a response to the declines, the committee "recommend[s] that departments give continued attention to writing studies and to its connection to other parts of the major" (23).

The report's findings and these dire national trends present an exigency for writing studies faculty to encourage their colleagues in other areas of English to collaborate on revisions to their English major, designs that include a writing studies curricula, a growth area in English (2). But simply redesigning the English major to include more writing studies courses is not enough: "Departments struggling with enrollment [. . .] should be under no illusion that revising the major will be the panacea to their problems" (2). We argue that undergraduate English departments must collaborate across institutional boundaries, cultivating partnerships with two-year colleges that create pathways to facilitate degree completion, increase enrollment, and leverage faculty expertise and institutional resources to offer appealing, relevant curricula able to sustain programmatic viability.

In referring to *programs* throughout this manuscript, we acknowledge that curricular growth is the outcome of a long history in writing studies of expansion, the seemingly inevitable outcome of the swell in PhDs and scholarly productivity beginning in the last two decades of the last century (Bolin, Burmester, Faber, and Vandenberg). As the discipline flourished, the term *program* and *writing program administrator* expanded to reference the functions and scope of writing centers and writing across the curriculum initiatives (Babb). By 2016, the *CCCC Committee on the Major in Writing and Rhetoric* had identified 141 entities identified in the administrative taxonomy of Higher Ed as *programs*—courses of study leading to a degree or certificate. The wider field has embraced this definition; nowhere is that more evident than in the description of the *CCCC Writing Program Certificate of Excellence*: "As a term, 'programs' is intended to be capacious in its application," the guidelines say, inviting nominations from more than a half-dozen different institutional mechanisms with writing at their center.

Our use of the term in this article does not ignore that in many institutions *writing program* typically references the two-course sequence required of first-year students; indeed, we embrace that use of the term as well. Rather, we explore the extent to which academic program expansion has and will continue to collide with powerful institutional and economic trends toward austerity—trends that put similar pressures on English programs and those upstart "independent writing programs" struggling in the wake of the 2008 recession and its implications for college enrollment (Matzen). As a consequence, we explore what might be the next stage in

a field committed to programmatic growth—articulation. We agree with Louise Wetherbee Phelps: "In these circumstances, resilience thinking requires not just adaptation, but also the opposite: invention, risk taking, and experimentation with bold and unconventional designs" (9). These circumstances may well necessitate building disciplinary bridges between institutions.

Judith Kearns and Brian Turner argue in both "No Longer Discourse Technicians: Redefining Place and Purpose in an Independent Canadian Writing Program" and "An Outsider's Perspective: Curriculum Design and Strategies for Sustainability in a Canadian IWP" that creating such a curricular pathway with a two-year college infused their major with a sustainable enrollment.

> Our senior courses are flourishing. Two of them, designated as requirements in the program, now have a steady supplemental enrollment; the others, designated as electives, have a reliable pool of students from which to draw. These increases come on top of consistently high enrollment in upper-level courses, so high, in fact, that our requests to deliver existing rhetoric courses and our proposals for new courses have been routinely granted. (Turner and Kearns 98-99)

Missing from their discussion of the partnership, however, are details of the pathway's formation. In "No Longer Discourse Technicians," they state, "When an opportunity arose to help construct a combined degree/diploma in communications, to be offered jointly between our university and a local community college, we seized it" (97). In "An Outsider's Perspective," they add, "when [the English Department chair] was approached by a local community college that offers a two-year diploma in Creative Communication, he recognized—as few others could have done, at that point—a potential complement to the work of CAW [Centre for Academic Writing]. He asked our Director to join the working group that eventually developed a cooperative venture between the two institutions" (Kearns and Turner 46-47). But how did that cooperative venture form? Why did the two-year college reach out to the university? What value did the partnership hold for the two-year college as well as the four-year institution? An explanation of how to form such a pathway as well as its value to each institution is critical for English departments to survive the current crisis of declines.

It would seem obvious in this moment that four-year colleges and universities would reach out to two-year colleges, in hopes of establishing direct transfer agreements that could bring new students into their major; however, what could four-year colleges and universities offer two-year colleges to incentivize such a partnership? Moreover, how does one go about

making these agreements? Many two-year colleges do not have a defined writing program or an identified WPA (Calhoon-Dillahunt 125). Who should one contact, how are these two-year writing programs organized, and how does one create a reciprocal relationship that benefits both institutions, programs, and students?

In this article, we address these questions, paying particular attention to the role and perspective of the two-year college. Kearns and Turner have already proven the successes of two-year/four-year partnerships, but very little is known about two-year college writing programs (Taylor 120), their structures, and incentives to partner. By understanding the particular needs of two-year college writing programs, we may begin to view writing programming as multi-institutional. Through a multi-institutional framework and assembling of partnerships, we may be able to help shape two-year college writing programs and reimagine the English major. In other words, if writing is a growth area within the declining English major and two-year college writing programs can be assembled to prepare and send interested writing studies students to four-year institutions, we may be headed toward a growth and rearticulation of the English major.

The authors of this article come from varied institutions: a large, private urban university with an independent writing department, a small, private suburban liberal arts college with a traditional English department, and the largest, public two-year college in the sixth most populous state with an unorganized writing program. Over the past five years, we have negotiated and sustained 2+2 direct transfer agreements between the two-year college and the four-year institutions. In this article, we discuss how and why we made these agreements and their effects on our programs and enrollments. We hope our discussion provides a generative heuristic for four-year college and university WPAs to invent partnerships with nearby two-year college writing faculty that address their enrollment and programmatic needs. First, we overview what two-year college writing programs typically look like across the nation and why faculty in those unorganized writing programs may be interested in forming partnerships. Second, we address how forming multi-institutional partnerships are beneficial to both the sending and receiving institutions, programs, and students. Third, we discuss our process and approach to forming these 2+2 direct transfer agreements with our programs and administrators and reveal some of our early successes with these partnerships. Finally, we conclude by suggesting how these partnerships not only have the potential to reimagine our English major but also could grow and strengthen the field of writing studies at the undergraduate level.

Writing Programs at the Two-Year College

Tim Taylor argues that two-year college writing programs are "largely invisible to the profession as a whole—many of us know little about them" (Taylor 120). This lack of knowledge makes it difficult for WPAs at four-year institutions to know how to approach and partner with a two-year college writing program. Carolyn Calhoon-Dillahunt argues that "[i]n two-year college English departments, writing courses tend to make up the majority of the course offerings" (121). There is first-year writing, and likely, developmental writing, and possibly even advanced or professional writing courses. Jeffery Andelora agrees and goes one step further, asserting that unlike four-year colleges and universities "two-year college English departments aren't built around literary studies, nor do they have writing programs—they are writing programs" (qtd. in Taylor 129). While there is no doubt that two-year colleges have many course offerings in writing, some take issue with Andelora's assertion, questioning whether two-year colleges indeed have writing *programs.*

According to the National Census of Writing, 82% of participating two-year colleges report having an "official writing program" ("Does your"); yet, only 11% say that they have a WPA administering it ("Who has"). This disparity, a "program" without a WPA, leaves some interrogating the definition of an "official writing program" at the two-year college (Klausman, "Toward" 263). Jeffery Klausman, who has written extensively on two-year college writing programs over the last ten years, argues that without a WPA, two-year colleges simply do not have a writing program, but rather "a collection of writing classes" (Klausman, "Mapping" 239).

Even with a WPA, the necessary professionalizing of writing faculty at the two-year college is a challenge. Unlike four-year colleges and universities, in which a WPA has a teacher/student relationship with their graduate student TAs, at the two-year college the relationship is peer-to-peer (244). In other words, two-year college WPAs cannot always simply *teach* their teachers rhetoric and writing theory and pedagogy; they often have to *professionalize* their peers, and they must do so in an English subfield in which their peers may not specialize. An additional challenge is that two-year college writing faculty often "resist" this professionalizing, arguing that they "*are* experienced teachers" (Calhoon-Dillahunt 123) and sometimes invoke "academic freedom" (Klausman, "The Two-Year" 386), that they have the right to teach what they want to teach and how they teach it. Of course, every two-year college English department is different, but knowing the baseline trends when learning about how one's nearby two-year college's

English department is organized and operates is critical before inventing arguments for a multi-institutional partnership.

The Benefits of Multi-Institutional Partnerships

Upon first glance there might not seem to be any incentives for two-year college writing faculty to negotiate a 2+2 direct transfer agreement with a four-year institution. After all, as Turner and Kearns demonstrate, it is the four-year institution's faculty that stand to benefit by way of increased enrollments. Specifically, it is their coveted upper division courses that are likely to see an uptick in head counts. Such an increase provides the grounds for four-year institution faculty to redesign their English major to include more writing studies course offerings. Nevertheless, there are many reasons why two-year college writing faculty should be willing to partner.

First, four-year institutions can provide a framework for an official writing program that most two-year colleges do not have. Using those frameworks, two-year colleges could assemble a comprehensive sequenced writing program that fits their local institution, which may prompt the need for more writing courses, providing writing faculty with more course options to teach beyond first-year writing. Once a program is constructed and poised to send prepared and interested students to the receiving school's program, the two-year college could argue for a WPA position to facilitate such a program. Two-year college faculty are generally limited to the role of teacher and are often expected to teach more than their four-year counterparts; creating a new role for writing faculty would be a welcomed addition (Accardi and Grauman 76).

Next, two-year colleges, like four-year institutions, have been suffering enrollment losses for the past ten years ("Community College Enrollment"). An organized multi-institutional writing program that seamlessly guided students from one institution to the next, from one degree to the next, could increase enrollments at both institutions. According to guided pathways advocates Thomas Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and David Jenkins, two-year colleges are currently designed like cafeterias. The open access mission of the college "provide[s] a wide variety of students with a wide variety of goals" a wide variety of choices, that is, courses, programs, credentials (Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins 13). However, "the typical student is overwhelmed by the many choices available, resulting in poor program or course selections decisions, which in turn cost time and money, and likely lead many students to drop out in frustration" (22). Many students choose to complete as many general education courses as possible at the two-year-college-cost before transferring, but they soon discover that only some of

these courses count toward their intended major at some institutions while others get marked as electives. Not wanting to "make more mistakes," students leave without completing their associate degree, choosing to take courses "that count" at their transfer school instead. Leaving before graduating negatively impacts the two-year college's graduation rates, a measurement of success that is frequently tied to financial rewards (Gold and Albert 89). The higher the graduation rates, the greater the state and federal subsidies, which in turn allow for "more generous financial aid to students" thereby attracting more students and tuition dollars to the college (Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins 5).

Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins argue that two-year colleges should carve out clear paths in the dense forest of choice. That way, students could explore these routes while making sure their time and money is not wasted. The critique to this narrow path-making is course reduction. The "unnecessary courses," those not on a program's path, for example, special topics courses, are eliminated or effectively no longer enroll. However, in the case of assembling new multi-institutional writing programs, new courses would be created, not eliminated. The pathway could even lead to the construction of a transferable writing certificate, which could encourage more students to enroll in more writing studies courses, thereby boosting enrollment at the two-year college as well as the four-year institution. The 2+2 direct transfer agreement structure incentivizes students to stay at the two-year college for two years, and all but assures the completion of their associate degree. In short, the partnership pathway retains students, boosting enrollment at both institutions and writing programs.

Finally, many two-year college students cannot afford to attend four-year institutions for a variety of reasons, for example, cost, transcript limitations, or family obligations. Two-year colleges function as their best, or only, choice for a college education. As a result, some students are resentful of their constrained situation and even ashamed of their two-year college identity. The 2+2 agreement communicates to two-year college students, perhaps for the first time, that they are wanted, that a four-year institution, with an elevated ethos, wants them at their school and wants them in their program. To follow the pathway is a powerful identity shift. Once committed to the agreement, students are identified as four-year university students, who are completing the first two years of their major at the two-year college. Similarly, two-year college writing programs are elevated by the university writing program's status. The partnership communicates that a four-year college or university has invested in the two-year college writing program and desires a quality of student that the two-year college writing

program produces. Students are persuaded by that ethos and are likely to enroll in the program.

Beyond increasing two-year and four-year English enrollments, inventing and assembling multi-institutional writing programs could better connect and expand our field. Two-year and four-year writing faculty could work together to design and revise writing studies courses that best prepare students for the twenty-first century. Writing studies programs and WPA positions could be created at two-year colleges, while English bachelor's degree requirements could be revised to include more writing courses at four-year institutions. In sum, the field of writing studies could have a greater presence at the undergraduate level and would no longer be fragmented by institutional type but rather enhanced through multi-institutional writing programs.

Our Process

For the past several years, we have negotiated, created, and facilitated partnerships connecting the two-year and four-year institutions described above. From this experience, we have identified a process that could be applied to others' institutional conditions and needs; but first, we explain our institutional contexts and programmatic needs.

Steve is a professor of English at College of DuPage (COD), the largest two-year college in Illinois, located 25 miles west of Chicago, which serves approximately 25,000 students per semester. In 2015, when Steve was hired, enrollments had been declining for four straight semesters ("Students in English"). English enrollments were down 2% ("Enrollments in English"). The department was almost entirely made of faculty with training in either literature or creative writing who were expected to teach first-year writing as well as their area of expertise. There were three professional writing courses—"Writing in the Workplace," "Technical Writing," and "Writing for the Web"—that were part of a multidisciplinary 24.0-credit-hour technical communication certificate. Unfortunately, the courses were so poorly enrolled that the certificate was deactivated the year before and was slated to be terminated. In the ten years that it was active, the certificate only graduated nine students. Steve speculated that if the certificate was revised, scaled back from 24.0 hours to 18.0 hours; housed exclusively in English; and made to offer current writing studies courses, it could be relaunched, rather than terminated, bringing new enrollments into English. The necessary framework and justification for this curriculum overhaul was a four-year writing program willing to invest its time and support

to collaborate on a new two-year writing studies program that would map onto its four-year major.

Nick is a professor of English at Elmhurst University, which is located approximately 10 miles northeast of COD. In 2015, Elmhurst was a small liberal arts college of approximately 3,200 undergraduate and graduate students, but elevated its name to Elmhurst University in 2020 to more accurately represent academic program offerings. As has been the national trend at a majority of small liberal arts institutions, enrollment in English at Elmhurst University has been trending lower for several years, decreasing approximately 10–15% from 2011–2018, as tracked by the college's Office of Information Services ("Data Book: 2015-2016" and "Data Book: 2019–2020"). In 2014, the institution eliminated its MA program in English Studies because of a lack of enrollment, an effect of school districts eliminating reimbursement for high school English teachers completing graduate credits. Enrollments in 300-level and 400-level English courses at the time were dramatically declining as well. And it was not just English or other Humanities disciplines feeling the pinch. Still reeling from the Great Recession, the institution was financially unstable and engaged in a number of unpopular financial decisions, like cutting retirement contributions, laying off lecturers and visiting professors, and eliminating benefits, to balance budgets. Morale across the institution was at a nadir.

Nick was looking for ways to increase enrollments in the English major, which already had three tracks (English education, literature, and writing), but particularly in writing. Such an increase in English-writing majors could provide an opportunity to redesign the English major, in favor of more writing studies courses, and to demonstrate the relevance of writing studies to skeptical students and parents. Moreover, Nick has long believed that the small liberal arts institutions most likely to survive the various financial crises and the impending dramatic decrease in student enrollment are those that cultivate strategic partnerships with two-year colleges. A majority of liberal arts institutions face apocalyptic financial challenges, and to survive, faculty and administrators must think creatively about academic programming and degree-completion pathways that are responsive to students' needs. Partnering with College of DuPage presented an opportunity to demonstrate the value of such strategic partnerships for both schools and for the English department at Elmhurst University in particular.

Pete is a professor of writing, rhetoric, and discourse (WRD) at DePaul University in Chicago. WRD is the only independent writing program in the Chicagoland area, offering both a BA and MA in the field of writing studies. Like COD and Elmhurst, DePaul's English major had been

experiencing steady declines in enrollment, but relative to WRD, continued to enjoy comparatively strong first-year and transfer declarations owing to the familiarity of "English" as an established college major. Attracting students to the writing and rhetoric major has been a perennial challenge since the units separated in 2007. An exclusive attention to British and American literature in the English Major Course Recommendations of the Illinois Articulation Initiative effectively obscured the writing and rhetoric major as a transfer option. When Steve laid out the pathway opportunity for Pete, the prospects for a positive, mutual relationship between the two departments was obvious. COD English would be able to show students a tangible, local option to carry investment in writing studies past the associates degree to the BA, while the writing and rhetoric major in WRD would have access to motivated students already well prepared to excel in upper-division core courses, where enrollments were lagging.

Similar to the two-year college faculty in Turner and Kearns's partnership, it was Steve who reached out to both Pete and Nick. It took approximately a year to establish an agreement with Elmhurst, which ended up being three agreements, and then about a semester to create one with DePaul. We detail our process below. Central to our experience is the recognition that faculty-to-faculty, unit-to-unit negotiation is the first step in the process of a successful partnership. Not only are faculty—as content experts and program designers—best equipped to mitigate the differences in course designs and programs, but administrators at higher levels have limited perspective to understand and weigh the details of course objectives and outcomes. Having moved through college themselves with the understanding that *English* largely equals *literature*, staff professionals in offices of two-year college partnerships simply cannot be expected to envision or lead such efforts.

First, we suggest starting with what both institutions have in common: low enrollments. Steve had a certificate that was about to be terminated. Nick had a degree that already was terminated. Pete faced limited transfer and first-year declarations in an environment facing the "prioritization of academic programs" (Dickeson 21). Our experience encourages us to propose that, before envisioning desired outcomes, those motivated to explore multi-institutional pathways look with clear eyes at what is not working in one's own programs to best recognize what might work across both institutions.

Second, move toward what can be offered. Steve could offer students, but with the right multi-institutional design and support, he could offer well-prepared and interested writing studies students. These students would have completed all their 100- and 200-level courses for the major, so upon

transfer they would immediately increase enrollment in the 300- and 400-level courses. Nick and Pete could offer collaborating effort and support on a multi-institutional writing studies program. Such a program could provide Steve and his colleagues with new or revised course offerings in rhetoric and writing, which could lead to a new credential. Such a program could also cue the need for a WPA, a new role beyond teacher for the oft limited two-year college writing faculty (Accardi and Grauman 76). The new program with new courses would also justify new hires in writing studies. Nick and Pete could lend the two-year college writing program and its students their ethos—a mark of investment and credibility that could bring about new enrollments—generating a sense of belonging and destination that students desire.

Next, negotiate courses. Examine course descriptions and content and syllabi. See which courses align. Could any 200-level courses at the two-year college count for 300-level courses at the four-year institution? Should any two-year college courses count toward the major's core courses? Are there any courses missing at the two-year college that could be created for the partnership? For the Elmhurst agreement, Steve was able to revise the old 100-level professional writing courses into Workplace Writing, Technical Writing, and Digital Writing and create new 200-level courses: Writing in the Professions, Professional Editing, Writing in the Community, and Advanced Composition. Based on their collaborative efforts, Nick and Steve were able to negotiate Writing in the Professions for Elmhurst's 300-level Business and Technical Writing course. For the DePaul agreement, Steve's colleague was able to revise "Introduction to Writing and Reading Center Theory and Practice" into "Writing Center Theory and Practice" while Steve was able to create Argumentative Writing at the 200-level. With the revision, Pete and Steve negotiated COD's 100-level Technical Writing and Digital Writing courses for DePaul's 200-level courses by the same name and counted COD's 200-level Professional Editing course for DePaul's 300-level Editing course. Both Nick and Pete refrained from having any of COD's writing studies courses count for their major's core courses, arguing that such courses are designed in part to condition students to localized programmatic visions. Remember that each school would like more students to take more courses at their institution; however, the more courses that students could take at the two-year-college-price, the greater they are incentivized to follow the agreement.

Once the courses are mapped, then take the articulated agreement to departmental chairs and colleagues for review and feedback. Review steps one through three with them so that they understand what the problem is, what is at stake, what can be offered, and how the partnership could

improve the program. For example, Nick met with his department chair and Steve met with his associate dean (COD did not have an English department chair at the time). Both were excited by the plans and prospects of a partnership. Shortly thereafter, the four met at COD to review the details and in the process, sketched out two more agreements, mirroring Elmhurst's three English tracks for the major (literature, education, and writing).

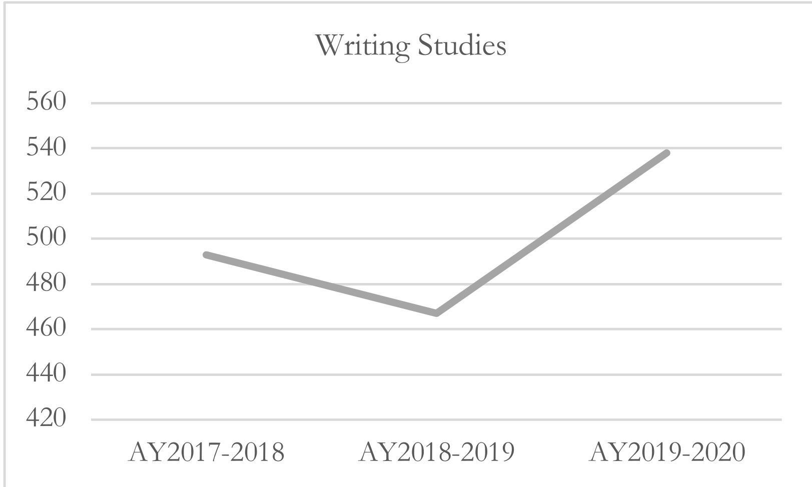
Once colleagues are informed and onboard, take the agreed upon partnership to administrators. Administrators beyond the home unit typically view enrollments in aggregate; at the college level and beyond, cumulative headcount and credit hours mean more than which major students call "home." That is why it is so important at the unit-level to work out those details faculty-to-faculty. Upon finalizing all three tracks, Nick and Steve scheduled a meeting at Elmhurst with colleagues and administrators from COD and Elmhurst to discuss institutional details, such as a tuition freeze once a student starts the agreement or a fifth semester at COD. (Both initiatives did not come to fruition.) Steve and Pete worked with their administrators individually, informing them of the plan and partnership and then having them coordinate with each other to finalize the agreement.

After completing the agreement,[1] the next step is to promote it. One of the mistakes Steve and Nick made was assuming that both institutions would promote the partnership avidly. After a semester without any marketing materials or even an announcement, Steve contacted the dean of liberal arts and COD marketing to start making the pathway visible to students. Learning from this mistake, Steve worked with Pete to promote the agreement right after signing. Pete visited COD English courses to talk with students personally about the partnership. He produced marketing materials from DePaul, the semester-by-semester sequence of coursework, and the benefits of following the agreement beyond financial, such as access to DePaul's library system and advisors while attending COD. Afterward, Pete had a story about the partnership published on WRD's blog and circulated it on social media. Steve had COD marketing produce flyers and post them around campus and email them to students and faculty. A marketing challenge at two-year colleges is that the audience turns over quickly, so constant promotion is necessary.

Early Successes

As a result of these partnerships and promotion, we have seen some early success. First and foremost, we have seen enrollment increases in our programs. At COD, despite English declining overall, writing studies has

started to grow. The new program was launched in academic year 2017–2018 and the new partnerships were promoted in 2018–2019, thus making AY2019–2020 the first year to observe its effects. Writing studies began with 493 students, dipped by 5.2% the following year to 467 students, and then with the promoted partnerships, increased by 15.2% to 538 students ("English Course Enrollments"). English (excluding writing studies), over the same period of time, declined similarly by 4.5% but then again by 2.8% ("English Course Enrollments").



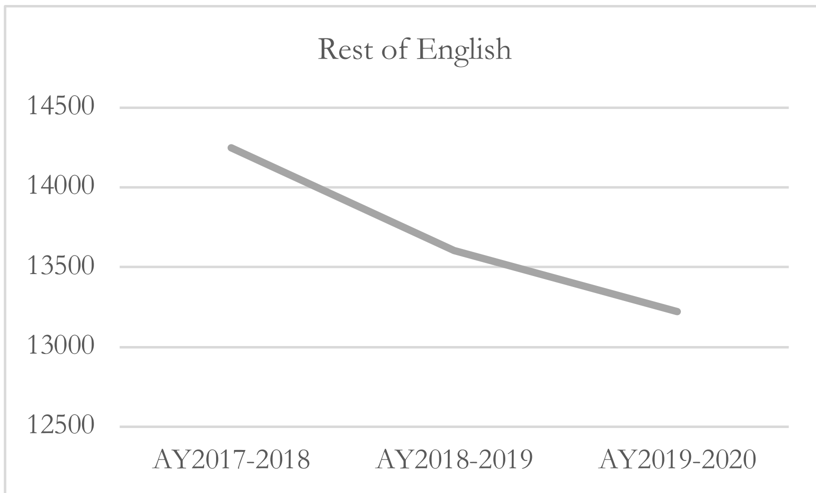


Figure 1. Writing Studies Compared to the Rest of English Enrollments.

At Elmhurst, enrollments in English have stabilized the last two years, and the partnership with COD is credited with helping significantly with that stabilization. In 2011, as noted by Elmhurst College's Office of Information Services, the English department boasted 121 undergraduate majors, but enrollment dropped precipitously in subsequent years ("Data Book: 2015-2016"). In 2015, just prior to the agreement with the COD, enrollment had declined to 80 majors, so the English department at Elmhurst was desperate to find ways to staunch the losses ("Data Book: 2015-2016"). The chart below outlines the precipitous declines.

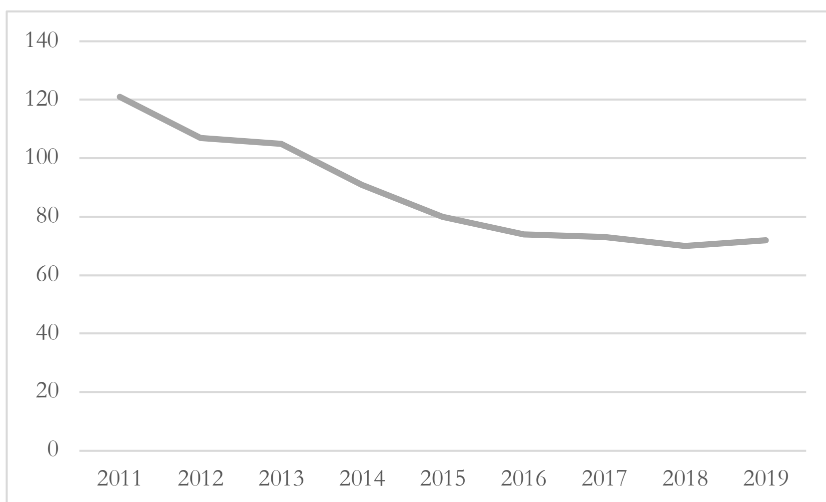


Figure 2. English Enrollment at Elmhurst University

As the Figure 2 shows, according to Elmhurst's Office of Information Services, major numbers began to stabilize after the 2+2 agreement with COD, and that agreement has played a fundamental role in ensuring that stabilization ("Data Book: 2019-2020").

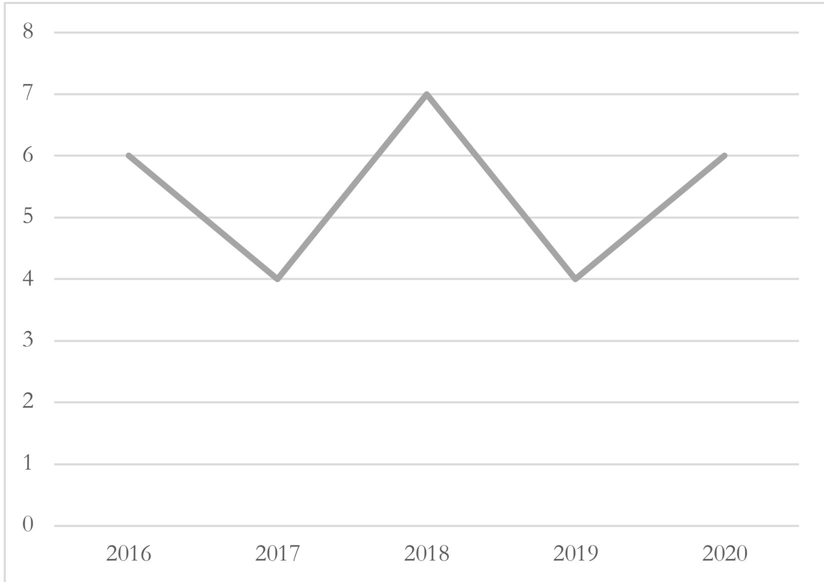


Figure 3. Transfer Students from College of DuPage

The significance of the 2+2 partnership with COD is even more apparent when compared to recent data showing the total number of enrolled transfer students to the English department. In 2019, for instance, the English department had eighteen transfer students enroll in the English major; four of those eighteen were transfer students from COD (Anderson). In 2020, the proportion of COD transfer students to all enrolled transfer students was even more pronounced; of the thirteen total transfer students who enrolled as English majors in the fall of 2020, six transferred from COD (Anderson; Office of Information Services, "Data Book: 2019-2020").

The partnership between COD and DePaul is much newer than the one between COD and Elmhurst; it is too early to judge the potential impact on the major in writing and rhetoric. The significant differences between the English department at Elmhurst and WRD at DePaul makes the former a less than reliable predictor of transfer students for the latter. Elmhurst is dramatically smaller than either COD or DePaul, but it is physically much closer to COD and shares a suburban location. WRD teaches all its major courses at DePaul's Lincoln Park campus, along Lake Michigan, just two miles north of Chicago's downtown. DePaul is more than an hour's drive from COD, and close to three hours by train. Students who stay at the two-year college long enough to earn an associate degree may not want

to make a transition to campus living as juniors, nor wish to spend as much time on the road (or the tracks) as they do in class while approaching four-year graduation. While those of us in writing studies recognize DePaul's writing and rhetoric major as highly desirable, for many current COD transfer students, it may be neither feasible nor viable.

Further, internal competition for COD students who choose DePaul, which offers some 95 discrete undergraduate programs across nine colleges, puts a program like writing and rhetoric at a significant disadvantage. While English at Elmhurst is an omnibus program, offering opportunities in creative writing, journalism, and literature as well as writing studies, most of those options are offered in other units at DePaul. WRD projects a fairly narrow pathway by comparison to the wealth of choices the school makes available. For example, in fall 2020, DePaul welcomed a recent stand-out student at COD—the first ever to publish in *Young Scholars in Writing*—but she matriculated at DePaul in Data Science, in the College of Science and Health, where her two-year college coursework in writing studies will no doubt serve her very well.

It will take some time to see strong results from the pathway created between COD's writing studies program and DePaul's major in writing and rhetoric. This particular transfer arrangement will be successful to the extent that COD becomes accomplished in drawing students into writing studies as first-year students and sustaining them through two years of study. The challenges of travel and culture-shift are likely to be least significant for the two-year transfer student who becomes initiated to the discipline across multiple courses and accumulates a sufficient number of transferable credits to make the move to DePaul feasible and desirable.

While the COD-Elmhurst partnership has seen positive results already, the pathway from COD to DePaul is a long game. We understood this at the outset, and the lack of an immediate payoff was not as distinctive. As the program at COD gains prominence, and intake advisors come to recognize writing studies as an attractive option for retaining students, the pathway to completion at DePaul becomes more useful to both schools. The faculty-to-faculty connection discussed above is crucial to such an arrangement. Driven as they must be by return on investment, large, bureaucratic universities would likely be unwilling to invest significantly in or wait on long-term pathway development. We have found, however, that this unit-level work has been both supported and openly valued by deans and enrollment management officials at both schools. While the pathway's value to WRD in terms of headcount and credit-hours has been slim to date, the agreement has benefitted both departments in demonstrating a favorable administrative posture—awareness of and attention to strategy and tactics

critical to sustaining institutional health. We believe this proactive, institutionally aligned position will elevate the profiles of our programs and lengthen the runway necessary to get the agreement off the ground.

As a result of these partnerships, Steve was able to halt the deactivation of the technical communication certificate and relaunch it as a newly designed professional writing certificate. The certificate was promoted and brought in new students, returning students interested in advancing or changing their careers and first-time students interested in writing as a profession. The certificate courses transferred directly into Elmhurst and DePaul's writing programs, as well, incentivizing students to complete their AA, earn the additional credential, and have all their English coursework count toward their BA degree.

In addition, the new certificate afforded Steve a new role, as coordinator of the certificate, and the supported reassigned time. As coordinator, Steve had access to Perkins funding, which he used to create a collegewide lecture series on professional writing. The series promoted the certificate and partnerships every semester, bringing in new students. Finally, the certificate won the 2020 Diana Hacker TYCA Outstanding Program in English Award. The national recognition was promoted and again brought in new students. In short, with the structure and support of the four-year institution, the two-year college was able to increase enrollments at both institutions.

Since its launch in fall of 2017, enrollment in the certificate has grown every semester. In its three years of operation, enrollment has more than doubled, an increase of 130%, and has already produced ten certificate graduates, one more than the previous certificate generated in ten years of operation.

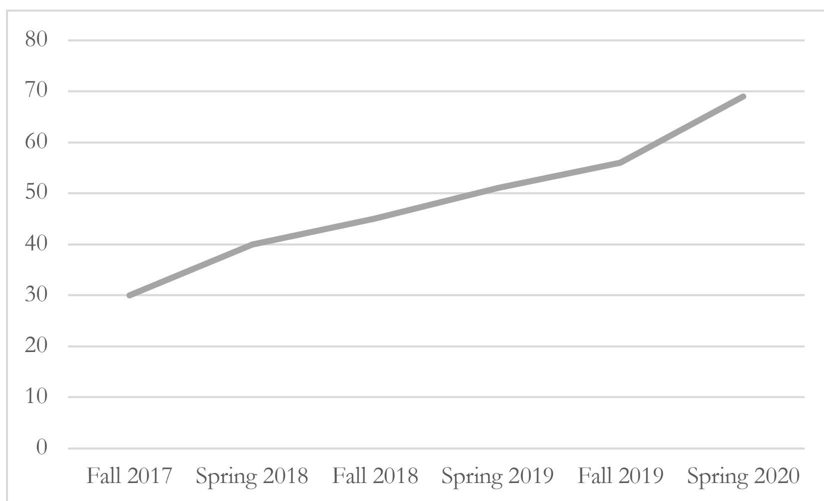


Figure 4. Professional Writing Certificate Enrollment

Beyond enrollment increases, the partnerships shaped a multi-institutional writing studies program. Theoretically sound courses were created and sequenced into curricula, some in professional writing and others in rhetoric and writing, clearing the way for a direct path to a four-year degree.

Conclusion

What we have collaborated on is not exceptional but rather replicable. We are all experiencing decreases in enrollment, especially the English major. The ADE report recommends more writing studies courses ("A Changing Major" 23), rhetoric and writing, professional writing, and certificates (20), but revision to the major is not enough (2). Two-year colleges and four-year institutions must collaborate on sustainable partnerships and curricular pathways. Kearns and Turner have already proven the successes of such partnerships and we are beginning to experience them, too.

Reaching out across institutional boundaries to cultivate partnerships can begin from either direction, as the benefits are mutual: enrollment increases, contemporary curricula, new roles, perhaps even new hires, credentials, and funding. It is an act that may not only slow down the English major's decline but also increase the reach of writing studies at the undergraduate level. Most importantly, a larger writing studies footprint at the two-year college will improve student writing and the teaching of writing at all levels.

Notes

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Examining Retention at the SLAC: the Impact of Race, Class, and Resource Use on First Year Writing

Erin M. Andersen and Lisa S. Mastrangelo

This article explores retention at a SLAC, specifically breaking down the factors that affected our students' success in the writing classroom. Noting that students of color and first-generation students struggled more than their peers, we explore the current literature surrounding these issues and the writing classroom, particularly in terms of the ways that it affects a SLAC that is also a primarily white institution (PWI). In addition, we explore the use of resources that are available to all students on campus, and the fact that most students who did not successfully complete the course also did not take advantage of those resources in a meaningful way. Throughout, we brainstorm ways that we might further assist students in succeeding in the writing classroom and ways that writing directors might continue to implement antiracist pedagogies.

Throughout our years as writing directors, we have often lobbed national data at our administrators as a way to argue for either increasing or at least not reducing our current resources. Starting arguments with "national research shows. . ." was a way to not only indicate our participation in national conversations and awareness of current research, but also typically helped the ethos of our arguments. However, one spring, a frustrated administrator, responding to our claim that students who fail composition are more likely not to persist or graduate (Reichert Powell), shot back with "Yes, but is that true of *our* institution?" Gauntlet thrown, this challenged us to compare our own data to national trends. Simple initial results showed that students with a grade in the C range were just as likely as any other students on our campus to persist and graduate. However, students with grades of D and F were put on probation and/or dismissed from the institution 50% and 80% of the time (respectively).[1]

As pleased as we were to point out that yes, our data was in keeping with national results, the exercise raised larger questions for us, even if it seemed to temporarily quell the administration. What, exactly, was the profile of the students who were struggling in our classes? What, if anything, was being done to assist the students who were having difficulties? What resources were the D/F students using on campus? How could we more effectively assist first-year students, specifically in the writing classroom, to pair them with resources that might help them succeed? Scholar Pegeen Reichert Powell points out that retention issues are caused by so many

mitigating factors (finances, health, family situations, etc.) that there is ultimately little that we can do at the institutional level to raise overall retention rates (106). But our research pointed out that the students who were most at risk for not succeeding when they entered the institution were also not being connected with the resources that most likely would help them to be retained. Furthermore, our research raised concerns about larger socioeconomic disparities in the success of economically disadvantaged students and students of color versus their white and economically stable counterparts. The problems presented by these findings are particularly troubling given our institution's status as a predominantly white institution (PWI) and small liberal arts college (SLAC), meaning that race- and class-based divides are deeply rooted in campus life.

This article gives a brief overview of the most relevant current retention/persistence research for composition studies in terms of race, class, and retention in the composition classroom. Following this, we parse the data that we gathered in order to explore our findings regarding students' race and first-generation status and how these correlated with those students struggling the most to complete the classes. We also explore the ways in which their struggles figure into composition's current research. Finally, we offer suggestions for the possible improvement of retention/persistence by increased availability of on-campus support systems and outreach geared specifically towards marginalized student populations at a PWI. Because such issues are always local and specific, we realize that our particular study may not always be applicable to other locations. However, we hope that our methods and results will assist other WPAs as they work to design their own studies and understand the factors assisting in/impeding their students' success at the university.

There is no doubt that this work is ongoing, messy, and sometimes unsatisfying. Our overall conclusion is that there is value to an institution doing a deep dive to examine retention through the lens of the writing courses. For us, we discovered that while the use of on-campus support systems (particularly those geared to the writing classroom) cannot guarantee student success, students who do not use them, particularly students of color and/or economically disadvantaged students, are more likely to fail. In our case, our self-examination of the needs of first generation and BIPOC students lead us to reaffirm our commitment to socially just academic practices, and a commitment to institutionalized training and pedagogy. Given trends in the ways that the needs of students of color and economically disadvantaged students often go underserved at PWIs, our results reiterated that our overall pedagogy and specific support services must perform better outreach to those student groups in particular.

Background of Our Institution/First Year Retention Team

Centenary University is a small (>1,800 student), rural, religiously affiliated, primarily white liberal arts university in New Jersey. As such, many of our students (38%) are first-generation, and nearly all are from within a 100-mile radius of the campus ("Centenary University"). Like many other campuses with our profile, we have a large number of students in pre-professional programs such as business, criminal justice, and fashion. In addition, we have a unique program in equine science (and a corresponding barn with approximately 100 horses) that brings students (and sometimes their horses) to campus for a business-based degree in barn management and an equine pre-veterinary track.

Like many other institutions, in the last few years enrollment has become a significant issue, with administration counting on every student who can be recruited. As a result, at the time of our study our average incoming student SAT is a combined score of between 900 and 1100, and the acceptance rate is 93% ("Centenary University"). While the university was once known for primarily serving the local, white, upper-middle class population of the surrounding area, the student population has become more diverse as the college has realized the need to recruit outside of the immediate geographical area and the semi-rural area surrounding the college has become more working-class. In addition, the university has recently become increasingly focused on recruiting larger numbers, which has resulted in lowering selectivity and increasing geographic diversity, resulting in a more racially and economically diverse but less academically prepared population.

The result, predictably, is that we are losing a higher percentage of the first-year population than we have in the past (last year, approximately 25% of our first-time first-year students did not return or were dismissed). In response, the college appointed a Director of General Education and created a First-Year Retention Team (otherwise known as "the Squad"). While it is largely comprised of student service employees (the director of Disability Services and two of her staff, as well as members from student life and athletics), the Squad also invited the director of the Writing Program (Lisa) and the director of the Writing Collaboratory (Erin) to serve on the committee as well. Because of our small student population and the fact that nearly every incoming student takes first year writing, this provides us with a unique opportunity to track students and to attempt early interventions with students who are struggling.

Our first-year writing program consists of a two-course required sequence. Students are placed via directed self-placement and classes are

capped at seventeen. They are required to take either WRI 1001 (Composition and Rhetoric 1) and WRI 1002 (Composition and Rhetoric II), or WRI 1002 and WRI 2012 (Advanced Composition). This is designed to help our students more effectively move through the composition sequence and give them greater options if they struggled with their initial course choice. In part, we chose directed self-placement because of the evidence that it gives students greater autonomy and can lead to increased student success (Royer and Gilles 70).

One factor that affects our program (and is surely not specific to our institution) but that the administration does not want to address is the make-up of our writing faculty. We have four lines that are designated for full-time writing faculty. Two faculty members are tenure-track and have PhDs in Rhetoric and Composition. Two faculty members are non-tenure track and have long taught writing full-time for the institution, but have other degrees (an EdD and a DLit). Helping ensure that those two faculty, and the many contingent faculty members teaching first-year writing, get continued faculty development in teaching writing has been an uphill (and losing) battle as the institution also continues to scale back on funding for conferences and other professional development opportunities.[2] This means that the majority of our classes in any given semester are taught by poorly paid, under-supported adjunct labor.

In addition, both of our full-time composition-trained faculty are cisgendered white females. This is reflective of the campus as a whole. In recent years, we have had an average of two to three faculty members of color (out of eighty five faculty). While we know that a diverse faculty assists in the retention of non-white students, our numbers of faculty of color are far less than the national 12% reported (McClain and Perry). We recognize that a lack of "compositional diversity can hinder student retention due to faculty composition" (McClain and Perry)[3] and as a result continue to join other faculty voices across campus to encourage our administration to drastically rethink hiring practices in addition to our current retention study.

Methodology

When we were initially tasked with gathering this information, we simply looked at grades reported for the first-year composition courses for the previous three years (extending back to fall 2016, which is when both our current data system and the two-course required sequence began). We quickly realized that it would be much more helpful to explore other factors involved in the students' profiles, and we sought IRB approval.[4] From there, we compiled lists of students who had received a grade of D or F and

then gathered institutional data based on gender, race, and first-generation status. Campus faculty have surprising access to electronic student records, which allowed us to gather other data (such as intended major) on our own.[5] In addition, we conducted both individual and small-group interviews with students who had failed the writing courses to obtain input into their thinking about the reasons why this had occurred and how outside factors might have contributed to this (see the appendix).

Retention/Persistence

Overview of Our Campus

Like many small colleges, our writing program resides in another department (Gladstein and Regaignon 45). Three years ago, when we began this study, we were part of the English department on campus. However, since then, a reorganization moved us to a department later named Communication, Writing, and Design.[6] This move has maintained our place as a program within a larger department, which is certainly common for smaller institutions. However, we are fortunate to have a free-standing peer tutoring center with a full-time faculty director ("The Collaboratory") and a writing program director. Yet, another strength is our small size, which allows us to know most students individually quite well and to tailor potential ways to assist individual students. As faculty members, we are lucky to have a seat at the table of the weekly retention conversations. As Ruecker, Shepherd, Estrem, and Brunk-Chavez note, faculty are often not interested in this conversation, and for many, if they are interested there is no place for them at the table where the conversation is happening (11). If they are interested, they may actually have "little idea about what other parts of the university do to promote persistence outside of the classes we teach" (15). While both of us had had some connections with the Disability Services Office (DSO) prior to our work on the first-year retention committee, it is safe to say that as a result of our work on the Retention Squad, we both have a better sense for how offices such as the DSO, athletics, and student life work (both by themselves and together) to assist with student success. We have also created valuable relationships with these offices that assist us in other areas of our work.

Goals for Retention

It's important to think about what our goals are for student success in the first-year classroom. There will never, of course, be 100% success rates in these classes (at the very least, because there are always highly capable students whose success is interrupted by other factors). As Reichert Powell

notes in *Resistance and Retention*, the fact that nearly all students entering the university come through our courses presents us with unique opportunities (109). At the same time, however, we must admit that (1) not all students will be retained (or even wish to stay), despite our best efforts, and (2) we should find value in thinking about the skills that students are exposed to in our courses regardless of whether they persist and graduate (production and consumption of texts, for example) (110). What happens, for example, if we view transfer of skills more broadly than just transferring those skills to other courses? Powell encourages us to also see students' "fits and starts," movements back and forth, as potentially productive instead of simply disruptive (117). Our goal, then, is to better understand our student population in order to improve success and retention where it is both practical and possible.

Overall, we want to use our data to see if there are distinct areas where we could do better. While we could all, always, learn to teach better, it is important to think about the training that our instructors (particularly our adjuncts) have, and ways that we can offer them directed training for better addressing the needs of the particular students in their classrooms. As well, we have brought our findings back to the Retention Squad in order to think about ways that we could structurally and individually better support our students. Two areas, in particular, seemed to most affect students' success: race and first-generation status.

Race, Class, and Retention

Beginning as early as CCCC's *Students' Right to Their Own Language* resolution in 1974, research in composition and rhetoric has helped writing program administrators understand the impossibility of talking about "students" in the first-year writing class. Instead, we need to understand them as conglomerates of their individual experiences and backgrounds. Understanding the research, in our case, on race and class, which seemed to have the largest impact on our students' success, is essential to understanding how we might better support our current student population.

Research on students' interactions in the classroom as non-white bodies helps us to understand both their experiences on our campus and their experiences with retention. Scholars such as Asao Inoue, Staci Perryman-Clark, and Vershawn Ashanti-Young have deepened the field's theoretical insights into the importance of race in the writing classroom. Using a literacy-based framework, Young argues for the importance of honoring home literacies as a way of establishing racial equity and outreach to students of color who may be differently positioned to take on the typical white-washed

expectations of the college classroom (5–6), particularly at PWIs like ours. By acknowledging the efficacy of home literacies, not only do writing instructors offer students of color opportunities for building connections between their writing education and lived experiences, they also offer students a path for institutional success. Both Inoue and Perryman-Clark's work highlights the importance of administrative decision making in assuring that classrooms incorporate practices that ensure fairness in approaches to writing pedagogy, emphasizing the need for actively antiracist teaching, administration, and assessing in order to give students of color equitable chances at success in writing courses.

In thinking about the support services that first-year writing programs rely upon, we are aware that critical discussions of race have also deeply impacted the work of writing center pedagogy as directors and tutors negotiate power structures outside of the writing classroom. Neisha-Anne Green; Wonderful Faison and Anna Treviño; Aja Martinez; Mandy Suhr-Sytsma and Shan-Estelle Brown; Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan; and countless others have produced scholarship geared toward recognizing the essential nature of linguistic diversity and antiracist activism in the writing center in order to promote the success of students of color. Green's IWCA keynote speech on the complex and difficult work of being a Black writing center director (WCD), along with Faison and Treviño's descriptions of being people of color in academic spaces such as the writing center, highlight the urgency of these issues in supporting writers of color on university campuses. Suhr-Sytsma and Brown push support services to rethink our approaches to student advocacy, arguing for "productive dialogue about language, oppression, and resistance" (14) at the forefront of tutor education. Keeping abreast of such scholarship, then, helps us to continue to help our students.

As we review and contextualize our findings on retention at our institution, we commit ourselves to doing the work of interrogating inherent inequalities in our work as WPA and WCD. In particular, we keep Mya Poe's call to administrative action in mind:

> What do we do when we find that some students do not perform as well as other students? What do we do when performance seems to be linked to race? Rather than using an achievement gap frame and explaining differences through static identity groupings, it's more useful to consider what expectations teachers and students bring to rhetorical situations across the curriculum. Turning questions of difference into moments of dialogue aligns with WAC's emphasis on "pedagogical reform rather than curricular change." (95)

In taking on this work in WAC (in the case of Erin's work through the writing center) and in FYW (in the case of Lisa's work in the writing program), we aim to both improve instructors' understandings of the impact of race in the writing classroom and introduce them to more mindful, intentional classroom practices.

In addition to understanding race as it relates to the writing classroom and writing center, it is also important to note that race is an important conversation to have in terms of retention in general, particularly for a PWI like ours. In "Where Did They Go: Retention Rates for Students of Color at Predominantly White Institutions," McClain and Perry identify key factors associated with retention of students of color at PWIs. Key diversity factors were listed, including a history of inclusion/exclusion, compositional and structural diversity, and psychological and behavioral climates. McClain and Perry's research indicates that higher retention/persistence rates were found amongst students who had access to transition/bridge programs, student mentorship programs, and diverse faculty and staff.

While McClain and Perry advocate for positive psychological and behavioral climates, research also shows that students who perceive campuses to be racially hostile are less likely to persist and be retained. Ibrahim Karkouti's work on black students' educational experiences at PWIs indicate higher levels of racial stress and lowered levels of social integration and academic achievement (66), leading to higher rates of attrition. While our campus has begun to work on some of these areas, we still have significant work to do.

Perhaps the greatest concern that we directly observe in the writing classroom on our campus related to race is the concept of shaming. bell hooks, in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, comments on this shame, which many students of color bring to the classroom, particularly if they have not attended high-performing high schools. hooks notes that many academic settings are shame-based:

> In many cases simply the experience of being 'judged' activates deep-seated feelings of shame. Messing up, performing poorly eases the anxiety. If the fear is that they will be found wanting, then as soon as they can inappropriately act out so that they are indeed wanted, they can feel better. There are serious taboos against acknowledging shame. . . . They voice shame about feeling shame. (93–94)

Karkouti's research seconds hooks' findings, noting that "research indicates that lower levels of perceived institutional commitment toward diversity are associated with negative social behaviors among all students" (66). However, hooks' framework of shaming is a difficult concept to address with

instructors, since it is hard to imagine an instructor who believes that they are intentionally shaming their students. And yet, in our experience, students of color in our classes have indeed experienced this. One student, who failed composition his first semester, responded to the question of "what impact did the instructor have on your success in the course?" with a very direct answer. While many students simply responded to this question with a version of "I didn't like/understand their teaching style," DJ specifically responded with "I felt she disrespected me, so I stopped working." DJ's answer brought us up short. He indeed felt shamed by his professor, and he proceeded to behave exactly as hooks predicted. Once he felt shamed, he stopped submitting work, started coming to class late, and eventually stopped attending the class at all. Clearly, if DJ's response is at all representative of his peers of color in the writing classroom, this is an area where we must do better on our campus.

First-Generation/Class Conceptions

Data on first generation students and the ways that this might affect their success in the writing classroom is only recently coming to be understood in ways that might be helpful to persistence and retention. Collecting data from students is complicated—for instance, is a student first-generation if a parent had "some college" to report? Is ANY college experience on the part of a parent helpful in providing role modeling for current students? Current research does not make these distinctions, and nor do the data collection vehicles available to us. In addition, first-generation status is complicated by class. Cassandra Dulin notes that a key characteristic of working-class students is that they are also generally first-generation (80). First-generation students, however, may not always be working class. Overall, first-generation students are noted to be "at-risk" for dropping out of college during their first year; national data shows that only 73% of them return their second year (80). In addition, because they have no/few role models to provide frames of reference, they "come to college with expectations that are not aligned with academic reality, and they struggle to readjust these misconceptions during their first year" (81). Composition and rhetoric research has also begun to explore the ways that first-generation students experience the writing classroom differently from peers.

Many of the conceptions that instructors bring to classrooms regarding working class students are similar, if not the same, for their first-generation students. As Aaron Barlow and Patrick Corbett observe in "Implications of Redefining 'Working Class' in the Urban Composition Classroom," composition is a middle-class pursuit, taught in a middle and upper-class

location. Barlow and Corbett note that many instructors, consciously or not, divide working class students into the following categories based on their levels of resistance to the curriculum:

1. Those Most Likely to Succeed
2. Reluctant Scholars
3. Unlikely Candidates
4. Those Who Choose to Not-Learn. (68)

In doing so instructors view levels three and four as students who are not worth our time, or who will be too resistant to instruction for us to bother attempting it. And yet, many of these students, in our experience, appear "reluctant" or appear as if they are "choosing not to learn" because they are instead overwhelmed by the entirety of their experience: "They are aware that their writing expression is not the same as the academic expression expected of them by the university and their writing instructors" (Dulin 81). This is further supported by research on working class students in the writing center. In their study of four different institutions' writing centers, Harry Denny, John Nordlof, and Lori Salem found that working-class tutees needed more direct feedback during writing tutorials (86). Particularly for students who have been raised in classrooms where they have been told what to do and how to do it, the critical thinking and exploratory nature of composition, and the middle-/upper-class performances required of participation of university coursework, may overwhelm and confuse them.[7]

Indeed, we find this to be the case with many of our students. One first-generation student on our campus, NM, who failed WRI 1001 twice, never submitted the weekly summary/response that was required for the course. In Lisa's course that submission is labeled in an online platform as "Weekly News Article" and then numbered. Several times, Lisa reached out to him to ask why he was not submitting them, and what help he needed. Lisa grew increasingly frustrated with his lack of response. During a Squad meeting where the student's name came up as "at risk for course failure," she mentioned that he was not submitting work. However, in his weekly meetings with his DSO support person, he had said that he was up to date with all work in the course. Once his support person asked him specifically about his lack of submission of these documents, the student admitted to her that he was never sure where the summary/response was supposed to go. However, nor did he ever ask. When Lisa asked him why he had not asked for clarification, either in office hours or by email, he indicated that once he had missed submitting several of the assignments, he was too embarrassed

to ask. In his case, working directly with his DSO officer helped to pinpoint this as an issue, and to get him back on the path to submitting his work. His admission, however, made Lisa realize that she needs to go over where to put these documents more than just on the first day, in order to be sure that all students understood the assignment and where to submit it. The instructor's familiarity with the course platform and the assignments and their names, in this case, did not translate to the student; his overall discomfort in the academy translated to discomfort asking clarifying questions about his work.

This realization for us is further backed up by Erin's experiences in the Collaboratory, a space where students often feel that they are able to ask basic questions that they are too embarrassed to bring up in class to professors. Following scholarship in writing center studies that emphasizes the importance of reading comprehension in writing tutoring appointments (Adams 75–76), Erin trains tutors to answer any question that comes up in a tutorial to the best of their ability. Frequently, this results in their helping students find course materials on course websites or the LMS or going over writing prompts that rely on academic terminology with which the student (particularly first-year, first-generation students) may not be familiar.

As part of our commitment to Reichert Powell's notion of privileging larger goals for composition than "proficiency" within the academy, and in acknowledgement of the charged nature of that term, we also embrace James Paul Gee's notions of complicating "primary discourse communities" (the home) and "secondary discourse communities" (the classroom of the university) (174). Instead of viewing the students' primary discourse community as one that must be "fixed" (Preston 96), we must instead embrace the knowledge that students bring to the classroom. In part, we do this through direct conversations in our classrooms about discourse communities, but this is clearly an area where we need to continue in our efforts in response to the findings of our study.

As Jacqueline Preston notes, a successful classroom for working-class students is one that moves writing beyond simply the function of representation. Instead, we must model for students the ways that writing can "resolve tensions; build and sustain working relationships; move projects forward; raise and answer questions; explore and extend concepts; reject, accept, and create new ideas; and carve new rhetorical paths for imagining what could not have been imagined before" (98). This can be risky work for first-generation students, who often feel that the stakes for their success in college are very high. They may feel discomfort at first at the idea of using writing to explore rather than using writing to represent the "right answer," as their teacher sees it. In our writing program, we ask students to complete

work in our WRI 1001 class that revolves around an issue that they see in their home community. Doing so allows them to write about what they know, but it also asks them to explore issues, think about representations of those issues, and propose solutions to the problems that they see. The first-year writing classroom, in this case, can help first-generation students see the value of writing within discourse communities other than the university, but clearly our work in this area needs to continue.

Centenary University Data

Success/Failure in FYW

As we began to explore our preliminary data, it was important to us to understand the profile of the students who were failing the course before we explored what resources had been available to them. Centenary University has a long history as a women's college (we transitioned to co-education in 1988) and as a result, the majority (64%) of our students are female ("Student Diversity"). In addition, because of our location in the northwest corner of New Jersey and the fact that most of our students come from within 100 miles to attend, the majority of our campus identifies as White (50%, with a further 25% not reporting race) ("Student Diversity"). As we continued to work with the first-year retention team, we wondered what further profiling of these students might show both in terms of the group that received D/Fs, and how these numbers would compare to our university population in general. We chose to gather data on gender, race, major, and first-generation status.[8]

The data that we gathered indicated that 1,223 students took the courses over the three-year period, including 587 in WRI 1001 and 636 in WRI 1002 (a significant majority of all entering first year students). Of these, 46 D-range grades were given, and 104 Fs.[9] This means that 3.76% of students received a D-range grade, and 8.5% received an F. In total, then, with a minimum passing course grade of C-, approximately 12% of our first-year writing students had to retake at least one of the writing courses that they took. Probation, then, was a likely outcome of their failure in first-year writing, and for some students, was a contributing factor to their dismissal.

From our anecdotal work on the retention team, we suspected that more students of color were having to retake the writing courses than were represented on campus. In fact, our data breakdown revealed that this was indeed true. Overall, Figure 1 indicates that our White students were having to repeat the course at disproportionately lower rates to their campus population, while Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian students had a disproportionately higher rate (more than double, and in

some cases nearly triple). This indicates that our students of color on campus are not well supported in their writing needs.

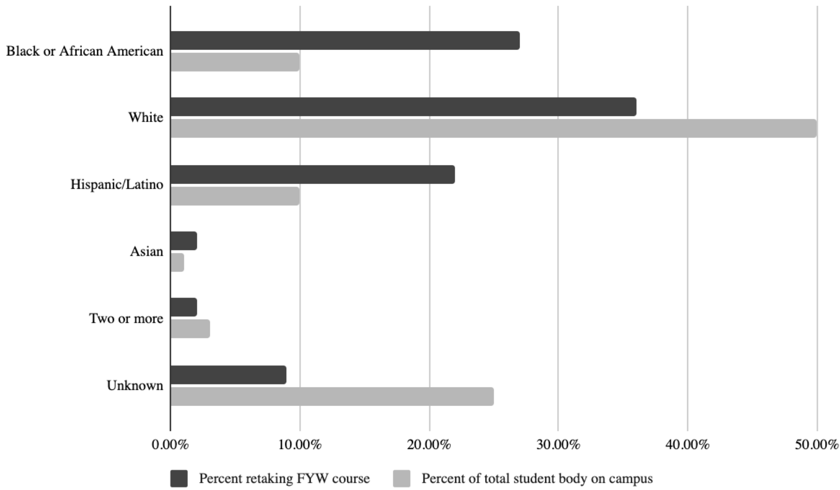

Figure 1. Reported Race ("Student Diversity").

This is complicated even further when first-generation status is considered. Overall, the campus reported in 2017 that 38% of our students were first-generation ("Centenary University"). However, it is difficult to gather this data for individual students, as mentioned above, and approximately 1/3 of our students had not completed the information on their FAFSA about a parent's college experience. Despite these difficulties, we were able to ascertain that 27.3% of students receiving a D or F in FYW courses were first-generation students. That percentage makes it clear, then, that a student's status as first-generation or not has less bearing on their success in the writing course than issues such as race but is still an important contributing factor. As well, the numbers of first-generation students not successfully completing the writing course is more in line with the campus population of those students (38%). However, this does not mean that this area might not benefit from some attention to pedagogical approaches for first-generation writers, particularly since nearly one-third of our struggling students are first-generation.

Gender provides another marker for observation in our study. Because of Centenary's status as a former women's college, the campus has retained a majority of female students since going co-ed in 1988. Degree-seeking women comprise 64% of the student population, and men comprise 36% ("Centenary University"). These numbers were relatively in-line with the

students who must retake the writing courses, as figure 3 illustrates. Gender, therefore, begins to fill out the picture for our students. Slightly more men than are represented on campus, and slightly fewer women, must retake the writing courses. Overall, then, students who were most likely not to succeed in our writing courses had their status complicated when they were male, first-generation, and minority.

Aggregating this data reveals an even more complex picture. For example, 13 students (8.6%) were white and first-generation. However, another 13 students (8.6%) were both Black or African American and first generation. Likewise, 11 students (7.3%) were Hispanic/Latino and first generation. Combined, nearly 16% of the students who had to repeat the writing courses were both first generation and non-white.

Use of Student Support Services

As we began to gather our data, as noted earlier, we also felt it important to look at the types of resources that students were using on campus and how we might place fewer responsibilities on the students themselves for locating/accessing them. This allowed us to create a picture of what students were already accessing, and in turn, what we might encourage and assist them to do more of. Our resources included being registered with the DSO, taking part in Project ABLE (a learning support summer program designed for students with learning differences to help them navigate the new environment of college), being a member of the Equal Opportunity Program (EOP—a program for economically disadvantaged students in the state), taking part in sessions at the Tutoring Center (professional subject-based tutoring, free and open to any student on campus) or visiting the Writing Collaboratory (a peer tutoring writing center, also free for any student). There is some overlap in our numbers; for example, students who are registered with DSO may also be part of Project Able, or students who used the Tutoring Center might also have used the Writing Collaboratory. Regardless, the picture that we created was one that indicated that a majority of students earning a D or F in the writing class were not using resources that were available to them (figure 2).

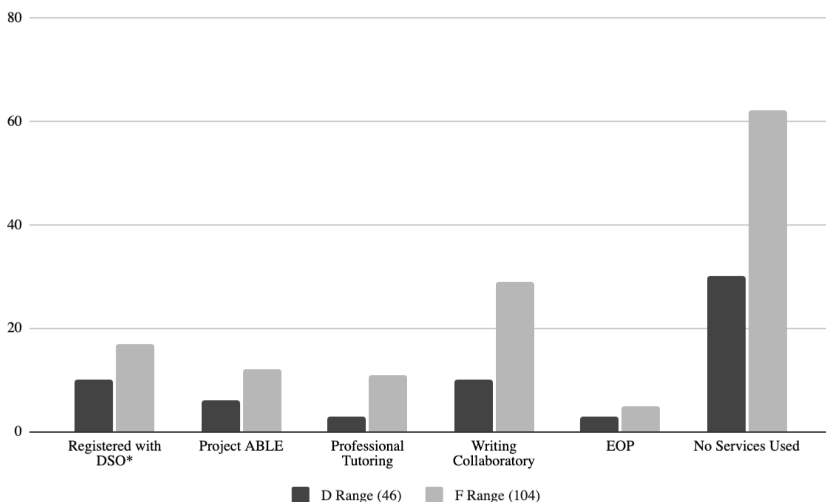

Figure 2. Usage of Student Support Services.[11]

Some of these programs are not available to every student. EOP or Project Able in particular would not be appropriate for all students. Likewise, not all students require the services of the DSO. However, students did not seem to take advantage of the professional or peer tutoring offered, either. Overall, 14/150 (or fewer than 10%) used professional tutoring. Numbers were better with students who used the Writing Collaboratory. In terms of raw data, 39 students (26%) visited the Writing Collaboratory for peer tutoring. Further breakdown of this data, however, reveals that only three of the D-range students and 9 of the students who failed the course visited the Writing Collaboratory more than once. 75% of the students who visited more than once were of color, which is encouraging in that this shows some students of color feel positively about the Collaboratory. However, this encouraging data also must be placed in the context of our other findings regarding race and retention at our institution. And while our numbers initially appear that 26% of the struggling students went to the Collaboratory during the semester that they were struggling, in reality, only 8% made multiple appointments. Clearly, we must begin by providing the students with better access to the Collaboratory. Encouraging students to not only feel confident initiating the kind of assistance that the Collaboratory can offer, but then to feel comfortable enough to continue pursuing it, is an area where we need to continue to improve.

To create a comparison, it's also important to understand which students did not use any services at all. Figure 3 indicates that over half of the

students who had to repeat the writing courses accessed no services available to them on campus. Access to resources that might assist in student success is therefore clearly an area of support that we need to improve.

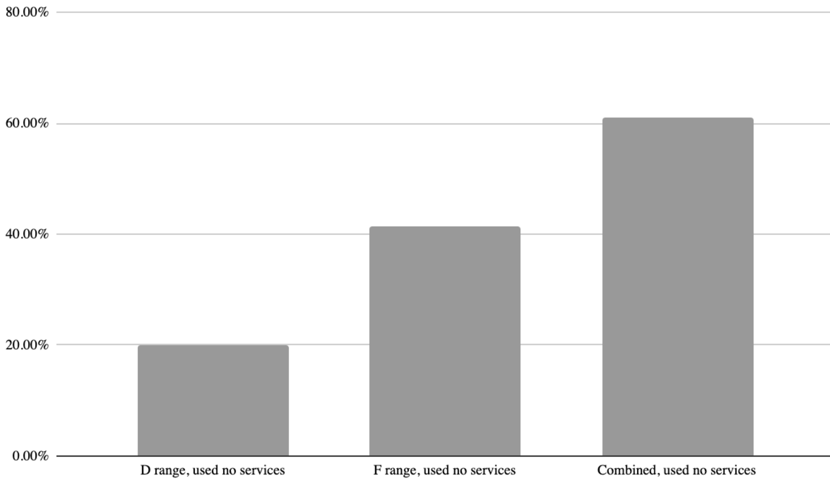

Figure 3. Grade Range vs. Service Used.

Observations/Movements Forward

As we write this article, protests are occurring across the country to condemn police brutality and systemic racism. As we take action in our personal lives to support Black lives, we continue to negotiate effective antiracist responses in our professional work. In thinking of retention, we claim an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to supporting first generation and students of color at our PWI. Without confronting the class and racial disparities evident in our findings, any social justice work we do at our institution is undermined in negative ways. We see retention, then, as the central focus of our administrative work in the near future, not because of institutional imperatives or executive-level decrees, but because of a commitment to access to frequently assessed, carefully crafted, critical, equitable education for all students.

Our data shows us, in some ways, no surprises, but some disappointments. Our percentage of students who are not successfully completing our first-year writing classes, for example, is not an enormous surprise on a campus where only two of the instructors have any direct training in composition pedagogy. But particularly when we combine this with data indicating that our students of color and first-generation students are also struggling

disproportionately, it truly indicates that we must do better despite our efforts toward inclusive writing education. In "Elite Colleges Constantly Tell Low-Income Students That They Do Not Belong," Clint Smith notes that those who are "doubly disadvantaged" (those who are from both low-income backgrounds and did not have the opportunity for elite schooling) are even less likely to succeed. Because of their educational backgrounds and the likelihood that their parents did not attend college, they are missing the "socioeducational tools necessary to understand the nuances of how these elite colleges operate" (Smith). Some of these tools are easy enough to assist students with—explaining the purpose and importance of office hours, for example, can be done in ways that don't shame students who might not know. Requiring all instructors to have students attend their first individual writing conference in an instructor's office introduces them to the space. But overall, low-income and first-generation students often have been taught that asking for help is a sign of weakness, not strength, and that individual attention is not something they desire (Pascoe 7). We must find ways to make tools available to students, then, that do not shame them but provide them with the resources that they need. These tools must be ones that students of color feel comfortable utilizing, as well. We must also make sure that, as instructors and administrators, we are not expecting students in these marginalized populations to seek out this assistance on their own; instead, we must encourage fellow faculty members and contingent faculty to follow best practices in encouraging students to pursue avenues for assistance available to them.[12]

Because our data indicates to us that students are not taking full advantage of resources such as the Writing Collaboratory, it is also important for us to imagine ways that we might invite them into the space so that they become more comfortable with its purpose and staff. For instance, our plans for next year include encouraging all instructors to increase the number of low-stakes Collaboratory group instructional visits by first-year classes in order to increase student comfort within the space. This way, students can acquaint themselves with the facilities and with the tutors in a larger group setting, with the goal of prompting them to return to the Collaboratory (either individually or with a friend) for peer tutoring.

Likewise, where McClain and Perry advocate for summer/bridge programs, we have begun to strengthen our relationship with EOP and the summer programs by involving the Writing Collaboratory, and hope to continue to do so in the near future. Current students involved in the campus's summer/bridge programs had the opportunity to work with Collaboratory tutors in group settings last summer. Peer tutors who were EOP students themselves were chosen as representatives of the Collaboratory for

the summer as a way of making the writing center space more welcoming and community-focused for the new EOP students. While individual tutoring sessions were offered, peer tutors worked with students in small groups in order to continue emphasizing the communal nature of writing and to allow students to have the support of a friend during tutorial. Making peer tutoring part of Project Able and the summer EOP program means that students, as is our goal with the low stakes Writing Collaboratory visits described above, will begin the fall semester with an already established relationship with an available resource. Additionally, Erin began recruiting potential peer tutors from the EOP summer program as a way of ensuring that the writing center staff would include EOP representatives in the future. Beginning this fall, Erin will also be asking student leaders (representatives from the SGA, sorority and fraternity executive board members, leadership from the campus BSU and Latinx organizations, etc.) for recommendations as a way of diversifying the largely white referrals that come from white faculty members.

Our work here also indicates that we clearly need to delve more deeply to find out what our most at-risk populations might need from us (rather than making assumptions). We must reach out to students—particularly those who identify both as minority and as first-generation—to better understand their needs and how we might assist them. Because this data was not gathered before our initial interviews, this would include additional small focus groups and individual interviews and/or surveys in order to better ascertain students' perceptions of both their overall campus experience and more focused interrogation of their writing classroom experience.

There are areas where the work of the Retention Squad may already be making a difference. Dane Pascoe's recent dissertation points to a significant effect on students when they feel that they have close relationships with "mentor-figures" on campus—including faculty and staff. While, in particular, "doubly disadvantaged students" are "far more resistant to engaging authority figures in college and tended to avoid them" (29), setting up opportunities for students to interact with faculty in non-classroom settings, or even setting up mentoring programs with successful upperclassmen can provide vital assistance in success and retention. For example, in response to student complaints that Black and African American students on our campus did not feel supported and felt a lack of community on campus, in fall 2019 Centenary began "Crown to Crown," a peer-support/mentoring program for Black/African American students. While the (white, cis-gendered female) Assistant Dean of Students was the appointed staff member for the group, it was run by junior and senior students of color who managed all recruiting and programming and who were the

face of the organization. While the program is not meant to be academic in nature, it does provide a place for students to ask questions of the mentors in the group and begins to provide the psychological and behavioral climates that McClain and Perry recommend. So, while we are beginning to create stronger resources for students of color on campus overall, there is still far to go with assisting them in succeeding in the writing classroom and other academic areas.

We clearly must also do better in training our instructors (both full-time and adjunct). While sharing articles and resources with them is a good start, we must do more to offer opportunities for them to learn more about these issues. Last year, for example, Lisa shared the Barlow and Corbett article with all writing faculty, with the comment that we needed to find ways to more appropriately respond to student writing that weren't viewed as shaming. We also ran small group "lunch and learn" workshops for all faculty surrounding issues such as "responding to student papers" that allowed us space for critical race and class work. However, we have struggled with finding ways to assist both full-time and part-time faculty that are not burdensome to instructors who are already seriously undercompensated on our campus.

Overall, if we think about the fact that while only approximately 75% of the first-year class was retained, 88% of the writing students were successful, it seems, on the surface, as if we are doing a reasonably good job in our approach. However, the further investigation of our study reveals several spots of significant weakness. If students of color and economically disadvantaged students are not receiving the support they need to succeed in a PWI that is rapidly diversifying in terms of our student body's racial and economic make up, can we say that we are being successful? The answer, as we continue to commit ourselves to antiracist pedagogy and administrative practices, is no. In acknowledging this difficult reality, we align ourselves with the CWPA's recent statement and "examine how our WPA practices support or challenge entrenched racial biases," recognizing our participation in systems that have worked to actively oppress students of color at our institution.[13] We clearly have a long way to go in utilizing the best methods possible to assist the greatest number of students, and we clearly need to continue to do our part to improve campus culture as well. It is our hope that by producing these results in a published format we can contribute to the growing body of data-driven research helping WPAs formulate arguments for antiracist initiatives and curricula, particularly at PWI institutions, and even more specifically at SLACs. At our smaller institutions, we are at an advantage in our ability to create change on a different scale than at larger institutions. We must do better with our teaching for

first-generation and minority students if we are committed to socially just teaching and success for all of our students, not just a select group.

Notes

1. We would like to thank reviewers Pegeen Recheirt Powell and Will Duffy for thoughtful and insightful comments on our draft.

2. While we were not pleased that two of our faculty did not have degrees in Rhetoric/Composition, this situation has been compounded by layoffs in December 2019, when the person with the EdD was let go. While we had four full-time faculty throughout the duration of this study, we now have three.

3. The faculty lay-offs in December 2019 also included the layoff of our only openly queer faculty member. In addition, in response to the layoffs, our only Asian-American faculty left for another position, leaving only one full-time faculty member of color on campus (who primarily teaches graduate students).

4. IRB #CENT-IRB-20-1001

5. While we initially sought to extend our data collection and observations through Spring 2020, the fact that COVID-19 forced our spring courses to go online, potentially skewing our data, led us to end the data collection at Spring 2019.

6. As we write this, a new reorganization taskforce is making decisions for new department structures, which means the writing program and Writing Collaboratory will, once again, be rehomed in the upcoming academic year.

7. See also Vershawn Ashanti-Young, “Introduction: The Burden of Racial Performance” in *Not Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity.*

8. First-generation was derived by default—if a student indicated on their FAFSA that a parent had gone to college (even if they had not completed), they were by default not considered first generation. Likewise, if they indicated that no parent had gone to college, they were marked “first generation.” Students who left the question on the FAFSA blank were marked “unknown.”

9. We did not count these by actual students since a student may have received one of these grades in more than one course (or in the same course but in multiple semesters). Some students who either received a D-range grade or an F may therefore have been counted more than once.

10. Unfortunately, data for individuals identifying as “gender non-binary” or other gender identifications was not gathered by our institutional research office.

11. Students are not required to inform instructors of a disability. However, in tracking these students, all but three students registered with DSO during our study had notified their instructors of their accommodations.

12. Compare to Perryman-Clark, "Who We Are(n't) Assessing: Racializing Language and Writing Assessment in Writing Program Administration."

13. Compare to CWPA, "Mark Blaauw-Hara, President of CWPA, on Racial Justice and Writing Programs."

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Appendix: Interview Questions from the Initial Interview

1. What were the major factors that you felt interfered with your success in this course?
2. Did you, at any point in the course, ask the instructor for extra help or attend office hours?
3. Did you, at any point in the course, use the Academic Success Center or the Writing Collaboratory?
4. What impact did the instructor have on your success in the course?
5. What impact did your understanding of college writing and how this course "worked" have on your success in the course? Did you feel that you were asked to work on your own too much?
6. What impact did outside factors have on your success in this course? (Jobs, adjusting to college, stress from other classes, difficulty managing workload, etc.?)

Standing Outside Success: A Re-Evaluation of WPA Failure during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Justin H. Cook and Jackie Hoermann-Elliott

This article examines how a heuristic for understanding failure in WPA work exists outside of success and also challenges parts of that heuristic that might reify heteronormative, success-oriented standards that stand in opposition to what the field has learned from recent scholarship on emotional labor and queer theory. We argue that WPAs should continue to normalize failure, and we present three distinct, narrative-style vignettes in which we try to illuminate our failures and use them to complement and complicate Heather Bastian's recent evaluation of failure. We resist the use of failure as a tool for productivity and instead allow our failures to be appreciated on their own terms, specifically as they were experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

As WPAs, we plan for success. Throughout the academic year, we plan pedagogical development sessions aimed at making our instructors more successful in the classroom spaces they inhabit. We plan course curricula that position undergraduate students to successfully achieve course learning outcomes. Then, at the end of the year, we cull up these successes and place them in annual reports or promotion and tenure materials that benefit us professionally. Even from our earliest brushes with administrative preparation in graduate school, we are groomed to be successful by apprenticing with role model WPAs, and increasingly, graduate courses focused on WPA scholarship and practice serving as a kind of finishing school experience for WPA hopefuls. Through all of these success-oriented preparatory steps, we take our first jobs feeling almost immunized against failure—until, that is, WPA work begins and we start to notice opportunities to fail all around us.

In fall 2019, Heather Bastian dropped an F-bomb in our laps with her article, "The F-Word: Failure in WPA Work," and ever since we have listened a bit more closely to the quiet ticking of our failures. While we have found Bastian's heuristic to be a guiding source of support and reference throughout the series of international and domestic crises brought to light through the pandemic, we have found that certain parts of this reconceptualization have proven to be more useful than others, particularly as we move away from our attachment to success. In this article, we argue that WPAs must continue recasting failure outside of success, but we also need to reconsider how and why we value failure for professional and personal gain. For us, as for Allison Carr, failure is a "*deeply felt*, transformative

process that incorporates feelings of anxiety, desperation, confusion, and shame," a process we hope to adopt "as an epistemological choice."

We offer three brief vignettes that represent moments in the pandemic when we grappled with our shared administrative failures. The first vignette narrates what was a tipping point in our work together during the 2020–2021 academic year, a moment when we started to understand success and failure on their own, separate terms. The second vignette grapples with Bastian's claim that "failure causes negatives yet worthwhile emotions" (103), and the third vignette illustrates how in the very writing of this piece we failed many times over while also critiquing the need for failure to be valuable. To be clear, our intention is not to pathologize or operationalize failure as a productive framework from which we will benefit, but rather to normalize failure for failure's sake, as Bastian has called on WPA scholars to do much more publicly than we have in the past. With each vignette, we provide contextual information and candidly explore the nuances of success and failure in these scenarios before concluding with a problematization of failure as a productive, heteronormative framework. In the end, we pose questions, not solutions, to guide future discussions of failure in WPA work.

Failure's Moment in WPA Scholarship

We contend that failure is having something of a heyday within WPA scholarship. In the aforementioned article, Bastian takes special care to unpack the larger systemic structures of power within North American universities and colleges that make failing feel shameful and forbidden. She notes that "Failure occupies a precarious position in academic culture" (Bastian 96) given our success-focused, results-oriented approach to teaching, scholarship, and administration, but eventually she came to accept "the failure of [her] writing program to exist outside of the context of success" (104). Scholars, such as Asao B. Inoue and Allison Carr, are re-theorizing what it means to fail, who fails, and why students are failing in first-year composition classes. Likewise, scholars such as Daniel M. Gross and Jonathan Alexander are bringing to light how the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* should be reconsidered to account for failure as critique of systems that are not working to support all students. As far back as 2002, Laura R. Micciche was nudging WPA scholars to further explore the affective dimensions of disappointment as a haunting hallmark of WPAs' professional realities. In the recent collection *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration,* contributors such as Carrie S. Leverenz share how administrative

responsibilities temporarily derailed their plans to secure tenure and flourish in the academy. Courtney Adams Wooten concludes the same collection by explaining how to be a "bad" WPA, backing up her claim with research and theory to validate our need to occasionally fail or just generally do less. We see in these examples and more a curiosity toward failure, one coming not a moment too soon.

Then came the pandemic, which was followed by the upheaval of racist roots that run deep through American society along with domestic threats to national security. Amid all of the crises faced in 2020–2021, we sit still in our roles as WPAs on the surface, sometimes feeling paralyzed to move, to act. But now we feel like those most clichéd swans: compelled to swim serenely on the surface of our professional work, but beneath the surface we are frantically treading water. We are trying to appear successful and calm despite encountering more failure than we have ever known. In her role as the full-time, tenure-track, Director of Texas Woman's University's First-Year Composition (FYC) Program, Jackie has caught herself wondering many times if other scholars in the field have felt as much failure as she has throughout this pandemic. Justin, as the First-Year Composition Program Assistant, is likewise working on understanding his relationship with failure as someone who is both finishing a dissertation and navigating the job market, arenas where failure seems both commonplace and so entirely damning. The pandemic-specific physical isolation from those we work with and our WPA colleagues meant that we have spent the last year searching deeply for how we might make peace with our failures while also normalizing them for others to see.

Bastian proposes a heuristic to help WPAs, like ourselves, make sense of our failings. She suggests that this heuristic includes four critical elements: "(1) failure exists outside of success, (2) failure is an important term, (3) failure causes negative yet worthwhile emotions, and (4) failure is valuable" (Bastian 103). To wit, as we fail, we should avoid thinking about failure in relation to success but as its own distinct experience, to see failure as separate from success. We can do this by acknowledging the term, normalizing failure by discussing failure openly and authentically as an important term in our field as well as continuing to theorize about failure in our journals and at conferences. However, the third and fourth elements become a bit more complicated than Bastian's heuristic might suggest. By proposing that feelings of failure must always be worthwhile or valuable, we are, as one of the reviewers taught us through their feedback on an earlier version of this article, operationalizing failure in a way that does not disrupt the institutional mechanisms for valuing WPA labor that oppress us and silence discussions of failure in the first place.

We hope that what we offer in the next sections serves as a sort of "narrative about the labor of WPAs after a large-scale crisis" (Clinnin 131) that Kaitlin Clinnin asks for in her 2020 chapter "And So I Respond: The Emotional Labor of Writing Program Administrators in Crisis Response." Though not divulging all of the stories of failure the last academic year brought, we have tried to present key moments in our first months of this pandemic up to as recently as the writing of this piece. Clinnin also explicates the double bind of the WPA position in crisis response, that of representing the university, the department, the writing program, and the instructors that make up that program. She argues "WPAs simultaneously represent the writing program and the larger institution in their crisis response and must therefore respond clearly" (137–38), and what our stories show below is how unclear, opaque, and chocked full of failure our response was.

* * *

> Justin: "Hey, just a heads-up: Jordan asked me why we're holding August orientation via Zoom when the University is opening up for face-to-face instruction in the fall semester. They were wondering why we aren't supporting the University's decision."
>
> Jackie: "Thank you for sharing that with me. You know, if they have that question someone else will, too. Thank you for telling me so I can be ready to respond."
>
> Justin: "We do have a lot of people who commute, so that could be useful for them. We also have a few who are immunosuppressed."
>
> Jackie: "Well, we're going to have to keep it virtual for that reason. I just can't see making them come to an in-person orientation during all this when it could easily be done online."

* * *

Like many WPAs around the country, in August 2020 we chose to facilitate our annual pre-semester meeting for our FYC graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and contingent and full-time faculty via Zoom for a host of reasons related to the need for social distancing. The outpouring of gratitude we received from instructors for having converted our pre-semester meeting into a virtual format—as opposed to our face-to-face tradition of meeting in a lecture hall—assured us that we made the best decision for the instructors with whom we work. And yet, when one GTA (whose name has been

changed for confidentiality reasons) challenged our decision, it came as a surprise to us. It was a microcosmic moment of programmatic failure that, on the surface, might not seem like a capital-F failure to some WPAs, but for us it served as a tipping moment in our academic year. The twinge of failure we experienced in this conversation felt like the first of many challenges to our decisions to administrate differently than our program has in the past, much to the dissatisfaction of some instructors and fellow administrators watching our program from afar. This conflict in expectations between the institution and our instructors was how we began to separate failure from success. What seemed like the traditional conception of failure to our administration was in some ways a success to our instructors. We argue later that this was failure, but failure that was meaningful in its own right and standing outside of success.

For context, over the past few years our instructor orientations have taken place inside one of the large, thoroughly modernized computer classrooms available to us on the floor of the building where the GTA offices are located. Our former orientation traditions included providing snacks, coffee, and lunch for instructors enjoying the generally excited bustle of other new teachers running to and fro, collecting their favorite creamers and sugar packets from their shared office space down the hall. So, the decision to go totally online for the orientation was not one we took lightly.

We see this interaction with Jordan to be one rife with failure. As administrators we were advised late in the summer that the campus would be reopening, but we stood firm in our decision to continue as planned with our virtual orientation via Zoom. Jordan's commentary on our decision prompted conversations about the dissonance we often feel as administrators caught between the instructions delivered at the behest of upper administration and the more boots-on-the-ground needs of our instructors. In Jordan's mind, this virtual orientation made little sense compared to the communication we were all receiving from the institution. We could have moved our orientation out of the physical space of the modernized classroom we like to hold orientations in and into one of the large lecture halls located within our building, implemented social distancing measures, and requested instructors to comply with the mask mandate in place in our county. However, knowing well the cohort of instructors we work with, all of whom come from varied backgrounds and a high percentage of whom are immunosuppressed, a virtual orientation made the most sense to us in our new context. In other words, we pressed forward with what felt like a failed-from-the-start strategy as an act of measured resistance to capitalistic pushes to return to normal campus operations as soon as possible.

To us, this microcosm moment of failure emblematizes how we have come to process our failures and successes in different terms. Taken as a success, we were able to deliver an intervention that supported the majority of our instructors as an administrative response strategy, and at the end of the orientation, we felt the pedagogical decisions we made in facilitating this meeting made it quite successful. We established a set of community standards that did not require instructors to keep their cameras on, but did remind them that chat transcripts (even private chats) on Zoom are downloadable by the administrator and that we were recording this for those that could not attend. We also encouraged instructors to utilize the chat feature throughout the meeting but especially while a presenter was talking to give them a space to compile their questions and thoughts as they occurred. We were open and honest about what we were doing with the recording of the meeting; we reminded them of some of the more intrusive issues with Zoom; and we encouraged them to use the software's affordances to everyone's advantage. Lastly, we made the conscious decision to acknowledge the work and home spaces of our colleagues. While perhaps a controversial decision, we wanted to throw ourselves head first into the reality of this programmatic moment. We wanted to acknowledge the awkwardness and tension of this unfamiliar space and do so openly so that we might be better able to cope with them going forward, especially being that this August orientation was our first program-wide meeting since the outbreak of COVID-19 the previous spring. Our instructors were working from home, and we knew how difficult that was for many of them. Therefore, we decided to ask instructors to point out an interesting object in their space (as opposed to the typical telling of something interesting about themselves).

Outside of these successes, we recognized the ways in which we failed, too. We began the day's orientation already feeling like we had failed at least one instructor who was questioning our administrative judgment, but we also found ourselves attuned to the many little unknown failures lurking around every corner. We found ourselves thinking, "Do the other instructors feel the same way that Jordan feels? Will the content we are covering in this session be enough? Should we have hosted two days' worth of virtual orientations? Or is this one-day, four-hour orientation going to cause Zoom fatigue?" We oscillated somewhere between adding another day entirely and reducing the whole orientation to an email. Several weeks later, more questions would arise, but this time those questions came from the instructors themselves. Our economizing of time for this orientation meant that we found ourselves delegating assessment guidelines to email communications, which inevitably some of them overlooked. Our semi-annual review of syllabi showed that some of our instructors teaching in a

hybrid format did not clearly grasp exactly how or when certain students would be meeting on certain days of the week. Other instructors expressed disapproval of our new programmatic policy that all instructors must continue to hold a set number of virtual office hours online each week and to share that login information with program leadership in case we needed to drop by and ask them a question. The trials and errors of this first semester back to teaching in a pandemic had us massaging our temples for personal reassurance more than once, but Bastian's message carried us through these most challenging moments. We came to process our failures as separate from our successes to the greatest extent we were able to and with what little we had left in our emotional reserves.

Our analysis in this section should not be read as pure success or pure failure, but the ways in which we succeeded and failed are ones we have compartmentalized for our own reflective thinking. We sit with these failures still because we see them as stepping stones towards a more critical understanding of failure and what it looks like for all stakeholders in our program. This moment allowed us to better understand the optics of our decisions, particularly in times of crisis. On the contrary and as Bastian has shown us, failure does not have to be dependent on success or vice versa. We can have both/and, and this cycle will repeat itself going forward. We found success. We found failure. We moved on.

* * *

> Jackie: "I think Noel makes a good point about the observation form. The changes we've made to improve that form as an assessment of our instructors' teaching might be holding them to an unattainable standard right now."
>
> Justin: "Yes, I could see that. But we also have brand new GTAs who have never taught before this semester and who have done a phenomenal job checking each box we've added to the form."

* * *

One of the first pandemic response actions taken by our leadership was to revise our existing observation form to more accurately assess the work of online and hybrid learning as opposed to the traditional face-to-face teaching these forms were originally intended to assess. In our program, contingent faculty members and GTAs are observed at least once each academic year. Although we approach the mentoring and teaching work of these observations as a peer-to-peer review process, we would be remiss if

we did not acknowledge that anytime a supervisor observes an instructor's class, feelings of insecurity may abound. For our contingent faculty, many of whom make their livelihoods on offensively small stipends alone, receiving a "Needs Work" rating on their observation form can trigger a sense of desperation and isolation.

To fully grasp what a shift our changes in instructional delivery format entailed, before the pandemic our program offered approximately five fully online and asynchronous sections of English 1013 or 1023, and these sections were a privilege to teach, one reserved for senior instructors with previous online pedagogical training. Our institution was responsive to the needs of our instructors by asking rather than mandating who wanted to teach face-to-face, hybrid, or online. In fall 2020, the majority of our nineteen instructors (54%) requested to teach fully asynchronous, (32%) expressed interest in teaching fully online with a synchronous component, and (32%) expressed interest in teaching in a hybrid format.

To effectively undertake our revision of the pre-pandemic observation forms, we spent a great deal of our summer reading, researching, and participating in training programs that might make us stronger online teachers and administrators of a fully online writing program. We individually enrolled in a two-week intensive Quality Matters certification program for reviewing online courses. We decided that the Quality Matters rubric was not holistically the best fit for our program, but Jackie also gleaned insights from a summer micro-credential program on effective online teaching practices facilitated by the Association for College and University Educators. Through these trainings, we did add to our existing, mostly narrative-style reporting form a checklist of best practices in online and hybrid learning to guide instructors through our expectations, which we also outlined in our pre-semester orientation. By making this revised observation form available to instructors well in advance of their actual observations, our hope was that this assessment would help them build their courses based on best practices for online learning. What we found, though, was that the additions to our form confounded our instructors. We had to pause at several points in fall 2020 to reflect on why the form we hoped would serve as a helpful guide, one that clearly communicated expectations and new ideas for improved teaching practices, actually ended up inducing more stress than we'd previously anticipated. In other words, our good intentions for encouraging instructors to explore and then implement best practices in online learning might have been well intentioned, but we failed in our interest of supporting instructors because we did not pace the introduction of this new pedagogical content more effectively.

Worth noting here is that there were variables at play that prevented this contingent faculty member from acclimating to fully online instruction at a leisurely pace. For one, Noel was brought on to teach sections for us the week before the semester started, a problem of administration that breeds disappointment or even despair, as Micciche and others have pointed to in the past (433; Kahn, Lalicker, and Biniek). Due to a summer spent watching enrollments climb steadily and then surge just before the semester began, we were unable to offer this instructor a section until after our orientation had passed, leaving them little time to develop a course shell as thoroughly as they might have liked otherwise. They were observed in the eighth week of the semester because we wanted to allow them enough time to get their courses up and running. However, when a student complaint arrived in our inbox just shortly after an associate WPA we work with expressed considerable concern about the quality of instruction occurring in their classes, a meeting was scheduled to discuss areas of improvement. The contingent instructor met with our leadership team to co-author a professional development plan for continued improvement so that they might continue to grow pedagogically and continue teaching in our program. Once the plan was put into writing, the instructor expressed their resistance to all parts of the plan. They stated that they could reasonably enact some of the suggested changes but probably could not implement all of the changes by the semester's end, when their mentor from the leadership team would step back into the course to see if they had been able to make some of the suggested changes.

We also want to acknowledge the contingency and inequitable compensation received by part-time faculty at our institution and institutions across the country, which makes resisting mastery more difficult. While we were asking this instructor to retrofit their course with practices that would increase accessibility, student-to-student engagement, and supportive feedback on student papers, we were also asking the instructor to engage in much more labor than they had previously expected and for which we wouldn't be able to compensate them. We also want to recognize that a power dynamic shifted and intensified as the pandemic progressed, particularly in terms of the contingent faculty-WPA relationship. As fewer sections became available to give to our contingent instructors, they seemed to do more work to improve their courses for no more pay than they were already receiving in hopes that future sections would continue to be made available to them.

These conditions make failure more bitter to taste, and yet, we were moved by the fact that this one instructor felt so overwhelmed as to speak out about what they realistically could and could not do, thus showing us

the potential of failure as an administrative technique. As a result, their resistance provided a critical opportunity for us to reflect on how, in our rush to prepare our instructors to be better online teachers, we overlooked how much we could ask of them or how much we could expect them to change without careful scaffolding and time. In the same way we would not throw an assignment rubric at a student and tell them to figure it out, it was a failure on our part to not recognize that the pressure we faced from upper administration to have our instructors become better online teachers was not a pressure that our instructors needed to face relatively unsupported. As seen in Justin's response, the fact that one of our new GTAs had fully adopted all of our suggestions for building an online learning environment made us question whether this scenario was a failure on the part of the contingent faculty member or on us. Who here had failed whom? Given our positions of power relative to this faculty member, we think it is safe to take the blame for this failure. But, again, that was failure as defined by the context of success. We failed this instructor and questioning that meant that we were still working within the boundaries of a "framework of failure" (to borrow Jonathan Alexander and Daniel Gross's title phrase) that still set itself in opposition to success. We were not there yet.

The dialogue introducing this section is demonstrative of the fact that our instructors come to us at different levels of pedagogical preparedness and ability, and these differences can lead to moments of miscommunication that leave us feeling like we failed our instructors. The instructor may have failed to meet many (if not most) of the new best practices for online learning clearly outlined in the form we created, but we also failed to create an observation form that would account for the steep learning curve many of our instructors faced in pivoting from mostly face-to-face instruction to fully online, asynchronous instruction. This contingent faculty member, who has been teaching at our institution for over five years, expressed their frustration after receiving one of the lowest ratings possible on our newly revised form. To their credit, their fully asynchronous classes clearly demonstrated that they had implemented some best practices for effective online learning. By being in their course shell to witness a lack of interest in accessibility, student-to-student engagement, and in providing any students with positive feedback on their assignments, the member of our leadership team who was assigned to be their mentor (a third administrator who did not partake in the authoring of this piece) and observe their class this year had grave concerns.

In processing the contingent faculty member's negative reaction to the observation, we have tried to keep in mind what feminist scholar Sara Ahmed recommends for noticing how different emotions interact with one

another. According to Ahmed, “rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective” (119). We tried to do this, to see how emotions were at play within ourselves, observe what we could of the emotions this instructor was feeling, and even consider how emotions were coming between us in a social sense in hopes that we could avoid negative emotions widening the divide between administration and faculty. All of this made the rush of negative emotions that come with failure feel, as Bastian describes, all the more worthwhile. We were learning from feelings of failure and inadequacy that challenged us. “Failure is an affect-bearing concept,” Carr argues, and we were feeling the many ways that affect marks us just as the faculty member was feeling the way they’d been marked.

Additionally, Robert McRuer’s simple yet searing definition of composition reminds us that the very nature of our discipline and pedagogy was born out of the desired reduction of difference into a singular whole, but it is experienced as quite the opposite. The result, he argues, is the “desirability of the loss of composure” (McRuer 50) and his words return our attention to the heart of queer and crip rhetorics. The work of the WPA, particularly in times of crisis, is seen as the reduction of friction or difference so that a cohesive program withstands when chaos abounds. The new observation form was our attempt to be responsive to necessary changes in terms of instruction, but by its very nature as a genre the observation form was aiming toward a reduction of difference through a set of best online pedagogical practices. We even, perhaps naively, believed that the new set of standards in our observation form would more accurately assess the new work of online and hybrid teaching that many of our instructors would engage in, but we did not adequately account for the learning curve that would come with such a transition.

With McRuer standing at our theoretical helm, we are reconsidering Bastian’s fourth element, which we see as being at odds with theories of queer failure we have contemplated while developing this article. Undoubtedly, we think that failure can stir up worthwhile emotions and that failure can be pedagogical in its own right; we are not convinced that failure must be valuable. In fact, we would argue that our administrative indoctrination that predisposes us to turning every failure into a success could be toxic. Alexander and Gross argue that, despite the excellent work being done on emotions in our field, “negative emotions do not find their own recognizable framework in our professional literature and principles” (274). This “professional disorientation,” as they call it, is less about redefining historically negative emotions such as failure and more about accepting them as

an inevitable part of the process of doing the work we do in this field (274). Because at what point, we might ask, does searching for the value that comes from a moment of failure move us further away from our failures and closer to the successes we vainly strive for?

* * *

> Justin: "Jackie, I am so sorry that your name was attached to this. I feel truly terrible. I guess my understanding of queer theory isn't what it used to be."
>
> Jackie: "We're just learning. We're learning together and I'm honored to learn with you. . . . I'm imagining this like a conference proposal. Imagine we went to CWPA to present this. We have the gift of this really authentic feedback so that we can have these conversations with our colleagues who may have spent more time with WPA and queer theory literature. . . . And they are able to articulate in really smart ways things that we are talking about: the resistance, the heteronormativity, how they interact with each other. . . . It just sounds like the WPA scholars that are occupying both [positions] have something to teach us about that."

* * *

Failure, perhaps ironically, even had its place in the writing of this piece, and we did not see our failure until an earlier draft of this article was submitted to the editors for external review. Our initial draft leaned heavily into queer theory and relied almost entirely on it to provide the backbone of our conception of failure. However, after some very useful feedback, we realized a few important lessons.

Namely, we realized that our application of queer theory was almost counterintuitive to the work of WPAs we laid out. This critique came as both a surprise and a relief. As we were writing this piece, we had multiple conversations about the origins of queer theory as running counter to all that WPA work entails, and yet we so deeply admired the work of queer scholars—such as Jack Halberstam, Harry Denny, and Jonathan Alexander—that we wanted to find novel ways to bring these two fields together. We wanted to think about what queer failure could teach us that could guide us as young administrators, and we wanted to heed the call that Denny and more recently Banks et al. had put forth within our professional circles and even this publication. Therefore, without fear of failure, we went for it. We wrote a 7,500-word manuscript that brought Halberstam's three

theoretical concepts of queer failure to our administrative table, but these competing theories were not going to settle for polite dinner conversation. We asked ourselves many times if this arranged union between WPA scholarship and queer theory was or would ever be truly compatible, and it was not until a reliable reviewer let us know quite directly that our application of Halberstam's theory was at odds with our argument that we stopped seeing what we wanted to see and started seeing another failure.

Our conception and implementation of failure was flawed in that it did not account for what is the very heart of queer failure: survival. We used it as an administrative heuristic whereas Halberstam conceived of it as a way to do the very opposite, to disrupt administrative proclivities for order and sense-making. We recognized that in our isolation and desperation we went running to queer failure as a theoretical lens that might guide us through the crises and resultant failures of the past academic year, only to realize that queer failure is not meant to teach us or help us move into the safe structures we sought shelter in. Queer failure is meant to help us tear those structures down. Queer and indigenous rhetorics scholar Joseph Pierce reminds us that "queer breath is a revolutionary act" (132), but we weren't using failure to revolutionize. In a sense, we failed to fail.

We also realized that while we certainly wanted to pay our respects to the queer lineage of failure in our literature review, what we were actually talking about in this article was the more face-value conception of failure. So, that meant we had to extract some of the queer work we were leaning on and replace it with more appropriate theory describing what we actually do as opposed to what we like to think we do. What we want to do is to operate as change agents at our university, particularly in times of crisis when solutions are needed. What we actually do is keep the systems running, the cogs of administration rotating, and sometimes in small, stealthy ways we make meaningful changes through our curricular development and the renewal and revision of our existing pedagogies. We do not intend for this description to sound as nihilistic as it likely does. We simply want to acknowledge the existing structures we must work within in our role as WPAs.

Failure, as conceptualized by WPA scholars, is a system by which we learn to work better, to do our jobs more efficiently or ethically. These are admirable goals, but they are not queer goals in so much as Justin understands them. While failure certainly exists outside of success in much of WPA scholarship on the topic, it still remains within "the context of a rhetoric of success, not associating one response to failure with another" (Segal qtd. in Bastian 97). This conflation of queer failure with other responses to failure is what we hope to avoid in this new draft. It is also why we have

captured our growth as WPAs in these pages while also imagining a future where failure can exist not as a static heuristic but rather as a dynamic and highly situational experience. Perhaps what the field needs next is not a heuristic defining failure's purpose but one for exploring failure.

While we have claimed in this piece not to fully accept the productivity aspect inherent in Bastian's third and fourth elements, we want to challenge the idea that these emotions must always perform an action. Feelings of failure work on us and within us to mark differences as much as they do to reduce them. In other words, the intensity of attachment to success both brings people together, as in the case of shared joy, but also can separate them, as in the case of perceived failure. These are the concrete ways Ahmed explains the psychic (individual) and the social (collective). Emotions do the work of composition, as seen in McRuer's dual definition. Emotions bring us together, reducing our differences, and yet can also exacerbate our differences. This tension is at the heart of not only our work as WPAs but also how we view the work of failure as emotional labor. It is so often experienced as increasing differences, the differences between "good" and "bad" or between "successful" and "unsuccessful," but we hope that what we have written here is an example of how we can normalize failure and begin understanding it outside a rhetoric of success. We bring our story to you not only to praise the value of peer review within this scholarly community but also to implement in the final pages of this work the value of failure. We believe that the substantive revisions we have made to this piece made it all the stronger and that was in large part due to our reviewers and editors.

Standing Outside Success

In this piece, we have picked up several threads of conversation in the field that we see colliding in generative ways. We are picking up Bastian's argument for failure, sweeping it off to Wooten, Babb, Costello, and Navickas, who add a layer of emotional labor to this, and then heading over to McRuer and other queer scholars for reflecting on what it even means to compose. Our original draft of this article complicated queer theory with these WPA scholars in an attempt to measure and understand our unique moment but later found that the issue was much deeper than we originally assumed. We hope that you will help us and those who have endeavored before us by writing up your failures, sending them to major journals, and contributing to this normalization process that is so important in times like these.

In the first vignette, we offered a story to both contextualize our later experiences and to illustrate how we came to understand failure as separate

from success, as standing outside of it on its own. This is Bastian's first critical element of her framework and as such is what we consider the first stepping-stone towards understanding failure on its own terms. The second vignette speaks to the emotional element of failure. Here we diverge somewhat from Bastian in that we agree failure often causes negative yet worthwhile emotions, but do not agree that these emotions must act as a heuristic by which we must learn. Our interaction with the instructor reminded us not only that failure is accompanied by big emotions, but also that it is important to experience failure for failure's sake sometimes. At the same time, we should try to protect our most vulnerable and overworked instructors (our contingent faculty) from failures that were not wholly their fault. We take ownership of our responsibility to evaluate contingent faculty as justly as possible. Our final vignette tries to make sense of our own failures not through the lens of success but rather as an exploration technique for understanding the competing and interactive needs of a writing program and WPAs. As two people who have seen the incredibly damaging effects of an uncritical assessment of failure, we included this final reflection because the normalization of failure is what we would have liked to have discussed in our graduate training experiences as we learned about writing program administration. We believe that, as young and untenured WPAs, there is a great deal more we can do to normalize failure.

Instead of offering recommendations, which might suggest that we possess all the right answers, we thought it better to pose questions rather than solutions. While there are many questions we have asked ourselves through writing and revising this piece, those we have returned to most frequently include:

- How does the rigor and tradition of academia eliminate failure as a safe option for learning?
- How does academic hyper-focus on demonstrating only where and how we have been effective as administrators sometimes prevent us from seeing our failures as an opportunity to reevaluate our usual approach to programmatic protocol?
- How might we as WPAs begin to appreciate failure as something other than a learning experience?
- Does valuing failure in that way alleviate some of the emotional labor of WPA work? If so, how can we effect that change on a larger scale in order to help our WPA colleagues?
- Might other scholars avoid engaging with theories of failure for fear of tarnishing their success-oriented academic profiles?
- What if failure is the point?

Carr asks and answers that final question, but it deserves repeating. Carr argues that in moments of failure "we can see each thing anew, how it functions on its own and how it connects to the rest; we can figure out how to fix it; or, with this new knowledge, we can build something else altogether." While we are not creating here a pedagogy or heuristic or framework of failure, what we want to foreground is the interconnectedness of failure and its affective quality on both WPAs and the instructors they work alongside. We want to make our failures apparent so that other WPAs and the larger field can take comfort in knowing that failure is neither good nor bad. Failure is just part of the process.

Carr's rhizomatic metaphor is also important at the conclusion of this piece. She argues that "failure fills the borders of our emotional capacities, or may disregard them altogether . . . [in an] individual-yet-social expression of meaning" (Carr). As the rhizome does, failure and emotions grow in unpredictable and uneven ways, affecting both the individual and the collective, or Ahmed's psychic and social. The rhizome's cohesive yet chaotic growth in all directions without order is precisely what we hope we privileged here in this piece. We have often called it failure for failure's sake, but what we mean is a failure that can grow and expand by itself without the confining boundaries of success, a failure allowed to stand outside of success. Carr remarks on failure that "wandering is its function, its method of sustaining life" and we could not agree more.

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When Communities of Practice Fail to Form: Instructor Perceptions of Peer Support Networks and Developing Competence in Hybrid Course Design

Brian Fitzpatrick, Lourdes Fernandez, Ariel M. Goldenthal, Jessica Matthews, Brandon Biller, and Courtney Adams Wooten

The authors argue that attention to new instructional modes allows writing programs to more intentionally trace how faculty remain at the periphery or engage with their professional communities. Through interviews with faculty who have a range of experience teaching hybrid writing courses, the authors study how these faculty engage in hybrid course design by relying on prior knowledge, competence gained in other communities, and access to limited networks of peers. Findings show how the lack of informal networks to help solve labor-intensive course development problems has implications for WPAs' understanding of how hybrid and online learning environments shape faculty membership in their professional communities as they acquire competence and experience. Using Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's theory of communities of practice, the authors argue that writing faculty who are moving into new instructional modes such as hybrid courses can be best served by writing programs that actively support the development of informal communities of practice in addition to robust programmatic resources.

Introduction

The pressure on writing programs to offer classes in a variety of instructional modes has only increased since COVID-19 forced many institutions and classes online. Whereas before institutions may have taught in two or three different modes at most, there are now many instructional modes offered by writing programs. Our Composition Program, which serves almost nine thousand students a year at a large research institution in the mid-Atlantic, previously offered three modes of instruction: fully face-to-face, fully asynchronous online, and hybrid with one face-to-face meeting per week and the remaining instruction occurring asynchronously online. Now, in addition, we offer synchronous online courses and an online hybrid course with instruction delivered synchronously and asynchronously. These reflect some of the changes happening in other writing programs, which have asked faculty to adapt to teaching in a variety of instructional modes including these and others (such as the hyflex model popular at many institutions).

Understanding how faculty adapt to these instructional modes is an important part of identifying how writing programs can better support faculty. In Fall 2019, our program convened a Hybrid Task Force comprised of seven faculty in our program (six NTT full-time faculty and one PhD TA) to create teaching resources and establish better support for faculty teaching hybrid courses. While the faculty on this task force had scarce resources to consult that specifically examine hybrid courses (Caulfield; Garrison and Vaughan; Paull and Snart), they were able to examine work focused on the institutional considerations influencing hybrid writing course development (Snart). The CCCC Position Statement on Online Writing Instruction (2013) also includes principles that were useful to consider in relation to hybrid courses, even if they do not specifically address hybrid writing instruction. In reviewing this scholarship, the task force decided that a study of faculty perceptions of hybrid courses would help us understand faculty concerns and generate programmatic resources that address gaps in the field's scholarship about hybrid writing instruction. In Spring 2020, we developed a plan for surveying and interviewing faculty with experience teaching hybrid courses. However, as the pandemic developed and our institution moved fully online, our study became more urgent, so we decided to use the interview data to develop (1) problem-solving strategies faculty could use to design and solve issues in hybrid courses, (2) additional teaching resources, and (3) recommendations for future professional development initiatives. The task force achieved these goals but, in doing so, discovered a surprising lack of informal faculty networks that could provide peer support.

In interviews completed in Spring 2020, we found that our faculty were not as connected to our program's already-existing resources as we had previously thought, leading us to question the types of support faculty in writing programs need to adapt to different instructional modes, particularly hybrid teaching that has been less researched. Faculty described relying primarily on one administrator, while wanting access to informal peer support networks. Some faculty did mention small, yet strong peer networks, but these networks had formed prior to faculty joining the program. Many described going through labor-intensive problem-solving by themselves and often felt as if they were "flying blind"[1] when designing hybrid courses.

Our faculty come from a diverse variety of backgrounds, often with their own distinct practices, yet faculty in our program are often assigned hybrid courses based on institutional need rather than preference; the program offers relatively few hybrid courses, hiring often happens close to the beginning of the semester, and onboarding practices can be rushed. The task force was already addressing some of these issues, which are made more

salient by the large size of the program, the geographical dispersion of faculty, and by labor conditions that make contingent faculty work less secure and often temporary. During the study, we realized the problem was part of a larger issue of faculty having limited access to informal networks and professional development opportunities that could help them solve day-to-day, seemingly small but labor-intensive issues in their hybrid courses.

In this article, we describe how faculty with a range of experiences engage in hybrid course design by relying on competence gained in other communities, access to a limited network of peers, and prior knowledge. We show how the lack of informal networks and opportunities for solving labor-intensive problems has implications for WPAs' understanding of how hybrid learning environments shape faculty membership in professional communities. We argue that paying attention to new instructional modes allows writing programs to more intentionally trace how faculty remain at the periphery or engage with their professional communities. Using Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's theory of "communities of practice" we show that writing faculty transitioning into new instructional modes such as hybrid courses can be best served by writing programs that recognize the need for and actively support the development of informal peer communities of practice in addition to robust programmatic resources.

Expertise and Labor Conditions in Writing Program Communities of Practice

As hybrid and online teaching have become more common at many institutions, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and as faculty support systems including professional development funding have declined due to budget constraints, writing programs have struggled to adequately support faculty rapidly transitioning to different instructional modes. The tension between additional demands on faculty and fewer resources to support them is exacerbated in writing programs that often include high numbers of contingent faculty who have historically been underpaid and overworked (working conditions that have been called out by organizations such as CWPA, NCTE, CCCC, MLA, and the Association of Departments of English as well as scholars in the field, notably Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, and Amy Lynch-Biniek; Randall McClure, Dayna V. Goldstein, and Michael A. Pemberton; Eileen Schell and Patricia L. Stock; and Nancy Welch and Tony Scott).

Despite such constraints, many WPAs have tried to establish and sustain supportive communities among their faculty before and after the pandemic, identifying this sense of community as an important part of faculty

gaining confidence, expertise, and a sense of belonging (Devitt, Jones, and Rife; Penrose; Rutz and Wilhoit; Willard-Traub). One generative way to theorize writing program communities is through the lens of Lave and Wenger's communities of practice, first presented in their 1991 book *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. This theory argues that a community of practice forms when a group of people who are practitioners in an area (e.g., teachers, midwives, tailors) individually and collectively participate in activities and produce resources through a "history of learning" to work toward a common goal, which becomes a community of practice (Wenger, "Career of a Concept" 180). Others can come to this community of practice as "newcomers" and perform less vital tasks as they observe "oldtimers" in their work, eventually becoming competent in this work themselves and identifying with the goals of the community (Wenger, "Career of a Concept" 182). This theory has been taken up by writing studies and technical communication scholars exploring the informal social networks that support community formation and continuation (Donahue; Droz and Jacobs; Haneda; Kinney, Snyder-Yuly, and Martinez; Kline and Alex-Brown; Kline and Barker; McGrath and Guglielmo; Wittenbrink and Pauschenwein).

Two particularly useful extensions of communities of practice in relation to our study of faculty adjustments to hybrid writing instruction are Christie Toth and Patrick Sullivan's discussion about communities of practice in two-year institutions in their article "Toward Local Teacher-Scholar Communities of Practice: Findings from a National TYCA Survey" and Mary K. Stewart, Jenae Cohn, and Carl Whithaus's work on communities of practice in relation to hybrid composition courses in the article "Collaborative Course Design and Communities of Practice: Strategies for Adaptable Course Shells in Hybrid and Online Writing." These articles demonstrate how WPAs can use communities of practice to analyze the work they and their faculty are doing in their programs and what they can do to support this work. As our own study results show, WPAs may also have misconceptions about how strongly communities of practice have formed in their own programs, misconceptions that need to be addressed.

Toth and Sullivan's article presents findings from a survey of TYCA members "about how faculty find and use published scholarship" (247). They argue that although many survey respondents were actively engaging with scholarship both as readers and as researchers, they often did so as "a largely solitary, individual pursuit, rather than a collaborative activity undertaken with departmental colleagues" (248). Despite not teaching at two-year institutions where labor conditions are typically even more austere than in our context, NTT faculty in our program face some of

the barriers Toth and Sullivan mention (adjunct faculty are typically not assigned hybrid courses), including: time constraints, wide-ranging professional preparation, and little incentive for scholarly activity. Elizabeth Wardle notes that "newcomers to a community normally experience a 'grace period' for adopting community practices" ("Identity"). Newly-hired writing instructors, however, are brought in essentially as experts who are seen as already understanding writing pedagogy. There is neither sustained master-apprentice shadowing before a writing instructor steps into the classroom, nor any participation in a process of moving from being a newcomer to an expert in a particular community, which Lave and Wenger call "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave and Wenger 29). It is expected that those candidates who fit the job requirements and have the requisite credentials and experience come in ready to perform the expected core task of teaching writing.

These challenges affect how engaged our program's faculty are with each other and the program overall. While our institution has promotion pathways for full-time NTT faculty that offer some stability, contingent faculty employment is temporary by design and contingent faculty experience a different employment context from the typical new hire in other workplaces. As the weight of teaching these hybrid courses falls largely on the shoulders of our NTT faculty, there is a real challenge to long-term sustainability of these courses and in forming communities of practice, due to both the increased labor of hybrid instruction, as well as the temporary nature of contingent employment. Even when these challenges to sustainability are recognized, NTT faculty typically lack the agency to make the necessary structural changes; if more hybrid courses are needed to be taught by NTT, they will be assigned, regardless of perceived long-term sustainability.

Labor conditions affect how faculty interact with one another in a writing program. Contingent faculty may feel pressure to display an outward identity of "expert" and, therefore, may be reluctant to display any lack of knowledge or competence about teaching in a hybrid instructional mode, even if it is new to them. In their article, Stewart, Cohn, and Whithaus argue that involving faculty in the development of adaptable hybrid and online course shells is one way to try to create communities of practice among faculty teaching these courses. They claim that this strategy helps faculty "to progressively develop their own identities as online writing instructors" by "allowing instructors to share their ideas and strategies for modifying course shell material so that course materials do not feel statically standardized, but instead, are truly adaptable" (4). However, seventeen out of the twenty faculty they worked with were graduate students who they mention had already formed a different type of community with each

other. These participants were also able to engage voluntarily in activities such as biweekly meetings about teaching, mentoring programs, and collaborative teaching journals in ways that contingent faculty in other writing programs such as ours may not be able to because of labor constraints and a lack of institutional support. Our interviews paint a more complicated picture of the ways contingent faculty in our program tried to adapt to a new instructional mode without being able to rely on already-existing communities, without giving up their assumed expertise, and without much time to participate in uncompensated labor.

If WPAs assume communities of practice exist in their programs when they do not, this can have consequences for the ways instructors adapt to new instructional modes and relate to each other (or not). As will be seen in our study, contingent faculty in particular can struggle to balance the authority and expertise they feel is integral to their positions as faculty members with the lack of experience they have in teaching hybrid courses. In the rest of this article, we examine these tensions and how writing programs can try to foster and support communities of practice among their faculty, especially those faculty in situations where they may be "newcomers" to an instructional mode but feel compelled to act as if they are "oldtimers" (Wenger, "Career of a Concept" 182).

Study Design and Methodology

During fall 2019, the task force designed a survey and interview protocol to gather data, which was approved by our institution's IRB (No. 1514418). In January 2020, we emailed a Qualtrics survey to 17 faculty in our program with experience teaching hybrid courses. The survey asked basic questions about faculty experience teaching hybrid courses, including when these faculty taught hybrid courses, where they taught these courses, and for how long. The final question in the survey asked faculty if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

Fourteen faculty responded to the survey and all agreed to be interviewed. Of the 14 participants, 13 had taught mostly composition courses; one had never taught composition but had taught hybrid technical communication courses. The faculty included two adjuncts, one teaching assistant who was formerly an adjunct, and 11 NTT, full-time faculty. Two participants had taught hybrid courses at different institutions, and one had developed training for faculty about how to teach hybrid courses at a former institution. There was a mix of experience from faculty who had taught mostly online, mostly face-to-face, or both. Members of the task force were also part of the faculty who were interviewed.

The interview protocol was designed to focus on how faculty describe their preparation and transition to teaching hybrid courses, and it also included questions specific to lessons learned, professional development, and feedback and student engagement practices. While the interview protocol was designed prior to the pandemic and explicitly referred to face-to-face classes, by the time faculty were interviewed in spring 2020, all of our institution's courses had moved online, and faculty frequently referred to synchronous and asynchronous online learning modalities. These semi-structured interviews lasted between 30–90 minutes and were conducted and recorded using Zoom. After transcription, we began coding.

Due to its utility in analyzing qualitative data (Lindlof and Taylor), we elected to leverage grounded theory as our coding approach. Therefore, all interview transcripts were interrogated using no prescribed constraints (e.g., open coded) as we permitted each team member to naturally code against what she or he felt was most salient in the text. Because we were a relatively large team, we first coded in pairs. Upon completing our first round of coding, each pair met internally within their group to normalize codes and methods. For example, we worked to ensure harmony among coding definitions. What one researcher might have coded as "teacher engagement," another researcher coded as "relationship" or "mentoring." Through normalization exercises, we were able to agree to a code like "mentoring" as the broad, multidimensional taxonomy.

After the coding pairs had completed their normalization of codes, we reconvened as the larger project team to discuss our main observations, emerging themes, and final list of normalized codes. In order to allow flexibility in the process, we agreed to allow the codes to expand or narrow as needed, and we met routinely throughout the remainder of the coding process, continuing to use a shared folder for codes, memos, and notes. Overall, we found over 75 codes, including codes related to feedback, students, course design, and mentoring. In this article we focus on the following codes: professional development, mentoring, peer, course design, problem solving, and adapting/adaptation.

Peer Relationships: Modes of Identification, Engagement, and Competence

As we focused on codes related to professional development, mentoring, and course design, we noticed that faculty were not describing interactions with peers as they engaged with an unfamiliar instructional mode (hybrid). When we focused on faculty-centered codes, we realized that faculty did not discuss working with others to solve problems, learn about tools,

address concerns with the design of the course, or to make revisions to the course. While faculty mentioned that they valued professional development and would appreciate programming focused on hybrid courses, several faculty wanted less formal, more rapid interventions. This need is understandable when considering what is gained from highly-structured, formal versus more frequent, informal learning experiences (Billett 318).

In short, we anticipated learning more about what our program could do in order to support faculty new to teaching hybrid courses. We found that faculty were failing to create communities of practice in our program that would support them through more informal learning experiences. While writing programs can support faculty in formal professional development opportunities, in order for learning and eventually an identity of expertise to develop, there is a need for ongoing and "organic" faculty engagement to develop coherent practices outside of sporadic, formal programmatic professional development (Wenger, "Conceptual Tools" 131). In the data, we found faculty addressing multiple problems with course design in two main ways:

1. Drawing from membership in other communities, and
2. Relying on prior knowledge and sources outside of the program community.

We also found that faculty networks were limited:

1. Faculty rely repeatedly on the same administrative staff, usually one long-term faculty member;
2. Faculty who have been in the program for a while have very small, but very strong networks; and
3. Faculty solve problems on their own and want more access to informal networks, but the need is not currently well-addressed by the program.

The combination of having limited opportunities to interact with people while also adapting prior knowledge and seeking resources outside of the community impacts participation and non-participation in a community of practice. Competence and therefore confidence come from our successful participation in the practices of our communities. As Wenger notes, "Engagement gives us direct experience of regimes of competence, whether this experience is one of competence or incompetence and whether we develop an identity of participation or non-participation" ("Career of a Concept" 184). While many faculty do seek peer feedback in improving their expertise, most faculty interviewed identified a single administrator or a small pool of static colleagues with whom they share practices.

While certainly serving as kinds of resources for faculty, these two limited avenues fall short in qualifying as clear communities of practice. A community of practice, according to Wenger, requires "mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire" ("Communities" 152). In the case of the single administrator, the interaction tended to be asymmetrical, a mentor-mentee relationship, rather than an equal one. As for the pool of colleagues, there are two issues: first, the colleagues had pre-existing relationships from attending a graduate program together—the writing program itself was not generating their connection, so they tended not to be bound by the joint enterprise of their teaching experiences in the writing program (Wenger's "domain"), but rather by being friends beforehand; and second, the impermanent nature of contingent employment combined with ever-changing course assignments make the sustained mutual interactions required to develop a "shared repertoire" challenging (82). These colleagues may continue to meet as friends to trade stories of their struggles, but as some of them move on to other institutions, or as they are assigned different courses than their colleagues, the shared competencies become incompatible. The lack of any clear and sustained community of practice in the program seems to contribute to the overall lack of relationship building between faculty as well as confidence in expertise among faculty.

Those faculty who do report confidence in their own practices tend to derive their expertise and identity via membership in other communities. For example, an instructor who spent the majority of their career in editing and technical communication rather than composition pedagogy shows a swiftness in their willingness to pivot from one mode to another:

> So, if people come to my course and what I've prepared is something that they already know, then I'll pivot and adjust it over time so that I can give them something new, something useful. And then obviously, in the reverse, if they come to my course and they really don't understand what I'm talking about, then I need to pivot . . . give them something new . . . I like it when they reach a point where they get confused . . . so I like shaking things up and getting them to think about the theory behind all of this by making them uncomfortable [laughter]. (Participant 2)

Similarly, a faculty member who had previously worked as a curriculum designer in a faculty development position explicitly stated not needing professional development but rather a need for better course design practices:

> I'm a pretty experienced teacher. I used to give professional development as my job before this. So, I mean, in some ways I'm like, "I don't really need it." I know what I need to do. But I can also think

> about it with my hat of designing professional development of what I would do for others. And I think—I mean, in some ways, what we always said . . . was that good course design is good course design. It doesn't really, in some ways, matter the modality. You make changes in the modality. But the fundamental course design is what's important in terms of having good objectives, having good activities. (Participant 11)

While neither of these faculty took part in formal training or professional development for hybrid course design, they move confidently in their teaching based on their secure identities in other communities. Their ability to uphold "an identity across boundaries" offsets the lack of formal professional development and a lack of a unified community of practice from which they would otherwise gain expertise (Wenger, "Conceptual Tools" 139).

However, those faculty without this confidence seek the benefits of community elsewhere. For example, Participant One reaches out to internet communities:

> So, I use Twitter a lot for that, in particular. And if I see a resource that I think might be useful, I grab the link and I pull it into Pocket or Google Keep and then, at the end of the semester, I go through those and save the ones or read/save or annotate the ones that I'm thinking about implementing later.

Another way faculty participate in the margins of the community is by building bridges across boundary practices (Wenger, "Conceptual Tools" 127), drawing on knowledge from other instructional modes. Those might include use of freewriting activities, low-stakes peer reviews, and think/pair/shares. As they bring in those practices, faculty also describe how the hybrid format forces adaptations to the scaffolding activities. As one participant describes,

> What I've been trying to do is make sure they've done the reading beforehand. So, at the beginning of every hybrid class, make sure they've posted about their reading so they can sort of digest it. But I also do this freewriting at the beginning of the class, where it's a knowledge check that they've really done the reading. So, they can sort of apply that. And I do five questions and they're open-ended. But they're really simple. (Participant 10)

Another faculty member describes how they allocate activities according to instructional mode—the activity is a familiar activity, but it accounts for the different modality:

> So, the thing that I do most often is that the very, very first thing we do in our face-to-face day asks them to open up the work that they did for the online course day and work with it in some way. It might be, if they wrote a sample summary paragraph, to then review their sample summary paragraph or review a peer's. It might be a think/pair/share. (Participant 7)

Faculty describe their engagement with the course primarily in terms of design practices across multiple learning environments, but rarely in terms of people. The interviewees frequently pointed to trial-and-error, self-note keeping, and on-the-fly revision as means of their growth and development of expertise.

Yet without greater relationship building in the program (coupled with a dearth of hybrid pedagogy–specific scholarship available), faculty are often unsure of the expected competencies and practices of the program. Faculty generally report viewing one or two specific administrators as their "go-to experts" and typically only seek those administrators out. This leads to minimal sharing of experiences and practices among the larger faculty and thus less relationship building and development of expertise across the program. The creative tension between experience and competence that maximizes learning is not happening when faculty are learning mostly on the periphery and in close contact with only one or two members of that community (Wenger, "Conceptual Tools" 126).

One participant approaches the tension between prior experience and acquiring new competencies by relying on their prior experience in online course design:

> I decided to design my fully online class first and sort of keep them together somewhat. And then from there, I designed my hybrid sort of based off of the fully online course and sort of decided which activities would most benefit from kind of the interaction of a face-to-face meeting and making it more of sort of a flipped model so that all of the content and readings and that sort of thing was done online. (Participant 11)

In other instances, faculty show that the tension between competence and experience, while potentially productive, also results in uncertainty about the degree of expertise acquired. Expertise acquired in the absence of full participation in the community limits how the faculty understands their own development and learning. As Participant Five explains,

> I thought I was figuring it out as I was doing it. . . . They just said, "Here, you're going to teach this online." And so there was absolutely no faculty development, no resources, nothing for that. So, I

> never had a comp pedagogy course in graduate school. Everybody has always just thrown me into the deep end and said, "Okay. You figure it out, and try not to drown." But in the end, you do drown a little bit all the time.

Faculty also note instances where interactions with other faculty were less formal and directed by administrators. Participant Thirteen expresses a desire for the type of interaction that would allow for expertise and competence to be displayed across members of the community, rather than only by administrative staff:

> Two or three years ago, we had a panel rotating where we had faculty presenting on the assignments we were teaching, and you could choose what you would do, and I loved that because it was actually helpful to hear from people who are teaching how they approach these kinds of things. So, it would be helpful to go to a workshop on that. . . . Any resources really would be great.

For newcomers to hybrid course design, even if not newcomers to teaching or to the program, attaining membership in the community is difficult because there is no easy access to informal networks. Though resources, including administrators, are available, faculty are often redefining their own competence, but without full participation in the community. Wenger claims that realignment to a new regime of expertise and a new community is a necessary part of learning and becoming, along with the knowledge a person gains. Eventually, a person is transformed by the community: "When a newcomer is entering a community, it is mostly the competence that is pulling the experience along, until the learner's experience reflects the competence of the community" (Wenger, "Career of a Concept" 181). This learning process, however, is inhibited when faculty only have peripheral connections to the community and, therefore, access to the full community's regimes of competence is unavailable.

Participant Thirteen, an experienced faculty member who has been teaching hybrids for several semesters, sums up the strength of the administrative support, drawing on prior knowledge, and the limitations of that support in the context of gaining competence in a new instructional mode when informal networks might best provide avenues for supporting learning:

> I like to feel like I have a model that I'm working toward that I know works. And so I feel like as an instructor, I felt a little more blind than I would have maybe liked to. Even though . . . everyone was very helpful and [I got] resources. [That] actually really helped me to be like, "Oh, this is what a hybrid could look like." I feel like just seeing

> more models of, "Here's a hybrid class and how it works and how it's structured," would be super helpful. Because right now, I feel like the challenge for us is that we're kind of flying a little blind.

As Wenger describes, "Gaining a competence entails becoming someone for whom the competence is a meaningful way of living in the world. . . . The history of practice, the significance of what drives the community, the relationships that shape it, and the identities of members all provide resources for learning—for newcomers and oldtimers alike" (Wenger, "Career of a Concept" 182). Without an integrated experience with other faculty and in an environment where resources are scarce, faculty might not reach this stage of fully becoming, even in supportive programs with professional development initiatives.

Obstacles to Communities of Practice Formation in Writing Programs

There are several obstacles that prevent contingent faculty in our program from organically forming the networks or communities of practice that would better support their transition into teaching in the hybrid instructional mode. Many of these relate to the labor conditions described earlier in the article:

1. The overall temporary and insecure nature of contingent faculty life;
2. New faculty coming from other writing programs with their own distinct practices and competencies;
3. A lack of time between hiring new faculty and their beginning to teach in our program;
4. A lack of networks between contingent faculty and limited access to colleagues, exacerbated at our institution because of the size of the program and the spread of faculty across our geographical location;
5. The pressure to teach hybrid courses out of institutional need rather than preference; and
6. Less availability of hybrid courses (before the pandemic, fewer than 10% of our courses were taught in a hybrid mode).

The result is that faculty are often experienced writing instructors with limited hybrid course design training, or faculty are fairly new to both the design and the course. For these faculty, participation in writing programs should be more than just imitating or enacting practices: "participation

involves 'hearts and minds': a sense of belonging (or a desire to belong), mutual responsibilities, and an understanding of the meaning of behaviors and relationships" (Handley, Clark, Fincham, and Sturdy 181). Without further attention to the development of communities of practice, writing programs can overlook this central piece of faculty participation.

The hope of our program is that all faculty are on an inbound trajectory toward full membership into a community of practice; that is, that faculty engage with one another and with programmatic practices for hybrid courses, adapting them to fit their own teacherly identities as they gain expertise in this instructional mode and share these adaptations with others. However, the obstacles recounted above and seen in the interviews often interfere with this goal. Faculty accumulate disparate practices and perceptions of expertise and competence that result in problem-solving on their own, inconsistent conceptions of hybrid teaching/course structures, feeling overwhelmed/lost/drowning, etc. The result is often lack of faculty participation in a community of practice which leads to their remaining on the periphery of our program, which, as Wenger argues, can either lead to "peripherality or marginality depend[ing] on relations of participation that render non-participation either enabling or problematic" ("Conceptual Tools" 141). Thus, while peripheral participation is not necessarily bad, as it can lead eventually to full membership in our program, it can also lead to long-term marginality when such non-participation becomes ingrained and faculty never access programmatic "regimes of competence" (Wenger, "Career of a Concept" 184).

Because of the rapidity with which new contingent faculty are asked to perform as experts, there is no time for peripheral participation or peripheral observation, a productive kind of non-participation. Faculty are then in a position to either engrain practices outside of the regime of competence, which can include getting into bad habits, never seeing expected practices enacted and being afraid to ask about them, or to seek outside help or fix it themselves without reliance on networks in a community of practice. This issue can continue long-term if faculty continue to be in a peripheral position; as Wenger claims, "the very maintenance of that position may have become so integrated in the practice that it closes the future" ("Conceptual Tools" 141). The question for writing programs then becomes how to encourage faculty with full membership in a community of practice, if one exists, to reach out and form networks with others and how to encourage faculty on the periphery to reach in and link into the community of practice; or, if such a community of practice does not yet exist, how to encourage its development.

Supporting Communities of Practice in Writing Programs

Although we began our interviews thinking that faculty in our program who were teaching hybrid courses were already involved in communities of practice, we discovered that as faculty developed hybrid courses, their sharing of experiences and practices with other faculty was rare. They generally lacked opportunities for engagement with programmatic practices that Wenger states can give practitioners "direct experience of regimes of competence" ("Career of a Concept" 184), and thus struggled with gaining community membership because, as Wenger argues, "membership is not defined by institutional categories" but rather through participation in practices ("Conceptual Tools" 131). In the end, then, we recognized that structures have to be set up to foster the growth of communities of practice instead of assuming that they will form on their own. For our own writing program, and for other writing programs where this may also be the case, writing programs need to pay deliberate attention to the development and encouragement of avenues of consistent shared practices that allow for learning and engagement in the practices of the program. In our program, this community is open to faculty regardless of their institutional position (contingent faculty, TAs, etc.), and we believe that communities of practice ideally would include everyone engaged in that practice in order to be sustainable. WPAs must understand that while programmatic initiatives and opportunities are needed resources for faculty, faculty with different levels of experience and in different institutional positions benefit from informal relationships that support identity and membership building beyond such programmatic efforts.

While our writing program is still trying to balance the tension between how to foster and support communities of practice among faculty with the labor conditions and lack of support contingent faculty face (course release time, stipends, etc.), we have begun the work of addressing some of the obstacles to communities of practice forming in our program, while recognizing some limitations we cannot adequately address. We have built course templates for faculty to use the first time they teach a course so that they can be enculturated into our program's distinct practices and curricular approach; for new faculty in particular, we have also structured an orientation to our program alongside workshops, previously only offered to new TAs, so that they are particularly supported in the transition to our program (alongside institutional orientations for new faculty). These can create a kind of buffer zone in which faculty can become peripheral participants and start to identify with our program's faculty as a community of practice.

Our program has also worked intentionally to foster informal, peer-to-peer networks in our program both around hybrid course instruction specifically and teaching writing more broadly, rather than assuming these will naturally form on their own as we had before. This semester, we have planned short, faculty-facilitated workshops about providing low stakes feedback to students online and teaching synchronous class sessions. Rather than formal presentations, these have been more loosely formed around faculty leading discussions, sharing resources, and generating ideas with faculty groups to help all participants identify as a community of practice with expertise to build and share together. For the past two years, we have also held monthly "Teachers Need Teachers" meetings where, similarly, faculty present assignments they are teaching, activities they are using with their classes, etc. in a more informal way. These also seek to build community knowledge and form networks of faculty, regardless of faculty status, who can depend on each other in addition to our program's administrative team and/or the smaller networks faculty may already have.

In the long term, we may find that there will be more flexibility in terms of how many hybrid courses are available for faculty to teach and more flexibility in instructors choosing what types of classes they want to teach. During the pandemic, many more faculty have taught hybrid classes and may in the future want to opt into teaching this type of course because they have built these skills. Because of the flexibility in instructional modes our institution has embraced during the pandemic, it is also possible that the institution as a whole will be more open to offering hybrid courses in a variety of formats that further expand what hybrid courses look like at our institution. However, some obstacles are more difficult or even impossible to address. Although our institution is actively working on changing how contingent faculty are situated, the ultimately temporary and insecure nature of these positions is not something that our program can on its own address, and this is not something that building a community of practice will necessarily change. Building a community of practice, therefore, will always be constrained in some way by the labor conditions of the faculty teaching hybrid courses in our program.

While a fully formed community of practice might be difficult to achieve because of the labor conditions in our program, sustained community engagement between all faculty through these types of more informal, collective spaces for sharing, question asking, and problem solving provides faculty with an opportunity to learn more about the tools and practices of our program without having to appear to lack experience or competence as they identify how everyone has gaps in their knowledge and resources to share with each other. As faculty design hybrid courses in particular, they

encounter a boundary practice where competence and experience are in creative tension. Writing programs can more intentionally and deliberately support faculty as they engage in boundary practices that create meaningful identity forming and learning opportunities for faculty, including opportunities for informal relationship building with peers and other members of the community of practice.

Notes

1. We recognize the ableist language use in this term but we also recognize the importance of staying true to the voices of our participants. This phrasing replicates wording used by one of our participants that is quoted in full context later in our article.

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Directed Self-Placement and the Figured World of College Writing

Kristine Johnson

Using the framework of figured worlds, I examine how incoming students make self-placement decisions. Although writing program administrators have demonstrated the consequential validity of directed self-placement, we must also address its substantive validity by understanding the relationship between direction and choice. I analyze what students write moments before selecting a first-year writing course, comparing the constructs they use to describe themselves with the constructs expressed in materials from the writing program. The identities students bring from the figured world of school are operative in their placement decisions. Emphasizing the identity work that directed self-placement requires, I call writing program administrators to use directed self-placement as a tool for linguistic, racial, and social justice by offering students more ways to locate themselves in the figured world of college writing.

Long before the first day of classes and perhaps even before their high school graduation, incoming students at my institution—a small, private liberal arts university—work through an enrollment checklist and begin imagining themselves as college students. They submit the housing application and wonder about dorm life; they designate a major and wonder if it will be too challenging; they register for first-year orientation and wonder if the wilderness option is actually a good idea. For conditionally admitted students, the checklist also includes directed self-placement, an online process through which students place themselves into a one-semester composition course or a two-semester stretch sequence.[1] After the placement process, students need to wonder less about their college writing requirement; they have received information about the course offerings, the way our program approaches writing, and even the extent to which we seem accessible and supportive. And the program needs to wonder less about its students; when students take the self-reflection survey and complete the writing prompt, we learn about the experiences, strategies, hopes, and insecurities they bring to college.

Placement is a moment of transition from high school to college writing, and I envision this moment as an entrance into a new figured world. Cultural anthropologists Dorothy Holland et al. define figured worlds as "cultural realms peopled by characters from collective imaginings" (51). In *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*, they introduce figured worlds to

examine how human identities emerge from participation in socially produced, culturally constructed activities (40–41). Figured worlds are varied and ubiquitous, and Holland et al. describe a world that my readers know well: "What if there were a world called academia, where books were so significant that people would sit for hours on end, away from friends and family, writing them?" (49). The figured world of academia is populated by recognizable characters such as professors, students, and administrators performing recognizable activities such as teaching, earning tenure, and granting degrees (59). Its discourse of *originality* and *brilliance* shapes how characters "evaluate their efforts, understand themselves, and interpret the positions they hold in the academy" (59). Before they imagine the figured world of college, students will have encountered the figured world of school, which Mary Louise Gomez argues is "one of the most ubiquitous and enveloping figured worlds in the United States" (48). The recognizable characters include students, teachers, and parents, and its primary activity is achievement. Students inhabit the identity of the *good student* by following the rules, sitting quietly in class, receiving good grades, participating in extracurricular activities, and earning awards (Gomez 48).

Figured worlds are conceptual, existing in the mind as simplified models. In these narrativized, dramatized models of reality, "particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (Holland et al. 52). These conceptual models help people understand the possibilities for identity and agency by assigning characters "a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state . . . as moved by a specific set of forces" (52). Figured worlds are also material, manifest in activities, discourses, and artifacts; they "*happen* as social processes and in historical time" and are learned, enacted, and reproduced through ordinary activities (55). How someone imagines a figured world shapes their initial participation in that world, and material experiences create a feedback loop in which that conceptual model is confirmed or challenged. With continued experience and feedback, participants in a figured world (re)construct their identity in that world, ultimately learning and inhabiting the world so well that they reproduce it for others (53).

Envisioning placement as an entrance into the figured world of college writing[2] highlights two key characteristics of directed self-placement (DSP). Through its direction element, DSP first offers students direct, material access to program artifacts, discourses, and activities. It takes seriously the idea that placement is "an opportunity to communicate" (Harrington 12). Placement is for most students their first material encounter with the figured world of college writing, and DSP initiates a feedback

loop that (re)shapes their conceptual model. In "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae examines placement essays to understand how students invent the university and in particular its specialized discourse. What distinguishes DSP from the traditional placement methods Bartholomae describes is that DSP gives students more with which to invent—more material and discursive information about the figured world of college writing. Second, DSP requires students to position themselves in a figured world, claiming a recognizable identity for themselves. Self-reflection surveys are especially powerful venues for identity construction because they give immediate material feedback. When students check *agree* or *disagree*, they receive feedback on their initial participation: Do their answers mark them as experienced or inexperienced, confident or uncertain, insiders or outsiders? Does their conception of college writing align their first material experiences of its artifacts and activities? The moment of choice is a moment of identity construction.

In this article, I use the framework of figured worlds to address these questions: how do students make self-placement decisions, and how does DSP invite students to make those decisions? I argue that identity in the figured world of school and the figured world of college writing is a factor in the relationship between *direction* (the initial material encounter with the figured world) and *choice* (the positioning of oneself in that world). I begin by grounding my work in conversations about validity. Ethical critiques of DSP focus on its substantive validity, questioning the process by which students engage in the self-placement activity and make decisions. I also ground my work in conversations about student agency, positioning agency as the outgrowth of identity in a figured world rather than the exercise of individual power. To provide evidence for my claim, I analyze what students write only moments before they select a course, comparing the constructs they use to describe themselves and justify their course choices with the constructs expressed in program materials. My analysis reveals the extent to which particular constructs are operative and the ways in which students interpret and use those program constructs. I finally encourage writing program administrators to attend to the identity work and the identity politics of DSP. When we understand how students interpret their first material encounter with the program, we find new ways to make our world of college writing more accessible and inclusive.

Validity and Directed Self-Placement

Early advocates of directed self-placement emphasized its potential as a highly valid form of placement. Daniel Royer and Roger Gilles claimed

that DSP "may be the most valid procedure we can use," explaining that students know more about their educational background and current writing ability than others can know based on test scores or writing sample (69). To argue that a placement strategy is valid, WPAs must demonstrate not only the quality—the construct validity—of the measures themselves but also the "adequacy and appropriateness of interpretations and actions" based on those measures (Messick 5). Validity must extend beyond the meaning of test scores to their use and potential uses in a particular context.

Writing program administrators have addressed construct validity, arguing that placement materials—information, self-reflection surveys, and writing prompts—are valid only when they align with the local construct of writing and preparedness (Toth and Aull). In a 2010 study, for example, Anne Ruggles Gere et al. demonstrated that their existing DSP instrument did not align with the local construct of writing and thus lacked validity. WPAs have also addressed the consequential validity of DSP. Valid measures should effect appropriate results and positive pedagogical and educational outcomes, and WPAs have demonstrated that DSP produces acceptably high course grades and pass rates (Blakesley; Royer and Gilles) and that students are typically satisfied with their course choice (Bedore and Rossen-Knill; Blakesley et al.). In a subsequent 2013 study, Gere et al. validated a revised DSP instrument by confirming that students who place themselves in different courses produce qualitatively different writing.

Despite this body of validity research, directed self-placement has been subject to ethical critique. DSP requires students to imagine the future and, as Richard Haswell notes, that future—even with good information—ultimately involves an unknown course taught by an unknown teacher (Condon 205). The method further requires students to assess their present (and past) selves. If students do not or cannot assess themselves accurately, Haswell contends, self-placement "runs the danger of becoming directed self-fulfilling prophecy" (204). Especially troubling is the idea that self-placement decisions are manifestations of internalized racial and linguistic bias. Ellen Schendel and Peggy O'Neill speculate that race, class, gender, and disability influence self-assessment (219), and Rachel Lewis Ketai argues that self-placement materials often promote individualistic, white values and literacy practices (247–48). Placement materials may perpetuate self-fulfilling prophecy in which students are positioned as underprepared writers even before they are asked to position themselves.

I argue that writing program administrators can address these ethical questions by examining *how* students make placement decisions. We have focused on the design and consequences of placement measures, but we have not addressed the *use* of those measures. Which constructs expressed

in our placement materials are salient? How do students interpret and use these constructs? And what other constructs and narratives are at work? These questions interrogate substantive validity, which requires evidence that students are engaged in the performance task (Messick 6). An argument for substantive validity affirms that students are "actually engaged in meaningful self-reflection" that guides their decision (Gere et al. 2010). Michael Neal and Brian Huot urge WPAs to learn more about DSP decisions and to "consider the ways in which individuals can be influenced in their decision-making" (251). Attention to the decision-making process—and specifically to the moment of choice—has the potential to address ethical questions and to reveal the constructs that influence self-placement decisions.

Agency and Identity in Directed Self-Placement

Proponents of directed self-placement also highlight its potential to affirm student agency (Gere et al. 2010; Gere et al. 2013; Jones; Toth). Encouraging students to exercise agency, David Blakesley explains, requires institutional change at the level of bureaucracy and the level of collective imagination (15). When the university allows students to place themselves, it must "relinquish to its subjects at least some of its power to name and place" (29). Arguments about centering students and decentering traditional institutional authority strongly resonate with critical pedagogy, and WPAs envision DSP as a way to communicate their commitment to individual agency, autonomy, and empowerment. Affirming agency is not simply a positive feature of DSP but a guiding principle.

Conversations about directed self-placement define agency in humanist or modernist terms—as something that individual or collective subjects possess and use. Steven Accardi notes that, as a commonplace, "agency signifies the ability or capacity to act," and in WPA scholarship, the concept of agency is regularly associated with authority and power (1). DSP transfers agency (and power and authority) for placement decisions from teachers and administrators to students: one subject relinquishes agency to another. It is my argument, however, that this definition of agency limits our ability to see how agency and identity are mediated when students enter new figured worlds. In *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*, Holland et al. resist fully modernist or postmodernist thinking, yet their theory accounts for the ways in which agency and identity are discursively constructed in figured worlds, through interaction with the artifacts, discourses, performances, and activities of those worlds.

Positioning agency and identity in figured worlds acknowledges that agency in a figured world emerges from an identity within that world. Identities are "unstable, especially as people are first inducted into a figured world" and develop with experience (Holland et al. 65). When people ultimately "develop more or less conscious conceptions of themselves as actors in socially and culturally constructed worlds," their identity grants them agency (41). DSP accelerates the process of identity construction, but simply assigning students agency does not preclude the work of identity construction in a new world. Positioning agency and identity in figured worlds also foregrounds the full range of constructs, values, and narratives that students bring to placement. To this point, I have referenced the relationship between *direction* and *choice*, perhaps implying that DSP is a self-contained activity in which only constructs *internal* to the process are operative: students receive direction from the program and make a choice based on that direction. Yet Holland et al. describe how figured worlds exist in relationship with other figured worlds and with structural identity categories (129–32). Not all structural identities are "taken up, elaborated, and made hegemonic" (131) in all figured worlds, but all figured worlds contain structures of power, status, and privilege.

When students encounter the figured world of college writing, their identity and agency have almost certainly been constructed by their previous experience in the world of school. And in the figured world of school, identities are often shaped by sociocultural and sociolinguistic assumptions about literacy. For example, Wendy Luttrell and Caroline Parker examine the literacy practices of high school students who love writing yet struggle to pass their English courses, arguing that the figured world of school often fails to acknowledge personally significant literacy practices. When students accept these negative views of their literacy practices, they may develop identities as *bad students* or *bad writers* (245–6). From the perspective of figured worlds, educational inequality and injustice are systemic rather than the result of individual agency. Self-identified *bad students* may have difficulty accessing the world of school, and material feedback reinforces their identity as low-status characters in these worlds. When students enter college, they have positioned themselves (and have been positioned) in the figured world of school based on test scores, grades, and experiences. And they carry this identity as they attempt to learn the figured worlds of college and college writing.

Program Artifacts: Constructs Expressed

The directed self-placement system in my first-year writing program was prompted by a mid-winter request from the university to administer all placement tests online. I was disappointed because I enjoyed talking with students as they lingered after our summer orientation placement sessions, but the upheaval presented an opportunity: we could redesign our decade-old placement materials, and we could learn more about our students and their choices. Ten years after the stretch course was created, instructors in our program had come to believe that writing ability was not the only—or perhaps the most important—factor distinguishing students who benefit from the stretch course from students who succeed in the one-semester course. Also significant were their study skills and executive functioning, their motivation for writing and academic work. Program instructors identified two student identities made socially recognizable not only by their literacy practices but also by their actions, values, and motivations.

We began the revision process by defining three broad constructs that we would express in our materials and measure in the self-reflection survey. First, we defined *literacy practices/processes*, a construct that addresses writing proficiency in the program. We aligned all placement materials with the local construct of writing, addressing only the processes, genres, and rhetorical aims described in our course outcomes and assessment plans. Second, we defined constructs that differentiate the two course options: *pace of learning* and *level of support*. Students place themselves into courses that differ according to pace and built-in level of support, and these constructs indicate what we intend to measure: the ability to work at a particular pace with a particular level of support. Third, we defined constructs that characterize academic behaviors, testing the sense in our collective imagining that stretch sequence students and one-semester students are differently recognizable based on *study skills* and *motivation*.

Incoming domestic students receive a link to the placement website, which contains information about the courses and the program, video interviews with faculty and students, and sample reading and writing assignments. In the videos, a professor outlines the course options, and four students describe their reasons for selecting either the stretch sequence (English 100/102) or the one-semester course (English 101), as well as their experiences in the course. After incoming students review these materials, they begin a self-reflection survey run through Qualtrics. The survey contains twenty-five questions, all scored on a four-point scale. When students reach the end of the survey, we ask them to consider the videos, the sample assignments, and their survey responses before indicating their

course choice. We also require them to answer this question before clicking *submit*: "In one or two paragraphs, please discuss your reasons for choosing either English 100/102 or English 101. If you are unsure about which course is best, please also tell us about your questions and concerns." Students who need assistance are contacted by phone; these conversations are largely for reassurance and rarely result in a different decision.

To understand how students interpret and use the constructs expressed in the placement materials, two researchers coded each clause in the videos and the survey.[3] Summarized in table 1, the analysis reveals which constructs were most frequently expressed in the placement materials.

Table 1. Constructs Expressed in DSP Materials.

Construct	Percentage of Codes	Survey and Video Examples
Literacy Practices/Processes	37	the main points of this [sample] article pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of your essay
Level of Support	27	I met regularly with my professor revise it without additional assistance
Pace of Learning	19	write a draft of this essay within a few days the papers in English 101 came at me fast
Study Habits	10	manage multiple writing projects at the same time use a calendar and/or to-do list to manage my assignments and deadlines
Motivation	7	I have set high academic goals for myself in college I will work hard to meet them

The most frequently expressed construct, *literacy practices/processes*, encompasses several constructs Toth and Aull identified in a corpus of DSP surveys: *reading practices/abilities*, *writing practices/processes*, *development of ideas*, and *rhetorical awareness* (7). Three clauses reference the sample

reading assignment and thus *reading practices/abilities*, and the remainder reference writing processes such as invention, integrating source material, adapting writing for different audiences, and revision. *Literacy practices/ processes* does not include linguistic background or familiarity with Standard Edited English, and our placement materials never mention usage, grammar, punctuation, or mechanics. By deemphasizing standardized language—and by rejecting the language of correctness and metaphors of clarity—we intended to avoid promoting narrow, racialized conceptions of writing and literacy. Yet the materials themselves may nonetheless promote standardized language simply by employing conventional linguistic features. As Bethany Davila argues, positioning language varieties as neutral or universally accessible ultimately positions them as superior (134–36), and our materials do not explicitly work against this implicitly superior positioning as they might.

The second most frequently expressed construct, *level of support*, references help, assistance, or support from faculty and classmates. Several survey questions include the phrase "without additional assistance," and one student shared in his video interview, "I never felt like I was totally out there on my own with my writing projects." *Pace of learning* was the third most frequently expressed construct. Coded clauses refer to time or speed, including the length of a semester. An English 100/102 student appreciated having "time for each big assignment," and survey questions asked students about their ability to complete particular assignments within a specified time frame.

Together comprising only seventeen percent of constructs expressed, *study habits* and *motivation* transcend subject areas but have particular meaning in writing courses. *Study habits* refers to basic organizational and project management skills, and it extends to "break[ing] up a major writing assignment into smaller tasks." *Motivation* addresses students' willingness to take a faster course when a stretch option is available, and it measures their motivation for writing and academic work. One survey question states, "I don't mind working hard to improve my papers," and an English 101 student shared that "it was a challenging class . . . I knew I would need to invest lots of time and effort."

These constructs begin to reveal socially recognizable identities. Some students are able to move through the writing process without extraordinary difficulty, entering college with strategies to manage large projects and meet deadlines. They are motivated to undertake academic work, which they find engaging and even enjoyable. Other students lack confidence in their ability to move through the writing process without extraordinary difficulty and/or assistance. Less willing to set ambitious academic goals,

they may lack some degree of academic motivation but value supportive relationships.

Student Responses: Constructs Interpreted

After the first several dozen students completed the revised DSP process, I was surprised by their written responses. Students were writing from across the country, but their words were stunningly similar—and they were often *our* words replicated verbatim from the videos and survey questions. When we looked more systematically at their responses, however, a more complex reality emerged: students indeed cited program constructs, but depending on their course choice, they interpreted and used these constructs in distinct ways. Students also cited constructs never mentioned in the program materials, and again depending on their course choice, they introduced different constructs. Their decision-making process was mediated by their identity in the figured world of school and their perceived distance from the figured world of college writing. Students with strong, positive academic identities already imagined themselves as college writers and recognized themselves as successful characters in the new world.

Over three placement cycles, students have written approximately 15,000 words explaining their decision to enroll in the stretch sequence or the one-semester course.[4] English 100/102 students wrote 443 sentences, and English 101 students wrote 307 sentences. (About sixty-five percent of students selected the stretch sequence each year, but they wrote shorter responses.) Using the five program constructs, the same researchers used the same coding procedures to analyze clauses in which students describe themselves or justify their course choice. We also produced an in-vivo record of external constructs—constructs the program did not express but that students used to describe themselves or justify their choice.

Students who chose English 100/102 cited *literacy practices/processes* most frequently, with the construct representing forty-six percent of codes (see table 2). They interpreted the construct as the specific ability to write "college essays," using it to evaluate themselves negatively. Identifying specific elements of the writing process with which they struggle (coming up with ideas, elaboration, revision), these students described their essays and their writing as *bad*, *weak*, *not great*, and *marginal*. Although the program materials never explicitly introduce standardized language as a literacy construct or use the word *grammar*, students frequently disclosed that they "have trouble with grammar" and that their "grammar is not the greatest." Another striking theme in their responses is their perception that a large gap exists between themselves and college writing—an entirely reasonable

feeling given the timing of the placement process yet also a feeling their English 101 counterparts do not share. They reported that their "writing ability is not yet college caliber" or "up to par with college essays." Because they do not yet identify as college writers, they envision the stretch sequence as a place to "adjust from high school to college writing" and become college writers.

Table 2. Constructs Expressed in 100/102 Student Responses

Construct	Percentage of Codes	Example Quotations
Literacy Practices/Processes	46	My writing is not up to par with college essays I am marginal at my writing skills and layout for a paper and what to do for different audiences
Level of Support	10	I want to work with my peers and professors when I have assignments I want to start off my college career with as much help I can get
Pace of Learning	31	The stress of a fast-paced class is not something I see myself in, and I would like more time to get my assignments done I am not one for going fast in school, I take my time on things
Study Habits	4	[The stretch sequence] can help me become more organized and help me get more things done I have the terrible tendency to slack off and procrastinate on larger projects
Motivation	9	I often am really lazy when it comes to it I do feel that I am a person who works hard to make my writing the best it can be

The second most frequent construct for English 100/102 students was *pace of learning*, representing thirty-one percent of codes. Students interpreted and used the construct in two ways: first, they applied the concept of pace to themselves. Although the word *slow* does not appear in program materials, students explain that *slow writers, slow readers*, and *slow learners* take slow classes. "When I was growing up," one student wrote, "I was the one taking baby steps rather than that big leap. I like to learn with little baby steps at a time." Another simply explained, "I have always been a slow writer." Second, students interpreted pace as a way to manage what they perceive to be a stressful, risky transition to college. "A slower speed could be better for me with the transition," a student who also identified as a slow writer reported, "almost like a warm up and then getting the hang of everything later." Students again perceived distance between themselves and the figured world of college writing, and they wanted to close that distance slowly and carefully.

Students who chose English 100/102 cited *level of support* and *motivation* relatively infrequently, and *study habits* represented only four percent of codes. When citing *level of support*, students explained that they have always needed "extra help" in school, just as they have always struggled in writing or learned at a slow pace. Although the program materials emphasize two kinds of support (support from peers in a small cohort and from faculty), all but one student wrote about only faculty support. Students who cited *motivation* shared their desire to become better writers and to work hard, but some referenced their lack of effort, propensity for laziness, and desire for a class that would be "smooth sailing."

Only ten percent of clauses written by English 100/102 students cited external constructs. All of these constructs represent reasons why students may not have developed an identity as a good student in the world of school. They include *high school grades*, *standardized test scores*, *learning disabilities*, and *extended time between high school and college*. The constructs *high school grades* and *standardized test scores* align with *literacy practices/processes* because students use experiences with standardized language and assessment to draw conclusions about their writing ability, and *learning disabilities* aligns—for students who report having dyslexia and receiving 504 plans or other learning accomodations—with a slower *pace of learning*.

Students who chose English 101 cited *literacy practices/processes* and *motivation* equally frequently, with each construct representing thirty-two percent of codes (see table 3). Although these students did not reduce *literacy practices/processes* to "college essays," they also used the construct as an evaluative tool. Compared with the negative, often specific evaluations English 100/102 students made of themselves, English 101 students

evaluated themselves positively and in generalities. They reported that writing is "one of my strengths," and they described themselves as "capable" and "confident" writers. And as I discuss below, students who evaluated their writing ability positively regularly grounded their judgments in external constructs.

Table 3. Constructs Expressed in 101 Student Responses

Construct	Percentage of Codes	Example Quotations
Literacy Practices/Processes	32	I am confident in my writing skills I feel like writing is one of my best strengths
Level of Support	3	I will use tutors who can provide me with some assistance if needed
Pace of Learning	25	I just want to get it over with When I used to do writing assignments, I'd always either get them done the day they were assigned
Study Habits	8	I believe my time management skills are good I will map out a way to get things done on time and not be cramming the night before
Motivation	32	I am ready to take a challenging class where I will have to work hard to achieve my goals I am ready to apply myself to my schoolwork and work my hardest

English 101 students interpreted *motivation* as the desire to undertake a challenge, and they envision challenges as positive. They perceived English 101 to be the more challenging course: "a challenge I would like to take on" and "an environment where I can be challenged and focus on my work." With their English 100/102 counterparts, these students also interpreted *motivation* as the willingness to work hard. Rather than expressing a desire

to become better writers, they instead expressed a general desire to "accomplish whatever is necessary" and "to put some pressure on myself so I can achieve what I want."

Pace of learning was another important construct for English 101 students, representing twenty-five percent of codes. They interpreted the pace of learning as the pace of college itself, believing that English 101 would not slow them down or occupy extra space: "I would rather just take one semester so that way I can make more room for my major courses." Many reported having already succeeded in the kind of courses they will encounter in college. One student explained, "I am confident in my abilities in a fast-paced English class because in high school I was taking an extra college course while completing high school, and this course was an English class," and another noted that he was "accustomed to writing multiple papers within two weeks typically." The construct of pace is not risky but materially familiar.

Although the extent to which English 101 students cited *study habits* and *level of support* was minimal, twenty-six percent of their clauses referenced external constructs. These constructs fell into three categories, all of which are associated with achievement in the figured world of school: *high school courses*, *high school grades*, and *standardized test scores*. When students offered evidence of their ability to write well and work at a fast pace, they cited their history of "excelling" and earning high grades in honors, Advanced Placement, honors, and "College English" courses. Reinforcing their identity as successful students, they finally cited their "good" or "solid" ACT and SAT scores, even if these scores are in some cases well below the university average. Students used these constructs as recognizable markers of good or successful students, and they employed them to position themselves in the figured world of college writing.

Marked and Unmarked Identities

Questions about substantive validity address the extent to which students engage in meaningful self-reflection—the extent to which program constructs are operative in the decision. For my program, examining what students wrote at the moment of decision produced answers and questions. Some findings build a case for validity: both students and the program cited *literacy practices/processes* most frequently, and English 100/102 students in particular cited the same writing practices (invention and development of ideas, adapting writing to an audience, revision) included in the placement materials; the critical construct *pace of learning* was also cited second or third most frequently. Other findings prompt validity concerns: students

did not cite *level of support* nearly as frequently as the program did, and English 101 students cited *motivation* with disproportionate frequency. And although instructors believed *study skills* was salient, that intuition was not validated. Understanding these findings is a necessary first step, but we must also understand better how students engage program constructs. Depending on the course they chose, students interpreted and used program constructs differently—and they used different external constructs to different ends. It is in this gap between direction and choice that I argue identity is at work. Students who arrive with normative, unmarked student identities in the figured world of school and/or school writing perceive little distance between themselves and the world of college writing, and they believe those identities will persist from one figured world to another.

In her work on basic writing, Joyce Olewski Inman argues that American higher education is driven by "expediency and linear norms" (1). The "standard plot" and "taken-for-granted sequence of events" (Holland et al. 53) in the figured world of college is characterized by "straight institutional lines" (Inman 1). Yet the presence of basic writers—and at my institution, the presence of conditionally admitted students—troubles these lines. Even before the moment they arrive on campus, they are oriented differently from their peers. Inman notes that the *beginner/expert* or *high risk/mainstream* binaries we use to characterize students create marked and unmarked identities: "To label the majority of the student body as normal, a portion of the body must be othered. This very act of designating writers as basic is part of what allows for the privileges experienced by more traditional students" (4). The essential institutional purpose of basic writing and other marked courses is to unmark marked students (4), and the basic writing classroom is a site of (re)construction from one socially recognizable identity to another.

The key distinction between directed self-placement and the traditional placement methods that Inman references, of course, is that students must mark themselves. And when students mark themselves, marked and unmarked identity categories nevertheless emerge. Students who chose English 101 imagine themselves as normative, unmarked students and writers. Because of their experience in high school, they do not perceive significant distance between themselves and the world of college writing; many believe they have already experienced its pace, challenges, and writing demands. Their initial, imagined identity in the world of college writing is confirmed when they select *agree* in response to questions about understanding the sample assignment and feeling motivated for college academics. Perhaps most telling, their unmarked identity aligns with their desire—characters in a figured world are recognizable through their desires—to

move through college in a straight, efficient line. The constructs of *pace of learning* and *motivation* enable these students to position themselves on the standard, unmarked plotline.

Students who chose English 100/102 imagine themselves as nonnormative, marked writers and students. They perceive distance between themselves and the world of college writing, distance expressed in their doubts about "adjusting from high school to college" and in their belief that their writing is "not college caliber." As they respond *disagree* to survey questions about their writing practices and ability to manage deadlines, their imaginings are confirmed and desires linguistically marked: *extra* time, *extra* help, an *extra* semester. Although these students selected a stretch sequence rather than a basic writing course, they envision the stretch course—the nonnormative option—as a way to become unmarked, to "allow them to 'pass' in the traditional academic setting" (Inman 2). Many students use orientational metaphors to explain their choice, noting that the stretch sequence will "start [them] off on the right track" or will help them "begin on the correct path." By orienting themselves differently, they hope to right themselves on the straight line.

As we developed our DSP materials, we heeded arguments from Ketai about the ways in which placement materials may promote ideologies that reproduce social inequalities. We asked if our materials assume a white habitus as normative (Behm and Miller), and our revision process included eliminating questions about reading for fun, high school requirements, comfort with usage conventions and standardized language, and those implying that "students who are 'prepared' for college writing have earned that designation through personal effort alone" (Ketai 149). By providing sample readings and writing assignments, we attempted to situate writing and self-efficacy in a specific context. Yet what distinguishes students who choose a one-semester course from those who choose a stretch sequence is identities constructed in the figured world of school and imagined in the figured world of college writing. The constructs students encounter during DSP reveal marked and unmarked identity categories, and they carry with them constructs that reinforce those categories.

Conclusion: Opening the World of College Writing

Writing assessment is an ethical activity, and writing placement is a racial, social, economic, and linguistic justice issue. With Toth, I believe that directed self-placement has the capacity—even the unique capacity—to promote social justice and foster more accessible and inclusive writing programs. Our placement mechanisms should make the figured world of

college writing as initially open and accessible as possible. Among the many things DSP communicates to incoming students is our humility. We tell students that we do not know their whole story, that we will not presume to know it, and that we invite them to tell it. Students tell us that story, however, within the parameters of a figured world. They "reproduce the narratives about their own identities, languages, and literacies that they have experienced through prior school-based assessment" (Toth 159), and their agency is indeed "interpellated by an educational lifetime of summative evaluation" (Howard 48). It is important to note that marked and unmarked identities have varied consequences: students may overplace themselves if their identity as a successful student does not materially align with college practices, or they may underplace themselves if their identity hinges on standardized test scores. As writing program administrators validate DSP programs and work for justice, we must do the technical and ethical work of understanding how students engage program constructs and how identity shapes the relationship between direction and choice.

To this end, disparate impact analysis should address not only the consequences of placement, as Asao Inoue argues, but also the decision-making process. Among the multiple measures we consider, we must know if students from particular racial, ethnic, gender, economic, and linguistic backgrounds engage program constructs—or bring external constructs—in ways that negatively influence their decision. For example, I have learned that students from a particular high school disproportionately choose English 101, relying on the external constructs of *high school courses* and *high school grades*. Yet their final course grades are below average, and their conception of *literacy practices/processes* does not align with that of the program. Their literacy identities constructed in the world of school do not transfer to the world of college. The analytical methods I use in this article provide one way of conducting this form of disparate impact analysis, as could interviews or focus groups early in the first year of college.

Based on what our analysis reveals, finally, writing program administrators must help students better engage program constructs. To make programs equitable and inclusive, we must help students understand our constructs well enough so that they do not simply reproduce narratives about their identities constructed in the world of school. Understanding how students interpret *pace of learning*, for example, has prompted my program to incorporate more concrete examples that outline exactly how many major assignments students complete in a semester. We hope concrete information will discourage students from applying slow–fast binaries to themselves and from thinking only about the pace of college. And WPAs must address external constructs we find problematic—that is, we must make external

constructs internal—to discourage students from reverting too quickly to marked and unmarked identities. Because standardized test scores often dictate which students are conditionally admitted, my program has deemphasized these scores to avoid replicating the inequity already associated with them. However, we plan to make the external construct of *standardized test scores* internal, explicitly instructing students that scores should not be a major factor in their decision.

Directed self-placement requires students to imagine a world of college writing, but it also requires writing program administrators to imagine their students. To make our worlds accessible and inclusive, we must be capacious in our imagining—characterizing students beyond marked and unmarked categories, beyond straight institutional lines. Program materials should offer students multidimensional ways to be recognizable in the world of college writing: students who choose the stretch sequence because they enjoy writing, students who desire more writing courses in their schedule, students who rely on the support of their classmates, students who struggle in their writing courses, and students who blossom as writers in college. Students may tell their stories using only standard plotlines and marked and unmarked characters, but we can open our worlds by projecting an array of recognizable characters moving through the figured world of college writing in varied plotlines.

Notes

1. Students are conditionally admitted based on a holistic evaluation. ACT scores below 21, SAT scores below 1000, and/or high school GPAs below 3.0 typically result in a conditional admission decision.

2. I use the phrase *figured world of college writing* in the same way that other scholars use *figured world of school* or *figured world of academia* (Gomez; Luttrell and Parker). The figured world of academia has recognizable characteristics, but it is differently enacted across contexts. I do not attempt to offer a comprehensive definition of the figured world of college writing, so the phrase *figured world of college writing* functions as a shorthand for how this world is enacted in particular institutions.

3. Two researchers coded all data, achieving 90% interrater reliability as calculated by percent agreement. Clauses representing two constructs were coded twice; for example, the question *I could write a full draft of this essay without additional assistance* was coded as *literacy practices/processes* for "write a full draft" and *level of support* for "without additional assistance."

4. All students have granted permission to use their survey responses and words (IRB 19–030).

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How Writing Teachers' Beliefs about Learning Transfer Impact Their Teaching Practices: A Case from L2 Academic Writing

Dorothy Worden-Chambers and Ashley S. Montgomery

Questions regarding the extent to which students can and do transfer writing knowledge and skills to disciplinary and workplace writing are of obvious importance for WPAs. Recent research has examined various factors affecting students' transfer of writing knowledge including student disposition, institutional climate, and curricula. However, one factor that deserves more attention is the transfer beliefs of writing teachers. The present study addresses this gap by investigating the transfer beliefs expressed by six teachers of second language writing. Drawing on a variety of data[1], we examine what these teachers believe about learning transfer and how their beliefs shape their teaching practices. The findings demonstrate that the teachers frequently commented on issues of transfer, that their transfer beliefs did not always align with the official curriculum, and that their transfer beliefs impacted their curriculum adaptation, assignment design, and attempts to motivate their students.

Learning Transfer and Teacher Beliefs

Learning transfer, or the ability to use knowledge and skills learned in one context in a different context, has been a central concern for educators and psychologists over the last century (Salomon & Perkins, 1989). Transfer is foundational to the entire premise of education, as learning is not considered entirely successful unless students are able to use their knowledge in some other setting or activity. This is why, according to Salomon & Perkins (1989), "Basic questions of transfer simmer beneath the surface in numerous areas of psychological and educational inquiry" (p. 114).

Research on learning transfer has recently surged within writing studies in light of questions regarding the extent to which students successfully transfer writing knowledge and skills from their writing classes, especially first-year composition (FYC) to disciplinary and workplace writing. Such questions are pressing for FYC programs because such programs are justified (and often funded) for the goal of preparing students for future writing in their studies and professional careers. Investigations of transfer from FYC, however, have yielded mixed results, finding that while transfer is

possible, it is often unpredictable (Beaufort, 1999; James, 2009; McCarthy, 1987; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014).

To better understand and improve learning transfer from FYC, researchers have investigated the factors that affect students' ability to transfer writing knowledge. Research has shown that students who perceive the learning in FYC as connected to disciplinary and workplace writing are more likely to transfer such learning. In contrast, students who perceive the learning in FYC as disconnected from disciplinary and workplace writing will not identify opportunities to engage in learning transfer (Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007; Driscoll, 2011; McCarthy, 1987). In an early study McCarthy (1987) followed a focal student, Dave, through writing experiences in three courses across his first two years of college. Though the writing assignments in the three courses had many similarities, Dave perceived them as "totally different from each other and totally different from anything he had ever done before" (p. 245), severely limiting his ability to transfer potentially useful knowledge. Driscoll (2011) has, moreover, shown that this perception is shared by many other students who are often unsure of how writing might be important in their futures. Related to students' perceptions of the transferability of writing knowledge are their more general dispositions, which may have a major impact on students' abilities and willingness to engage in the self-reflection and monitoring required for learning transfer (Driscoll & Wells, 2012; Perkins & Salomon, 2012; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014).

Differences between the type of writing students complete in FYC and the writing required of them in other classes are another significant factor impacting transfer. In research with multilingual students, James (2009, 2010a; 2010b) found positive evidence of transfer from writing classes to new contexts, but also notes that students were more readily able to transfer learning to other humanities courses, which required a similar type of writing, than to courses such as the sciences (James, 2010a). Wardle (2009) takes these critiques further, noting that many of the writing assignments typically used in FYC do not promote transfer because they bear so little resemblance to writing done outside of the FYC classroom.

While a significant body of research has focused on the impact that both curricular and student-related factors have on learning transfer from FYC, less attention has thus far been paid to the potential role of teachers as a factor influencing transfer. While there is a general assumption in the literature that what teachers believe and do in their classrooms will affect student transfer, relatively little research has directly investigated teachers' beliefs. The research that does exist demonstrates that students and teachers may hold quite different ideas about transfer. Lightner, Benander, &

Kramer (2008), for instance, found that students and faculty disagreed about the overall importance of transfer and cited different barriers to transfer. Beyond just mismatched beliefs, teachers may not always have clear ideas about transfer. For example, Scharff et al. (2017) surveyed students and teaching staff at multiple colleges and universities to assess their perceptions of metacognition and learning transfer. They found that "many staff and a majority of students do not have a clear understanding of what learning transfer entails" (p. 1).

Despite the lack of clarity of some teachers' transfer beliefs, there is evidence that teachers' attitudes toward writing transfer can affect students' ability and willingness to transfer writing knowledge (James, 2010b; Lightner, Benander, & Kramer, 2008; Nelms & Dively, 2007). We know, for example, that teachers can promote learning transfer through a variety of instructional strategies (Downs & Wardle, 2007; Fishman & Reiff, 2008; Green, 2015; Wardle, 2009; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak 2014). Green (2015), for example, indicated a moderate relationship between instructors' use of transfer-focused teaching practices and students' self-perceived ability to transfer writing skills into their disciplinary studies. On the negative side, however, instructors can implicitly discourage learning transfer through the climate they foster in their classes. James (2010b), for instance, examined the effect transfer climate had on students as they moved from intensive English courses into mainstream academic classes. The students perceived a lack of support for learning transfer among their disciplinary instructors and their peers, which demotivated their attempts to transfer learning.

Overall, existing research presents compelling evidence that teachers' beliefs about learning transfer matter and may affect the ultimate outcomes of their students. More research, however, is needed, particularly on what teachers already believe about transfer and how it impacts their teaching. Attention to FYC teachers' transfer beliefs is particularly important in light of the curricular innovations being proposed to promote transfer. Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak (2014) have noted that implementing a transfer-oriented curriculum is highly dependent on the diverse background knowledge of writing teachers and that their "long-held beliefs and attitudes about writing courses might also prove a barrier to improving the way college writing is taught" (p. 147).

To address this need, our study investigates both *what* writing teachers believe about transfer and *how* their beliefs influence their teaching practice. We examine the transfer beliefs of six teachers of ESL 101, a credit-bearing second language (L2) FYC course at a university in the United States. [2] We found that they had strong beliefs about what kinds of writing

knowledge and skills their students could and should transfer—beliefs that did not always align with the required curriculum. Moreover, evidence from video-recordings of the teachers' classroom interactions and their reflections on these interactions demonstrated that their transfer beliefs impacted how they adapted the required curriculum and motivated their students to engage in the course. These results have important implications for WPAs and others who are engaged in writing teacher supervision and curriculum development.

Method: Examining Teachers' Transfer Beliefs

The data we analyze in this paper were not originally collected with the goal of examining teachers' transfer beliefs, but rather of examining changes in teachers' pedagogical content knowledge over time (Worden, 2015, 2018). For this study, Dorothy Worden-Chambers followed six teachers of ESL 101 through a semester of teaching. All six teachers had academic backgrounds in Applied Linguistics and TESOL. Three of the teachers, Anna, Jennifer, and Sergei[3], were graduate students with less than one year of previous language teaching experience. Of the remaining three teachers, Sonja, a graduate student, had the most previous teaching experience, having taught Russian as a foreign language for nine years. Gabriela and Pat were both non-tenure-track instructors with three and six years of prior language teaching experience respectively. Two of the teachers—Pat and Sergei—were returning to higher education after pursuing careers in business and agriculture, respectively.

Each teacher participated in five audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews focusing on their beliefs about teaching. Additionally, Worden-Chambers attended and video-recorded the teachers for the duration of one instructional unit during which the teachers participated in three stimulated recalls, in which they viewed videos of their teaching and commented on their thinking. Finally, programmatic documents, including the required syllabus and the teachers' handbook, were included in the data. Because of the mix of self-reporting of beliefs in the interviews and the direct observation of classroom teaching practice, these data offer us a window into both what transfer beliefs teachers express and how those beliefs are demonstrated (or not) in their classrooms.

Because the focus of the original study was not on learning transfer, the teachers were not directly asked about their transfer beliefs, yet all six teachers frequently commented on issues of transfer to justify and explain their instructional decisions. Our focus on transfer emerged as an unexpected area of interest based on these spontaneous comments. To better

understand this unexpected theme, we re-examined the entire data set with the goal of specifically answering the following research questions:

1. *What* are these L2 writing teachers' beliefs about learning transfer?
2. *How* do these beliefs about learning transfer impact teachers' instruction?

We adopted a qualitative approach, which fit both the complex nature of our data and the goal of our study, "to get at the inner experience of participants . . . and to discover rather than test variables" (Corbin & Strauss, 2012, p. 12). More specifically, we drew on principles of grounded theory to analyze the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2012; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This approach relies on "a series of cumulative coding cycles" with the goal of "theory generation" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 8). Our coding process involved several rounds of analysis and was conducted collaboratively. In general, our goal was to identify the teachers' expressed beliefs about transfer and create conceptual labels (i.e., codes) which captured "the experiences, spoken words, actions, interactions, problems, and issues expressed by the participants" to the best of our ability (Corbin & Strauss, 2012, p. 51). Through regular meetings and discussion, we refined and elaborated our codes and negotiated points of confusion and disagreement. This collaborative process aided us in creating "definitional clarity" of our codes and provided "a good reliability check" to ensure "more credible and trustworthy findings" than would have been achievable with a single analyst (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 84).

Our resulting coding scheme focused on several aspects of teachers' transfer beliefs. First, we identified all teacher mentions of learning transfer in the data. Based on the previous research literature, we defined learning transfer as any knowledge, skill, or disposition developed in one context being used in another context. For teacher beliefs about transfer, we included all mentions by the teacher of knowledge, skills, or dispositions the students were learning in the context of ESL 101 that the teachers hoped or believed the students would use in another context. Because the expectation of transfer is so central to the goals of education, all the teachers' instructional goals and practices could be interpreted to rest on an assumption of transfer. Our interest, however, was those moments when teachers explicitly focused on learning transfer. For this reason, we were conservative in what coded as a transfer belief, including only those mentions of learning goals and practices that the teachers explicitly marked as being relevant outside of the immediate context.

Once we had identified these transfer mentions, we examined their content and formed more detailed codes based on what knowledge and skills

the teachers believed the students would transfer. Various theoretical models regarding the knowledge students may transfer from FYC exist (e.g., CWPA, 2014). For our analysis however, we derived our codes based on the teachers' own comments in the data rather than relying on an external framework. This process resulted in a total of nine categories of knowledge the teachers identified as transferable (see table 1). We additionally coded the teachers' handbook (TH) using these same codes in order to examine how the teachers' beliefs about transfer did or did not align with the standard curriculum they were required to use (see table 2). To answer our second research question, we examined each mention of transfer which the teachers used to justify or explain an instructional decision. We then formed descriptive codes to categorize the aspect of instruction that the teachers justified in terms of transfer. This portion of the analysis resulted in four codes (see table 3).

Findings: What Teachers Believe Students Will Transfer

Our analysis yielded over one hundred explicit mentions of learning transfer, demonstrating that the teachers were aware of transfer and considered it actively in their pedagogy. Their attention to transfer is even more striking given the fact that the teachers were never directly asked to comment on learning transfer.

We further examined the substance of teachers' transfer beliefs. Our codes, along with definitions and examples, are displayed in table 1.

The transfer goals identified are likely familiar to many WPAs. It is not difficult, for instance, to categorize most of these transfer beliefs into the CWPA's (2014) *Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition*. The teachers' beliefs about genre and structure, for example, align closely with the statement's outcome of "rhetorical knowledge," and the objectives that students be able to write "in several genres" and understand "how genre conventions shape and are shaped" by rhetorical purposes. Similar alignments can be found between the teachers' goals of process and the statement's "processes," and the teachers' goals of thinking and research and the statement's "critical thinking." Finally, the teachers' focus on grammar and citation falls within the statement's "knowledge of conventions." In fact, only two of the categories of teachers' transfer beliefs—attitude and acculturation—do not fit neatly in one of the four main outcomes endorsed by the CWPA. When taken as a group, these teachers, by and large, agree with the CWPA on what outcomes are transferable from FYC.

Table 1. Codes: What Learning Will Transfer

Code	Working Definition	Examples
Genre	Teacher describes some element of genre as being a goal for learning transfer. Includes general mentions of the term genre as well as names of specific genres	Anna: I really want them to know first that writing's not that hard, as you know, you can write, but second, you do need to communicate in certain formats . . . There's the genre, the format that is widely accepted in the academic world. Gabriela: If they had to write a response to a reading in college that they'd be able to do it. So I looked at that as kind of a genre experience, teaching them the genre of response to reading.
Attitude	Teacher describes some change in student attitude, disposition, or emotional state as a goal for transfer.	Gabriela: Well first, with the attitude, sort of get over this, "writing is stupid, and I hate writing" ((laughter)) kind of attitude. Jennifer: Understanding the reasons behind that structure and the building is going to make it clearer, help them not freak out as much about a writing assignment perhaps.
Process	Teacher describes increased knowledge of or facility with any aspect of the writing process as a goal for transfer.	Gabriela: So that they can discover what process works best for them. Sergei: The other thing that I would want them to remember is that good writing, excellent writing, involves revision.
Thinking	Teacher describes some aspect of critical thinking as a goal for transfer. Includes mentions of thinking, critical thinking, exploring own ideas, and thinking rigorously.	Pat: The idea that you have to think rigorously and with some degree of precision and specificity when you're trying to articulate yourself in the language. Sonja: It produces this effect on your thought. It kind of makes you think in a more organized manner.

Table 1. cont.

Acculturation	Teacher describes increased familiarity with any aspect of "American culture" or "academic culture" as a goal for transfer.	Anna: It is not really related to writing, in one way of course they are they are writing American academic essay, but I feel they understand more about how do they adjust to this environment. Pat: these are my own little creation these last two are my little thing . . . adopt American culture expectations such as punctuality, productivity, attention to detail and striving for continual measurable improvement.
Research	Teacher describes knowledge of research procedures as a goal for transfer.	Anna: In their junior or senior years, they really need to write a lot. They really need to search for reliable resources instead of just google the random article from the internet.
Structure	Teacher describes general structure, format, or organization of academic writing as a goal for transfer.	Anna: If you really want to get your idea to your readers in the academic field, you need to follow certain structure and follow certain things in order, so that your reader will easily get what you say. Pat: I hope they'll come back and say, oh you know, like even the stupid things like they format the papers it has served me well.
Grammar	Teacher describes knowledge or use of grammar as a goal for transfer.	Sergei: The thing I struggle with is they're going to have to work in an American academic community. . . . If I give them a B+ or an A- with horrible grammar, what's that going to do to them in the future, when they're writing?
Citation	Teacher describes knowledge of citation principles and practices as a goal for transfer.	Gabriela: They can participate in the academic community knowing what is expected of them on a general kind of level, like that's where citation comes in, that's where the plagiarism talk comes in. Sonja: I also want them to understand that how you cite, again, impacts the kind of the meaning basically.

When we examine the teachers' transfer beliefs in finer detail, a more complicated picture emerges. The frequency[4] with which each individual teacher mentioned a particular category and how the teachers' beliefs compared to the official curriculum in the teachers' handbook (TH) are found in table 2.

Table 2. What Learning Teachers Believe Students Will Transfer

	Anna	Gabriela	Jennifer	Pat	Sergei	Sonja	TH	*Total*
Genre	6	6	8	1	4	1	2	*28*
Attitude	2	9	4	4	1	0	0	*20*
Process	0	9	0	2	1	0	6	*18*
Thinking	3	2	3	2	0	5	0	*15*
Acculturation	7	3	0	4	0	1	0	*15*
Research	1	2	0	1	4	0	3	*11*
Structure	1	0	0	3	2	2	1	*9*
Grammar	0	0	0	0	5	0	3	*8*
Citation	1	1	0	0	1	2	2	*7*

As table 2 shows, the teachers' beliefs about what kinds of learning students would transfer include elements not reflected in the curriculum. The teachers frequently cite changes in students' attitude, thinking ability, and their process of acculturation as goals for transfer, while the official curriculum never mentions such goals. What is more, these codes were among the most consistent across the teachers, with attitude and thinking being mentioned by five of the six teachers and acculturation by four teachers. In addition to being unmentioned in the official curriculum, these three goals are also not strictly writing skills, a fact that was noted rather apologetically by several of the teachers. These transfer goals, particularly attitude and acculturation, could instead be classified as "soft skills" or "the cluster of personality traits, social graces, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism" that complement technical skills and mark "the people that most employers want to hire" (Menochelli, 2006, as cited in Urciuoli, 2008, p. 215).

Also apparent in table 2 is that many of the teachers in the study, while mentioning several aspects they hoped would transfer, focused most of their comments on only a few areas. Anna focused primarily on genre and acculturation, Gabriela on attitude and process, Jennifer on genre, Pat on acculturation and attitude, Sergei on genre, research, and grammar, and Sonja on thinking. These specific focuses occurred despite all of the teachers working in the same program with identical curricular guidelines. This finding echoes Shi & Cumming's (1995) finding that teachers' conceptions of L2 writing are deeply shaped by their individual beliefs about teaching.

Our data demonstrate that teachers' transfer beliefs are similarly varied and individualized and speak to the importance of investigating such beliefs if we hope to promote changes in the teaching of writing.

Findings: How Teachers' Transfer Beliefs Affect Their Classroom Instruction

While we believe that there is value in simply investigating what teachers believe about learning transfer, the question of how their transfer beliefs affect their teaching practices is likewise important. Our data for this question are somewhat more anecdotal given the fact that the study was not initially designed to investigate transfer beliefs, and thus in the stimulated recalls teachers were not explicitly prompted to connect their teaching practices to their beliefs about transfer. Despite this shortcoming, in our analysis we note several intriguing trends across teachers. We offer these now as a starting point and potential inspiration for further research.

In our analysis on this question, we particularly examined those instances in which teachers explained or justified their teaching practices with reference to learning transfer. The definitions of the four categories we identified, as well as relevant examples, are summarized in table 3.

As table 4 shows, teachers' conceptualization of the curriculum, in how they justified, resisted, and even changed it, was one of the most commonly noted impacts of teachers' transfer beliefs. Such interpretations of the curriculum almost always also became apparent in teachers' assignment design and assessment practices, so for the sake of this discussion, we will address these three categories together.

Table 3. Codes: Impact of Transfer Beliefs on Teaching

Code	Working Definition	Examples
Curriculum	Teachers describe considerations of transfer as affecting their interpretation or adaptation of the required curriculum at the syllabus level (e.g., goals, objectives, etc.).	Sonja: I also want them to understand that how you cite, again, impacts the kind of the meaning basically. . . . This whole focus on technical part of citing sources is definitely something that was not my idea.
Assignment Design	Teachers describe considerations of transfer as affecting how they design assignments and activities for their students.	Jennifer: So here is trying to make it sort of specific enough that they could see the difference between analytic and argumentative when we get there, when I highlight the argumentative essay next unit. Gabriela: I wanted to give them a tool if they're stumped or if they're confused about something or if they feel like they need to write but they just can't get anything down on the page, this is a technique they can use.
Assessment	Teachers describe considerations of transfer as affecting how they assess their students. This includes both summative and formal assessments.	Sonja: Most of them won't use APA anymore because they use different formats and different majors, so I kind of don't want to punish people for technical things like that. . . . I'm not bothered by things like that.
Motivating Students	Teachers describe using explicit discussions of transfer with their students as a means of increasing student motivation and investment in the class.	Pat: I like to encourage them on the concept of this class being a preparation for another class. This class is not an end and of itself. It's meant for the future.

Table 4. How Transfer Beliefs Impact Teacher Practice

	Anna	Gabriela	Jennifer	Pat	Sergei	Sonja
Curriculum	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Assignment Design	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Assessment	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Motivating Students	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N

For example, let us examine the case of Pat, who made the most aggressive changes to the curriculum based on his beliefs about transfer. Pat, the teacher with the most experience teaching ESL 101, focused on attitude and acculturation. The influence of these transfer beliefs was readily apparent in Pat's teaching, starting with his syllabus. While all the teachers were

provided with a standardized syllabus, they were allowed to make minor changes to reflect their beliefs. Pat took these liberties further than most teachers, adding two original objectives:

1. Practice time management skills such as prioritizing of workload that will aid them in their university life
2. Adopt American cultural expectations such as punctuality, productivity, attention to detail, and striving for continual, measurable improvement

These objectives, which explicitly mention transfer (1) and acculturation (2) were unique to Pat's syllabus. As he reflected on these objectives, Pat explained why he had decided to include these objectives and what they meant to him:

> A lot of these kids are kids. . . . I feel like I need to mommy them a little bit . . . and when it comes to, you know, prioritizing your workload and getting things done and then adopt American cultural expectations such as punctuality, productivity, attention to detail, and striving for continual measurable improvement, this is my business background. . . . And the American cultural expectations, punctuality, productivity, attention to detail, well, I think that's important. That separates the men from the boys.

As Pat describes, his decision to include these objectives arose first from his understanding of his students' age and maturity level. Pat saw his students as "kids" who needed someone to "mommy them" by providing clear expectations and regulating their work practices. He further equates the ability to adapt to American cultural expectations as being a marker of maturity—what "separates the men from the boys." Additionally, Pat cites his own background in business, in which productivity, detail, and quantifiable improvement were valued, as a source of his transfer beliefs.

When asked specifically how he incorporated these objectives into his teaching, Pat described the pervasive impact they had on his teaching:

> I fit it in everything. I mean punctuality, you know, if you don't turn things in time your grade suffers. Productivity, you know, and again it's another thing, you know, my little homework assignments, you got to just do them.

Pat's transfer beliefs in acculturation and student attitude lead him to emphasize small homework assignments. The value in these assignments, as Pat describes, was not necessarily in the writing skills or content that they would teach, but rather simply in the development of American cultural values.

While other teachers did not go as far as Pat, their beliefs about transfer impacted their interactions with the curriculum in less obvious but still pervasive ways. Sergei's case is a good example of this. Sergei is unique within the study because he is the only teacher who emphasizes grammar as the primary learning students could and should transfer. Sergei's emphasis on grammar puts him in conflict with the required curriculum. While the official curriculum does not entirely discount grammar knowledge as transferable learning, teachers are admonished to emphasize other writing skills ahead of grammar. For instance, the teachers' handbook emphasizes that ESL 101 "is not an editing service or a grammar class" and encourages teachers to "focus primarily on the organization and content rather than the grammar of a student's text." Sergei, however, frequently expresses his skepticism of these policies, a skepticism that is based largely on his beliefs about learning transfer and what would be expected of his students in their future careers. As he explains, "You got to write so people can understand you and so your boss won't say, 'I can't promote that person. Look at the reports and emails I get'" (Sergei). Unlike Pat, however, Sergei did not make any official changes to the curriculum, stating that he would "go with what I have been told and that's not to consider grammar." Despite his verbal assent to this curricular mandate, Sergei's teaching illustrates a significant grammar focus. In the focal unit he devoted one class period completely to grammar, and he commented on grammar extensively in his feedback. Thus, though he did not make overt changes to the curriculum, Sergei's resistance to this curricular guideline manifests itself in his teaching practice in other ways.

The final impact of teachers' transfer beliefs on their teaching evident in the data were explicit discussions of transfer with students for the purpose of motivating them. These kinds of exhortations were present in multiple teachers' interactions. For example, during a peer review activity, Anna paused to discuss the purpose of the assignment with her students:

> Anna: I want to ask, why am I asking you to do this? Why am I asking you to find the quotation and then find the relationship for another person? Or why I'm giving another person your work to let them identify the quotation ((calling on student)) Yeah?
>
> Student: You're trying to get views from people's—from other people's experience.
>
> Anna: Yeah, different person has a different interpretation.

Anna's decision here to pause and reflect on the purpose of the activity was motivated by her beliefs about transfer and her own experiences as

a student. She explains that "I feel it is so important to let students know why they are doing this to let them be more motivated" (Anna). In this case, Anna viewed the purpose of peer review as explicitly transfer related, "because this is not writing for the professor. Your writing could serve as something in the future." Not only does Anna believe it is important to reveal the transferability of writing to her students to motivate them, the goal of motivating them to engage in the class pushed her to consider transfer more deeply, or as she says, "this is not actually that I realized how important this is for them. This is because I forced myself to think how important it is for them, so I can tell them and motivate them" (Anna). For Anna, then, the desire to motivate her students is what pushes her to consider the transfer value of the content she is teaching.

Implications: Taking Teachers' Transfer Beliefs into Account

Since this study was exploratory in nature, its findings are more suggestive than conclusive. Moreover, this study focused on the specific populations of postsecondary L2 writing instruction, so some of the themes may not apply to all other contexts. Despite these limitations, the beliefs about learning transfer expressed by these teachers and the evident impact on their teaching practices illustrate some noteworthy trends that can inform future research and teacher supervision efforts.

One important finding this study demonstrates is the various ways teachers' transfer beliefs influenced their adoption, adaptation, or resistance to the required curriculum. If teachers' transfer beliefs do not match the existing curricula, they are likely to adapt (or subvert) the required curriculum directly or covertly. The covert resistance Sergei enacted is particularly concerning as it was largely invisible to both the WPA and to his students. Unlike Pat, Sergei did not draft new learning objectives that made his transfer beliefs explicit to his students. Instead, Sergei's official curriculum documents followed the programmatic policies which de-emphasized grammar, yet his classroom practices, including his feedback and grading, heavily emphasized grammatical correctness. This practice essentially created a situation in Sergei's classroom where students were presented with one set of learning objectives in the official classroom documents but taught and assessed based on a different, often unspoken, set of criteria. While this study did not include data on student performance, the question of how such a hidden curriculum may impact student success is certainly worth further research.

This finding of adaptation and resistance among teachers is important given the many recent efforts to address transfer through creating

transfer-focused curricula (e.g., Downs & Wardle, 2007; Green, 2015; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014). These curricular efforts are certainly laudable, but our data suggest that such efforts must take teachers' existing transfer beliefs into account if they are to be successful. Our findings here concur with research that has found that curricular innovation is frequently rendered less than successful due to insufficient training for teachers and mismatches between the values of the curriculum and teachers' beliefs (e.g., Shi & Cumming, 1995; Wedell, 2003). By building on teachers' existing transfer beliefs, such curricula may be more faithfully implemented by teachers. Ignoring or directly contradicting such teacher transfer beliefs may, however, lead to teachers adapting or resisting the intended curriculum in ways that are unexpected, undesirable, and difficult to detect.

In order to take teachers' transfer beliefs into account, WPAs must first learn what these beliefs are. However, starting a sustained and open dialogue with teachers can be difficult for administrators due to their supervisory role. Teachers may be unwilling to share their transfer beliefs with their WPAs, particularly if those beliefs contradict the official curriculum or policies, as was the case with Sergei. Administrators will need to be particularly creative about how to elicit teacher beliefs in an unthreatening way. Anonymous surveys, for example, could be used to gather basic information about teachers' transfer beliefs. A richer but more involved option would be to follow the example of Estrem and Reid (2012), who relied on anonymized transcripts of focus group interviews conducted by graduate student research assistants in their study of TAs' principles and practices in teaching composition. A similar approach might be an effective means of gathering information about teachers' transfer beliefs.

In addition to informing curriculum design and implementation efforts, such data could be used to further research. In particular, we believe that research examining the impact of teacher education and professional development on teachers' transfer beliefs would be illuminating. Are these beliefs open to change? If so, what forms of professional development and support best promote changes in teachers' beliefs? Do changes in teachers' transfer beliefs translate into changes in teachers' instructional practices? Do such changes impact the extent to which students are able to transfer writing skills and knowledge to their future contexts? Insights into these questions could inform future program design and curriculum development and, ultimately, improve the value and transferability of writing instruction for students.

Another significant finding in this study was the extent to which teachers identified soft skills as their goals for student transfer. The strong, positive relationship between soft skills, such as self-efficacy, conscientiousness,

persistence and success in educational and workplace settings, has led a recent push to include a stronger focus on the development of soft skills in higher education (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). In this study, the teachers' focus on an improved attitude toward writing, acculturation to American classroom norms, and critical and disciplined thinking align with this more general focus in education and with current thinking on the importance of student dispositions to their ability to transfer learning (e.g., Driscoll & Wells, 2012; Perkins & Salomon, 2012). It is also noteworthy that these soft skills were among the most-frequently cited goals for learning transfer, though none of them were explicit in the official curriculum.

Given the importance of transfer in the arguments justifying the continued existence of FYC courses, this broadening of the scope of what is transferable learning may inform future research and help WPAs continue to justify the value of FYC programs to administrators. For example, we already know that success in FYC disproportionately predicts student retention and persistence (Garrett, Bridgewater, & Feinstein, 2017). While developing writing and research skills certainly contributes to this positive relationship, the soft skills identified by these teachers as so central to their goals may also help to explain the role of FYC in student persistence. If, as these teachers believe, students gain more than writing knowledge from such classes, perhaps our research into the outcomes of FYC should likewise focus on these themes. Research might, for instance, examine the extent to which students develop soft skills in their writing classes. What impact do these skills have on their ability to transfer writing knowledge and to their more general academic success and attainment? What teacher practices foster the development of soft skills within writing classrooms? These questions, we believe, would yield valuable results.

Yet while adopting the rhetoric of soft skills might be expeditious in the neoliberal university setting, we would caution both administrators and teachers to remain critical of how skills discourses privilege some students and exclude others. The dispositions and behaviors that are associated with such skills are, after all, neither culturally nor historically neutral but rather have their basis in the neoliberal philosophy and American corporate culture and function to "establish the type of person valued by the privileged system in ways that seem natural and logical" (Urciuoli, 2008, p. 215). While we are aware of the value of the development of soft skills for students, we also have deep concerns about the ways in which an emphasis on soft skills might well marginalize speakers and writers who have different styles, attitudes, and varieties of language (Blommaert, 2005). For instance, the teachers within our study mentioned attitude, thinking, and acculturation as soft skills that specifically align with American corporate culture.

These frequently mentioned soft skills are not referenced within the official curriculum, and the teachers even considered them to not be necessary for developing writing skills, yet the students were expected to demonstrate them. Therefore, it appears that some of the teachers are inadvertently using their personal ideologies about language behavior to impose conformity and assimilation into American society on the students, thus posing risks of alienation or identity issues for the students (Fleming, 2010).

Given the prevalence of soft skills in teachers' beliefs about learning transfer, we encourage administrators to discuss such skills, and their potential value and drawbacks, openly with teachers. Teachers could be invited to reflect, for instance on who, aside from students, are served by soft skills. Teachers could further be asked to unpack the cultural, racial, and classist baggage of the specific dispositions, behaviors, and practices that fall under the umbrella of certain soft skills. Such discussions can help teachers better weigh the utility of soft skills without associating them all as a "natural and logical" good (Urciuoli, 2008, p. 215).

Overall, this study has sought to contribute to the literature on learning transfer in writing education by illuminating the beliefs and practices of writing teachers themselves. Focusing on teachers of L2 writing specifically, this study has demonstrated that teachers hold strong beliefs about transfer which are often based on their personal experiences as writers and have a significant impact on how they interpret and implement the curriculum. What teachers believe about learning transfer, how their beliefs impact instruction, and, crucially, student learning, and how education, supervision, and professional development can impact teachers' transfer beliefs are, we believe, worthy questions for future research.

Notes

1. IRB Protocol #43218

2. Pseudonym

3. All names are pseudonyms.

4. We included these frequency numbers not to make any statistical claims of significance but rather because, as Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña note, "Numbers allow a researcher to 'see' the general drift of the data more easily and rapidly by looking at distributions" (p. 283).

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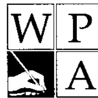

Book Review

Everything Is Connected: A Review of *Institutional Ethnography*

AJ Odasso

LaFrance, Michelle. *Institutional Ethnography: A Theory of Practice for Writing Studies Researchers*. Utah State UP, 2019. 151 pages.

In his foreword to Michelle LaFrance's monograph, Tony Scott (author of *Dangerous Writing: Understanding the Political Economy of Composition*) writes: "While the premise of scholarly influence on [composition and rhetoric] practice continues to be an important rationale sustaining the production of scholarship in the academic discipline, important questions surrounding the degree of actual influence of scholarship on practice remain very much open" (ix). He proceeds to acknowledge that the majority of those producing scholarship are tenure-track faculty, whereas the TAs, adjuncts, and other contingent instructors—those most deeply entrenched in practice—are not actively producing scholarship *on* said practice. It is this precise tension that lays broad groundwork for *Institutional Ethnography*. Questions of who should be responsible for bringing praxis into conversation with scholarship, what socio-material infrastructures provide space for that dialogue, and how "ideas about writing and writing education manifest in the actual activities of teachers, students, and the educational ecologies they encounter and create" (ix) persistently haunt the text. The three studies at the core of LaFrance's analysis shed light on the complex processes surrounding the work of institutional writing practices, as well as those who enact them, from the WAC/WID administrators who work with faculty on course content, to the faculty who in turn shape the syllabuses, prompts, rubrics, and day-to-day classroom activities with which their students interact. LaFrance argues that not only bureaucratic structures, but *all* individuals within a system affect how it works. The differences in perception to which practitioners, particularly instructors and students, are subjected keenly affect "the flexibility they have to interpret their work in relation to scholarship" (x)—hence the timeliness of LaFrance's ethnographic lens.

Institutional Ethnography speaks to a body of work already in progress, one intimately concerned with how writing research processes and

environments influence writing pedagogy, and vice versa. Recent books such as *Economies of Writing* (Horner, Nordquist, and Ryan), *Transnational Writing Program Administration* (Martins), *Ecologies of Writing Programs: Program Profiles in Context* (Reiff, Bawarshi, Ballif, and Weisser), and *Rewriting Composition: Terms of Exchange* (Horner) have taken on the challenge of applying ethnography to Composition and Rhetoric. This conversation has focused heavily on social justice issues within the field for instructors and students alike, and rightly so. The intersections of race, identity, class, and economic injustices comprise the emotional/psychological sites of our work as writing educators and scholars. In reshaping the landscape of this dialogue to explore how we approach our institutional processes and the spaces in which those processes operate, LaFrance reveals how inextricable our theory is from our day-to-day practice. The inseparability of our teaching from our scholarship forms the basis of LaFrance's ethnographic inquiry. This book challenges us to resist the urge to gloss over the complex interplay between people, events, and environments in our field. Instead, LaFrance guides us in a concretely researched interrogation of *how* our roles as individuals within a system create the conditions under which we act as administrators, teachers, students—and, above all, as collaborators and colleagues.

Following Scott's foreword and LaFrance's acknowledgments, *Institutional Ethnography* consists of an introduction and four main chapters. LaFrance's choice of the immortal Leonard Cohen's "Anthem" for her epigraph ("*Ring the bells that still can ring / Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in*") feels momentous, acknowledging from the outset that human imperfection is one of the meaningful, necessary elements in the processes she sets out to examine (or, if nothing else, suggests a stellar soundtrack for while one reads and works). In her introduction, "Twenty-First-Century Exigencies: Materialist Methods for Writing Studies," LaFrance establishes elements from the work of Dorothy E. Smith, a Canadian sociologist, as the guiding principles of her study:

> Positivist paradigms and universalist models of empirical research in the social sciences, Smith (2005, 9) argued, frequently oversimplified and reified the material conditions of sites of study, objectifying research subjects. Instead, the model of ethnography Smith developed drew upon principles of feminist cultural materialism to focus the researcher's eye on the unique personal experiences and coordinated practices of individuals, as these revealed recurrent patterns of social organization, . . . elements of everyday experience that

> were often otherwise occluded, elided, or erased by qualitative models that sought to study predetermined aspects of culture and community. (3–4)

Acknowledging ethnography's long use in the field of writing studies, LaFrance sets out to distinguish her chosen model, institutional ethnography (IE), as a tool for discovering and articulating "*how things come to happen*" and how institutions "*coordinate the experiences and practices of individuals*" (4). Writing instructional practices are always produced within specific contexts by specific individuals, with specific ends in mind. Therefore, LaFrance argues that "IE allows us to bring our concerns for pedagogy, professional identity, disciplinary practice, labor, and other forms of materiality into conversation" (25). In a field where reflective writing practices comprise so much of the work we do—regardless at what specific level, or in what specific role—this feels fitting. LaFrance promises that the case studies subsequently examined in the book "demonstrate the ways conceptions of writing (ruling relations) constitute the space studied and how people then use writing and a variety of related professional practices and identities (standpoint) to negotiate the landscapes they are situated within" (26).

Subsequently, LaFrance spends chapter 1, "Institutional Ethnography: A Theory of Practice for Writing Researchers," adapting the sociological framework of IE into a tool for studying work within institutional sites of writing (writing classrooms, writing centers, writing programs, assessment initiatives, etc.) She demonstrates the unique value of IE to our field, in that it permits us to simultaneously theorize about our work *and* "understand the actualities of that work that live below the layers of our materialist discourse" (30). Through the use of several narrative vignettes (a TA struggling to approach teaching commentaries as a genre; a HR representative seeking to clarify confusion over a writing center director's precise title; an instructor's frustration over the process of designing a FYC library writing assignment), LaFrance spends the remainder of the chapter laying out how our perceptions of the university, depending on where we are situated within it, vary. Living examples effectively demonstrate that "these central concerns for the field of writing studies are always produced within situated contexts by actual people who are negotiating any number of professional, institutional, and highly individual ideals toward specific ends" (35). Finally, LaFrance identifies seven core concepts integral to the use of IE in sites of writing: ruling relations, standpoint, social coordination, problematic, work and processes, and institutional circuits.

With her methodology thoroughly set down, LaFrance dedicates each of her remaining three chapters to a different case study, putting her methodology to thorough use in each. For example, chapter 2 ("How Work Takes

Shape: Tracing the Work of a 'Shared Assignment' in a Linked Gateway") takes an in-depth look at how following an assignment's trajectory (from the course catalog description and assignment prompt, all the way through to how students ultimately interact with and respond to it), alongside examining institutional data and interviewing key participants, can "tell the story of work" in a collaborative setting. LaFrance focuses on patterns of labor, disciplinary identity, and ideals of writing instruction in that particular site of writing, with an eye toward revealing what it can tell us about both labor conditions in the field and linked-course initiatives—"to turn up particularities that are highly relevant to the concerns of writing program administrators but often less visible in the scholarship of curricular initiatives and WAC/WID work" (51). Thanks to LaFrance's insightful, IE-oriented annotations to texts and interview transcripts, one gets the sense that if TAs, teaching at ground level in the linked courses, could more freely discuss their concerns and confusions with tenured faculty, the designers of that gateway "at the top," there would be significant benefit to how participants *do* the work of teaching and designing respectively. Adjuncts, who may occupy the same niche as TAs and/or be engaged in some of the same curriculum design work as tenured faculty, would in all likelihood benefit most significantly across the board.

Furthermore, TAs and adjuncts are not the only demographics that stand to benefit from LaFrance's groundbreaking analysis. This book also has the potential for immediate, visceral resonance with writing program administrators, particularly in its revealing use of concrete, detailed examples from existing writing programs. Understanding composition and the teaching of it as "cultural material work" may sound arduously theoretical, but it provides a framework for examining the complex interplay between our experiences as practicing teacher-scholars and the experiences of our FYC students. As program leaders and curriculum developers, we are not the only individuals who will teach the assignments we design. LaFrance asks us to be mindful of our work's evolution from start to finish, which entails consciousness of and communication with each group of colleagues and students who interact with it. Often, it will mean accepting criticism and feedback from colleagues whose work we oversee—and, yes, from our students.

Even as the COVID-19 pandemic has transitioned our classrooms into virtual spaces, radically changing the way we interact with each other and our students, it has *not* fundamentally changed the work that needs to be done. There are genres to be taught, examples to be discussed, assignment sequences to be scaffolded, revisions to be made—and, hopefully, if we've done a thorough job of all that, future collaborations to hatch. Even as our

new paradigm has resulted in budget cuts and reduced work for those in non-tenured ranks, it has resulted in an increased workload for still others. At the best of times, our vocation is fraught, yet rewarding. We encourage students to persist, guiding them while they grow as writers. At the worst, what was previously fraught may become disorienting, discouraging, and downright stressful, especially when our chains of communication fracture or collapse.

In breaking down the *how* and *why* behind our institutional writing research and instruction processes, LaFrance offers a blueprint for our troubled times and beyond. As Scott puts it in the foreword to the book, "We have theories of relations carrying considerable authority in the scholarship that blur distinctions between people and our environments . . . but we don't have enough qualitative research that tracks how theory emerges as activity in the institutional environments within which we and our students actually work together on a daily basis engaged in acts of composing, meaning making, and knowing" (x). LaFrance has made a dedicated project of engaging in that meaningful work so that we can continue to meaningfully engage in ours.

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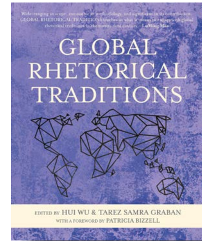

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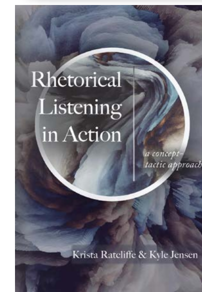

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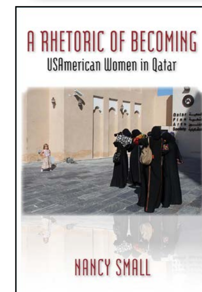

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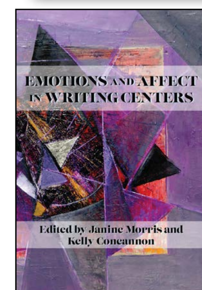

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