

## Overenrolled for the Summer: Graduate Instructor Labor, Course Caps, and Other Compounding Impacts

Gavin P. Johnson, Yu Lei, Rachel McShane, Haomei Meng,  
Reza Panahi, and Gouda Taha

### ABSTRACT

*In this brief article, we—a group of graduate students and a WPA—reflect on the challenges faced during a recent summer session. In doing so, we consider how our experience speaks to a larger issue: the compounding impacts that dictate the pedagogical and administrative decisions that need to be made within a writing program. Compounding impacts, as a concept, describes how local classroom concerns and programmatic logistics accumulate and exacerbate labor disparities and pedagogical challenges. Specifically, we consider the various changes necessitated when graduate students acting as instructors of record are assigned to teach overenrolled first-year writing courses during a compressed, five-week summer session. From our experience, we outline compounding impacts on labor related to course planning, class activities and management, and assessment as well as issues of financial precarity and international student status. We conclude with the list of suggestions we provided our local administration in the hopes that readers can understand how we blended scholarship and experience into praxis as well as anticipate similar impacts at their colleges and universities.*

### INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Graduate teaching assistants work hard. They exist in a liminal space of both student and teacher while acting as instructors of record while simultaneously taking seminars, preparing for comprehensive exams, designing and conducting research, attending professional development sessions, and, not to mention, living lives beyond the campus that often include family commitments, caregiving responsibilities, financial precarity, friendships, and long-distance relationships. It is quite a lot to juggle in ideal circumstances (for example, when life is going smoothly, courses are engaging, and we are teaching smaller classes during a full 15-week semester with little to no calendar shifts); when other complications arise, such as larger classes,

shortened semesters, or financial or personal struggles, things become challenging to balance, and that labor becomes less tenable.

The labor demanded by first-year writing programs has increasingly been documented and studied. Spurred on by the historic work of the Wyoming Resolution (see Robertson, Crowley, & Lentricchia, 1987) and later the Indianapolis Resolution (see Cox et al., 2016), scholars including Seth Kahn (2015), Nancy Welch and Tony Scott (2016), and Randall McClure, Dayna V. Goldstein, and Michael A. Pemberton (2017) have passionately argued that the labor of teaching composition, especially under neoliberal austerity measures, cannot be ignored when it makes lives within the academy so precarious. Often the most exploitative labor is hoisted upon non-tenure track faculty, contingent instructors, and graduate students; however, the experiences of these communities are rarely considered when administrative decisions are made. We aim to use this space to take seriously Ruth Osorio, Jaclyn Fiscus-Cannaday, and Allison Hutchinson's (2021) call to collect stories, honor lived experiences, and move toward collaborative leadership models with and for graduate students who teach writing.

We are colleagues—five graduate teaching assistants and one faculty member—working and learning in a PhD program housed in a department that offers courses and research opportunities in a range of disciplines and specializations: literary studies, rhetoric and writing studies, and applied linguistics. While not all PhD students apply for a teaching position in the first-year writing program, those who teach typically maintain their appointment throughout their degree program, pending acceptable progress toward degree and annual evaluation of teaching. In our program, students with Graduate Assistant Teaching (GAT<sup>1</sup>) appointments teach a majority of first-year writing classes—anywhere from 60–88% of sections offered. They typically teach two sections of first-year writing as instructors of record during fall and spring semesters. Summer is split into two five-week mini-sessions, and GATs have an opportunity to teach one course in each session. However, summer teaching is never guaranteed. GATs can express their interest, but ultimately, enrollment dictates availability. Regardless of how many summer courses are offered, it is not unusual for GATs to teach all but one or two of the summer offerings of first-year writing.

The writing program houses three first-year writing courses: English 1302: Written Research/Argument, English 1301: College Reading and Writing, and English 100: Introduction to College Reading and Writing (a corequisite basic writing course linked to English 1301). English 1301 and English 1302 are the only courses on campus that currently satisfy the “Written and Oral Communication” requirement of the Texas Core

Curriculum (TCC). In line with professional standards, class enrollment caps are set at eighteen students for English 1301 and 1302 and twelve students for English 100 (CCCC, 2023). The writing program provides a born-digital custom textbook and skeletal outline of the curriculum, but GATs are responsible for drafting course schedules, developing daily lesson plans, delivering instruction, assessing and responding to student assignments, and general classroom management. All things considered, the writing program is typical for a university like ours—a rural, teaching-focused, emerging R2 institution with a diverse student population in terms of age, race, and socioeconomic status.

While the return to face-to-face instruction following Covid-induced virtual learning has led many universities to struggle with recruitment, Texas A&M University-Commerce<sup>1</sup> experienced a surge in enrollment (Segar, 2023a). This increase is related to shifts expanding admission policies, adjusting student placement protocols, and general administrative decision-making related to the university mission. The university president, according to an announcement to the campus, believes the surge in enrollment is a “testament to the institution’s unwavering commitment to providing quality education and a supportive community for all students . . . providing a gateway to success for its growing student body” (Segar, 2023a). We are proud to be a part of this growing campus community, which continues to be named one of the best schools for social mobility in the United States (Segar, 2023b). We, in turn, work diligently to ensure that our curriculum and pedagogy align with the needs of the students that come to our classes. However, we also recognize, through this brief article, that this kind of rapid, newsworthy growth has a direct impact on the labor of first-year writing courses and the instructors, specifically GATs, at the front of the classroom.

We began to feel the impact of the student enrollment surge in the second summer session of 2023 (Summer II 2023). This session was five weeks of intensive instruction, four days a week, and was understandably already difficult for instructors because of the speed and labor required to ensure students receive “equivalent experiences” to their peers in a 15-week regular semester, as the university expects. With high demand and low supply, the required nature of the courses, and independent choices made by upper administration and advisors—despite the director of writing and

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1. As of November 7, 2024, our university has been renamed East Texas A&M University. Because this article was in final proofing at the time of this change, we have decided to maintain the university name used during the events described within.

department head pushing to maintain the standard enrollment caps—our courses quickly overenrolled. Most instructors, with little notice, taught courses with at least three to seven students above the enrollment cap. While overenrollment by one or two students in one or two sections is not uncommon at our university, to have nearly every course overenrolled by such a large number was a concern that presented issues for students, GATs, and the director of writing.

## A NOTE ON OUR COMPOSING PROCESS

Consider this a conversation. On October 11, 2023, Gavin P. Johnson, in his role as director of writing, met with five GATs—coauthors. Yu Lei, Rachel McShane, Haomei Meng, Reza Panahi, and Gouda Taha. This meeting took place over Zoom, and we discussed the GATs' experience teaching basic and first-year writing during Summer II 2023 (July 10–August 10, 2023). Our conversation was structured around eleven questions that Johnson prepared prior to the meeting (see appendix). By request of the department head, and with a small stipend, our primary task was crafting a memo for upper administration documenting and making recommendations for future scheduling, staffing, and GAT support.

During the conversation, Johnson considered how valuable this discussion might be not only for our institution but also for WPAs and graduate students in similar situations. He proposed that the group co-write a short article culled from the conversation. Using the Zoom recordings and automated transcripts, Johnson crafted the internal memo and shared it with the GATs to ensure they were accurately represented. To craft this article, we expanded our original memo to include additional context and scholarly framing to our conversation. Johnson composed the first draft before circulating it for Lei, McShane, Meng, Panahi, and Taha to offer feedback, make additions, and redirect the argument as needed. After receiving enthusiastic and valuable feedback from two *WPA: Writing Program Administration* reviewers, McShane and her fellow GATs took the lead revising for resubmission before sharing their draft with Johnson.

Our goal with this article is to demonstrate the impact of compounding factors, including course overenrollment, on the labor demanded from GATs teaching writing. Compounding impacts, as we use it, describes how local classroom concerns and programmatic logistics accumulate and exacerbate labor disparities and pedagogical challenges. This concept captures the entanglement of issues that feed into large-scale problems and, in turn, grow labor disparities. Put simply: it's never just one thing; or, when it rains it pours. Below we briefly discuss select literature available on the impact of

class size on pedagogical and programmatic decisions. Then, we make note of our major points of discussion, which we believe directly influenced our teaching and administrative experiences. Finally, we offer thoughts on how to address the challenges of overenrolled writing-intensive courses, speaking not only to the graduate students teaching these courses but also writing program administrators and other decision makers.

## THE ISSUE OF CLASS SIZE

Conversations about appropriate class size are certainly not new. In our research, we were amazed to find monographs and articles from the early 20th century debating the impact of the student-to-teacher ratio (Stevenson, 1923; Hatfield, 1924). Then, as now, much of the debate concerns tensions between the quality of learning and administrative efficiency. Alice Horning (2007) went as far to say, “if you are a WPA, sooner or later, you are going to have a fight with your administration over class size” (p. 11). Horning, like others, argued that smaller class sizes are preferable as their benefits impact student success, faculty labor, and institutional reputation. These arguments have continued to grow in importance as austerity measures taken by universities often begin with enlarging class enrollment caps (Cuseo, 2007; Phillips & Ahrenhoerster, 2018). And while we acknowledge recent pedagogical experimentation with “jumbo” and “MonsterComp” writing courses (Jaxon, Sparks, & Fosen, 2020; Seigel et al., 2020), for our institutional context, the writing program curriculum was designed for small(er) class sizes.

According to the Conference on College Composition and Communication (2023),

- **No more than 20 students should be permitted in any writing class. Ideally, classes should be limited to 15.**
  - **No English faculty members should teach more than 60 writing students per term. Any more than this, and teachers are spread too thin to effectively engage with students on their writing.**
- (The Enabling Conditions section, no. 11, para. 2)

These enrollment caps are noticeably lower than other first-year courses because of the immense labor that teaching writing involves, including extensive engagement with student writing processes and assignment drafts. Our first-year writing courses currently include enrollment caps that are in line with these recommendations: English 100 has a cap of 12; English 1301/1302 have caps of 18; GATs and adjuncts teach no more than two courses per term while lecturers teach five courses per term. These

recommendations were developed to provide “reasonable and equitable working conditions” to writing instructors (“A&M-Commerce,” 2019). Our enrollment caps were established after an active push from a previous director of writing and a previous department head only a few years prior. In fact, the then-recent reduction in course caps was explicitly mentioned as a contributing factor in the writing program receiving a CCCC Writing Program Certificate of Excellence (“A&M-Commerce,” 2019).

These reasonable course caps are still our starting point; however, exceeding those caps has become a frequent issue. Surging enrollments and restricted staffing budgets mean a course capped at 18 often has an actual enrollment of 20+. Students are frequently added over the cap by their advisors and with the consent of the department head. We do not see these actions as malicious as, often, they are trying to help a student. The issue comes when one student is added above the cap . . . then another . . . then another . . . compounding the impact. While we continue pushing for respecting the enrollment caps, it seemingly is a never-ending defensive position wherein we must carefully negotiate disciplinary best practices, instructor labor, student learning, and the influence of our university’s shifting demographics and administrative expectations. This was the issue during Summer II 2023 when most first-year writing courses were overenrolled.

## IMPACTS OF OVERENROLLMENT

In what follows, we synthesize our conversations within the context and scholarship discussed above. Namely, we make note of three impact factors experienced during Summer II 2023: impact on course planning, impact on class activities and course management, and impact on assessment. These are offered so that readers gain more insight about our experiences but also, if put into similar positions, they can feel prepared.

### *Impact on Course Planning*

In our conversations, all five GATs reported no change to their initial course planning due to overenrollment, per se, since enrollments were not finalized before the start of the term. What did drastically impact course planning was the compressed summer session as they reported difficulty fitting the program’s curriculum into a 5-week summer course. For Lei and Meng, while they had experience teaching the curriculum previously, this was their first time teaching a summer course. Lei explained, “I feel it’s pretty intensive. I taught from Monday to Thursday about two hours a day.” Meng added,

It's very stressful because I also have two summer courses. You know the courses I registered for myself. So from Monday to Thursday, I feel that I'm overburdened. And the other feeling is that, you know, in the spring and the fall semesters, I can ask students to do more things than in summer because time is quite limited. So I feel that there are some things that I haven't conveyed to my students.

Having to balance courses while learning how to deliver the content and support students was challenging. Certainly, while teaching under new constraints always tests our pedagogical choices, the intensity of a summer course doesn't leave space to make the kind of *in situ* adjustments an instructor might make during a 15-week semester. Many of those decisions about what to keep or cut should be made prior to starting the summer term.

McShane and Panahi have taught summer courses before and knew what they were in for. When asked about the labor of planning, McShane explained, "If I'm completely honest because I taught [English 1301] so many times, it didn't impact my course planning that much . . . I could recycle PowerPoints and things like that." Panahi echoed this approach. These GATs later noted that without previous experience teaching during the summer, they likely could not have managed planning and delivering the course, particularly in an overenrollment situation with more students to work with.

### *Impact on Class Activities and Management*

While they did not feel too challenged by planning their course, the GATs did report a noticeable impact on their approach to class activities and class management. Due to the combination of the overenrollment and a condensed term, Meng reported relying less on lecturing and made use of additional small group work and collective discussions to get through the material and maintain opportunities for in-class writing support. Lei also embraced more in-class workshopping to help students set aside time to write. We recognize that these shifts can be read as beneficial since they allowed for more process-oriented and collaborative class time. That is a silver lining; however, Lei found it difficult to work directly with students in her English 100 course. She expressed concern that students were always waiting for her to make it around the classroom. During our conversation, the GATs took this time to discuss their own methods of assigning informal reading partners and peer reviewers to ensure everyone was getting some kind of one-on-one attention, which alleviates some pressure for the

instructor, but does not, in their opinion, have the same impact as instructor guidance.

Interestingly, while attendance proved to be a consistent problem during regular semesters, especially after the return to face-to-face instruction following Covid-19 lockdowns, the GATs felt that attendance during the summer was stronger than the recent spring and fall semesters with more students attending more often and participating more. We don't quite know why this happened. Perhaps students recognized that missing a class session on a compressed timeline would prove much more detrimental to their learning.<sup>2</sup> Taha noted that his attendance was not only steady but that students were also reaching out to him via email much more frequently. This level of engagement, according to Taha, led to some surprisingly strong writing. While this is a hopeful and typically exciting occurrence for teachers, especially after a period of low attendance and engagement, overenrollment created tension, making it difficult for the GATs to appreciate this positive change. Stronger attendance and engagement of students in this situation meant more effort was required from instructors on group activities, class management, and communication with students, and they found it somewhat overwhelming to try and meet the demands of large and active classes within the constraints.

Class management was difficult for some GATs, especially those who had several students with advising mix-ups as well as exceedingly high enrollments. McShane reflected,

When I first started teaching summer, and this was some years ago, the cap for summer and fall was not the same. The cap, I believe, for summer was 15 while fall and spring semesters were capped at 18; now summer classes are capped at 18 just like the regular 15-week semester. I started this class with 26 students on the first day because of a mix-up in advising. So these students that should have been in another class were all in my class for like two weeks. The classroom management was tough, like the hardest I've ever had. I usually can harness a chatty class and keep on task, but this was just talking, talking, talking. Every single seat in my classroom was full. Every single seat. And most of them had another class right before mine. They were just antsy to the max. And it was exhausting.

Again, this demonstrates the way two issues overlapped: the overenrollment caused a literal crowding in the room, while the intense summer schedule caused students and instructors to feel particularly burnt out and to act accordingly. This created tension in the classroom for both the teacher and the students. In addition, we can see the pressure that inaccurate placement

brought, highlighting the need to continue refining procedures to ensure students are appropriately placed. Despite years of teaching experience, McShane often found teaching difficult in this situation, regardless of the classroom strategies she tried.

### *Impact on Assessment*

By far, courses being enrolled above standard caps had the largest and most negative impact on the assessment of student writing. During the conversation all GATs continued returning to the point of assessment because it had such a dominant impact on their time, energy, and labor. Taha, who has a scholarly interest in assessment, noted:

More students means you need to spend much more time on grading and giving feedback, especially providing the kind of detailed feedback students need for revision. In this case you're trying to provide some constructive feedback, not just praising feedback—good job or excellent—but I didn't have the time.

This sentiment was repeated over, and over, and over again.

Due to the number of students and the speed of the semester, general advice might be for an instructor to reduce the amount and specificity of feedback they are giving on drafts. However, McShane felt that approach was a “disservice to the students.” She estimated spending “probably twice as much time [assessing papers and] the turnover rate is much faster. In the spring or fall, I could take two weeks to grade papers, and now I have to get it done in like two days.”

Even if a GAT was comfortable reducing the amount of feedback provided, the labor was still intense when added to tasks like planning lectures, attending seminars, reading for exams, or conducting research. Panahi explained, “Imagine the professor is also working on his proposal, or he has some assignment to do and, also, teaching. It is a lot of work, and you get stressed.” Panahi, pressured by the number of documents to respond to and his other commitments, did experiment with more holistic forms of feedback and more explicit student peer-to-peer assessments and support structures. He found this very impactful and planned to bring it into his future courses too.

While not a focus of the prepared questions, some GATs believe several students used text generating AI like ChatGPT to complete coursework. McShane noted that she discovered a student misused ChatGPT throughout the term and had to not only fail the student but was also required to report the student for plagiarism, which created additional labor. Meng made a point to include a short discussion about ChatGPT in her class, but

still suspected unauthorized use by students rushing to produce writing. This practice led to “difficult conversations with students.” Panahi agreed and noted that he felt that the conversation was important to have but felt unsure how to address the issue, especially when time was so limited. In a typical 15-week semester with a regular-sized class, teachers might have had the opportunity to explore ChatGPT as a tool, invite a librarian to facilitate a workshop on ethical AI use, and encourage students to critically engage with generative AI programs; however, in a class that was overenrolled and crammed into five weeks, it simply created more labor and frustration for GATs, especially when attempting to provide feedback on a towering stack of student writing.

## OTHER COMPOUNDING IMPACTS

As it goes, the challenges that face professionals in higher education are never singular but rather compounding. As we have explained, our point of discussion, teaching and coordinating Summer II 2023 first-year writing courses at Texas A&M University-Commerce, concerns not only the issue of overenrolled courses but also overenrolled courses that were on a time-compressed (5-week) schedule.

Summer courses, for many, offer an opportunity for students to either “catch up” or “get ahead” in their coursework, especially general education courses. While studies of time-compressed instruction show insignificant declines in student performance and, in fact, can positively impact certain subjects, “reading- and writing-intensive courses” that are time-compressed show mostly negative impacts on student learning (Martin & Culver, 2005; Lutes & Davies, 2018). This is not surprising, we’re sure, to those aligned with process pedagogy, collaborative writing, and iterative revision. Compressed terms simply don’t offer temporal space for those activities, and overenrolled courses further limit time and space for learning.

Writing teachers also feel the time-compression, as noted again and again in our earlier discussion. Instructors commonly make major adjustments in pedagogical approach, assignment lengths, and student assessment instruments to keep pace with the course. Mark A. Kretovics, Alicia R. Crowe, and Eunsook Hyun (2005) studied faculty perceptions of summer courses on their teaching and found that while most instructors adjusted their curricula to accommodate for the summer, faculty status and rank significantly influenced the instructor’s willingness to deviate from a full-term teaching approach. Specifically, tenured and tenure-track faculty studied were more willing to adjust courses than nontenured instructors, which Kretovics, Crow, and Hyun (2005) attribute to concerns about labor

and “political stability” (pp. 46–48). This point is essential to understanding the pressures felt by GATs teaching summer courses.

Extrapolating from these findings, we must consider the pressure placed on GATs who experience significant precarity and shifting identities: “caught in [a] special type of bureaucratic and professional purgatory; at once a teacher *and* student” (Marine, 2023). In our department, GATs are not guaranteed summer funding, and because of their student status, if they do take on a summer teaching assignment they must be enrolled in coursework or independent dissertation research hours: three out of five GATs were taking one or more summer courses and two were registered for dissertation research hours.

In addition to the aforementioned impacts, all GATs cited financial instability as a reason for taking on summer teaching. Indeed, while they all would have liked to use their summer to focus on their coursework or research, they needed to teach to have an income, albeit an income roughly half their fall/spring pay since most GATs could only be assigned one course. McShane said that without a summer appointment, she would have had to seek out other temporary employment. However, for the other four international GATs, that is not an option; international students visas prohibit working beyond the context of education unless the student applies for Curricular Practical Training (CPT), which also has restrictions. As explained in the nextGEN (2020) Advocacy Call to Challenge Institutionalized Xenophobia Against International Students, “International students face significant financial burdens for not being allowed to work off campus during the semester. Moreover, as nonimmigrant residents, they often do not qualify for many financial aid and scholarship opportunities that would help defray the cost.” That is, Lei, Meng, Panahi, and Taha virtually had no way of making money over the summer—to pay rent, buy groceries, seek medical care, support a family, or travel home for the summer—without taking on coursework and a teaching appointment for a 5-week, overenrolled writing course. Graduate students can also be appointed to research assistantships; however, those appointments are virtually non-existent meaning for many a teaching appointment is essential.

Like the GATs, the director of writing does not have guaranteed summer funding because of a 9-month faculty contract. For summer 2023, Johnson did receive a teaching appointment during Summer I 2023 as well as an administrative appointment for Summer II 2023. His administrative appointment, while related to the writing program, was provided for him to complete the year-long revision of the program’s born-digital textbook. He diverted some of his time to supporting the summer courses; however,

without that additional appointment, any support he would have provided would have been unpaid labor.

While compressed summer terms, instructor status, and financial strains are not inherently linked to the issue of overenrollment, they should be critically considered in this conversation as they compound on each other significantly increasing the impact felt. GATs needed to accept the appointments, regardless of the increased labor and stress, because of limited opportunities for summer funding and/or restrictive employment rules. This results in GATs feeling physically and mentally fatigued trying to keep up with the demands of an overenrolled class and emotionally exhausted due to worry and concern of finances, which also leads to an inability to fully engage with all the students. Meanwhile, the director of writing is often required to choose between supporting GATs via unpaid labor or simply leaving them unsupported. Meng perhaps described our collective affect during Summer II 2023 best: “overburdened.”

#### SUGGESTIONS TO ADMINISTRATORS

As detailed above, Summer II 2023 was challenging on multiple fronts. Most obviously, overenrollment increased the labor and stress on not only GATs but also students and the director of writing. When asked to create a memo for upper administration detailing the various challenges, we (Johnson, Lei, McShane, Meng, Panahi, and Taha) provided the suggestions below. We are also providing these here for readers to consider and, potentially, advocate for at their own institutions.

- **Actively abide by the course enrollment caps and consider the potential of even lower caps for summer courses** that are more intensive because of the condensed 5-week term. Strict adherence to the enrollment caps needs to be communicated to other university offices with the ability to enroll students.
- **Continue refining placement procedures so that students who opt to enroll in summer courses are placed appropriately.** This work is currently underway thanks to a grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB); however, that grant specifically focuses on English 100. We should also consider placement procedures in English 1301 and 1302, which could provide not only more accurate placement but allow for more accurate scheduling from the department. This is assuming that more accurate placement procedures would shift enrollments.
- **Offer additional professional development opportunities that provide GATs strategies for addressing logistical issues,** like over-

enrollment, while reducing negative impact on otherwise professionally sound pedagogical approaches.

- **Continue working to address issues with GAT salaries and summer funding opportunities.** Our funding structure does not necessarily allow GATs to prepare for summer financial obligations during the regular term. Further, by linking teaching appointments with required courses, we are not only requiring heavy workloads balancing teaching and coursework/dissertation research but also requiring students to pay fees that further reduce their already limited summer income. Overenrolling the courses they teach, moreover, asks GATs to do additional labor without additional compensation.<sup>3</sup>
  - In particular, international GATs are in a precarious position as their ability to find alternative employment during the summer is restricted. This requires them to accept (indeed, actively request) these summer appointments, regardless of workload or impact on their own coursework, research, or personal wellness.
- **Consider the possibility of teaching full summer term (10 week) sections of the writing classes.**
- **Work to notify GATs of summer appointments earlier.** Current practice means GATs are rarely made aware of their appointments more than two weeks in advance of the start of term. Additional time to prepare would be beneficial.
- **Continue the practice of providing a course equivalent of reassigned time for the director of writing during the summer terms.** While the director of writing was granted reassigned time during Summer II 2023, this is not guaranteed as a 9-month employee. Considering the amount of support needed during the summer terms, the director must be compensated. This time can also be used to prepare for the upcoming semesters and attend to important tasks such as programmatic assessment or curricular development.

The lessons we learned during a hectic summer term are localized praxis. We engaged in our group conversations and composed this article to theorize—make sense of—our experiences within the larger context of labor in first-year writing. As we continue working to address issues of labor, student success, and administrative support for writing programs, it is essential to remember and attend to the compounding impacts affecting the experience of graduate students who teach.

## CODA

We are revising this article during the Summer II and Fall 2024 terms. Reflecting on the issue of summer overenrollment and the compounding labor issues experienced during Summer II 2023, we find ourselves in an unenviable situation. While none of the courses taught by GATs were over-enrolled in Summer I or II, that is by chance and due to faculty members allowing their courses to be overenrolled. Generally, labor conditions have not improved significantly, regardless of our feedback to upper administration. And, unfortunately, the enrollments for the Fall 2024 semester far exceeded our staffing capacity and quickly swelled beyond our strongly fought for course caps. Currently, we are seeing that many of the issues experienced during our overenrolled summer courses are emerging during the 15-week session. These actions have not simply happened but are part and parcel for ongoing budgetary shifts and hiring restrictions within higher education and our university as well as a weak culture of communication between units on campus.

Being here, again, does not mean we haven't been working to make good on our recommendations. Johnson carefully advocated for setting the GAT summer teaching appointments earlier, and he was able to notify instructors about their appointments earlier than normal. This advanced notice provided instructors opportunities to better plan their summer labor and expenses. Additionally, new methods for student placement and realigned curricula are making the co-requisite English 100 and English 1301 course more efficient providing the intensive writing support commonly needed among the still-surging student populations. On the issue of finances, while not in place for Summer 2024, thanks to the dedicated work of our PhD coordinator, GATs now (retitled Graduate Assistant Instructors of Record, or GAToRs) receive their regular stipend and tuition waiver as well as have their fees covered keeping more money in their pockets: upwards of \$1,600 per semester. In terms of professional development, workshops focusing on balancing the competing identities that GATs inhabit as student and teacher were offered during the pre-semester writing program orientation and plans are developing to offer sessions on assessment and encouraging student attendance and participation. Next, with McShane recently being hired as one of two full-time lecturers, Johnson established The Writing Program Council to collaboratively push for improved labor conditions. Finally, with the encouragement of our interim department head, Johnson is implementing new guardrails for assigning and enrolling courses, and a request for additional full-time lecturers has been submitted. Stabilizing our teaching faculty, we hope, will relieve some of the enrollment pressure

and, eventually, allow for graduate students teach advanced undergraduate courses in their area of study.

In short, we are doing what we can at the local level to move our goals forward and counter the impacts that are continually compounding.

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## NOTES

1. Our PhD coordinator, and former director of writing, has worked diligently with the dean of the graduate school to implement a title that indicates the enhanced labor taken on by graduate students independently teaching sections of first-year writing. As of fall 2024, their title is “Graduate Assistant Teacher of Record” (GAToR).

2. This theory is supported by the fact that many of the Summer II students are part of a bridge program wherein they are provisionally accepted to the university but must pass their summer courses with a grade of C or higher.

3. In summer 2023 the department head and director of writing were able to pay each of the GATs with overenrolled classes a small supplement to their stipend. Although the stipend was minimal, it made a difference to the GATs who have often taught extra students but never received compensation. McShane commented, “I’ve taught overenrolled courses almost every semester for the last four years and have never received any extra pay for all the additional labor, so even though the stipend was small, it was nice to finally feel recognized and acknowledged for all my work.”

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#### APPENDIX: QUESTIONS FOR OCTOBER 11TH MEETING WITH GATs

1. What was the general feeling teaching during Summer II?
2. Did the overenrollment of students impact or increase time spent course planning? How or by about how much time?
3. Did the overenrollment of students impact how you ran your class? How?
4. Did the overenrollment of students impact or increase time spent assessing student writing? How or by about how much time?
5. Based on final course grades, was student success potentially impacted by the overenrollment?
6. Beyond Summer II 2023, have you taught overenrolled classes at TAMUC?
  - a. If so, how often?
  - b. If so, how did it impact your teaching or student success?
7. Did receiving a summer appointment impact your financial stability?
8. Did the one-time additional payment impact your financial stability?
9. If you would not have received a summer appointment, would you have sought other employment?
10. Would you have focused on your research?
11. Any final comments?

**Gavin P. Johnson, PhD** (he/him) currently works as director of writing and assistant professor at East Texas A&M University (formerly Texas A&M University-Commerce). His research interests include critical digital pedagogy, multimodal composition, antioppressive writing assessment, queer-feminist rhetorics, and surveillance studies. He has won numerous national awards including the 2024 Ellen Nold Award for Outstanding Article in Computers and Composition Studies with Laura L. Allen. Gavin is a proud first-generation college graduate from southeast Louisiana.

**Yu Lei, PhD** (she/her) is a doctoral student studying applied linguistics. Her current research interests focus on humor and computer-mediated communications. She teaches courses in basic and first-year writing and has previously taught courses in Chinese language. She received her first PhD from Beijing Language and Culture University in China.

**Rachel McShane, PhD** (she/her) currently works as a lecturer in the writing program at East Texas A&M University (formerly Texas A&M University-Commerce). Her dissertation research focused on rhetorical framings of womanhood and studied three cases of Texas women who stood trial for murder and were found guilty. Rachel teaches courses in basic, first-year, and advanced writing. As a graduate student, Rachel won one of four inaugural Innovations in Writing Pedagogy Awards from the writing program.

**Haomei Meng** (she/her) is studies applied linguistics, cognition, and humor. She teaches courses in basic and first-year writing.

**Reza Panahi, PhD** (he/him) is a doctoral candidate studying applied linguistics and online language education. He teaches courses in basic and first-year writing and won one of four inaugural Innovations in Writing Pedagogy Awards in 2024 from the writing program.

**Gouda Taha** (he/him) is a doctoral candidate studying applied linguistics, second-language pedagogy, assessment, and AI in the classroom. He teaches courses in basic and first-year writing and won one of four inaugural Innovations in Writing Pedagogy Awards in 2024 from the writing program.

