Council of Writing Program Administrators

Executive Board

The Council of Writing Program Administrators is a national association of college and university faculty who serve or have served as directors of first-year composition or writing programs, coordinators of writing centers and writing workshops, chairpersons and members of writing-program-related committees, or in similar administrative capacities. The Council of Writing Program Administrators is an affiliate of the Association of American Colleges and the Modern Language Association.

Susan Miller-Cochran, President ........................................ University of Arizona
Dominic DelliCarpini, Vice President .................. York College of Pennsylvania
Rita Malenczyk, Past President .................. Eastern Connecticut State University
Cristyn Elder ............................................................... University of New Mexico
Paula Patch ........................................................................... Elon University
Scott Warnock ................................................................. Drexel University
Mark Blaauw-Hara ......................................................... North Central Michigan College
Heidi Estrem ........................................................................... Boise State University
Tracy Morse ............................................................... East Carolina University
Asao Inoue ................................................................. University of Washington-Tacoma
Karen Keaton Jackson .............................................. North Carolina Central University
Cheri Lemieux-Spiegel ........................................... Northern Virginia Community College

Ex-Officio

Christine Cacciare, Treasurer............................... University of Delaware
Michael McCamley, Secretary ................................. University of Delaware
Shirley K Rose, Director, Consultant Evaluator Service... Arizona State University
Michael Pemberton ...................................................... Georgia Southern University

Associate Director, Consultant Evaluator Service
Barbara L'Eplattenier, Journal Editor .......... University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Lisa Mastrangelo, Journal Editor .................. Centenary College of New Jersey
Mandy Macklin, WPA-GO ................................. University of Washington
Virginia Schwarz, Vice Chair, WPA-GO ........ University of Wisconsin-Madison
Authors’ Guide

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. WPA: Writing Program Administration is published twice per year: fall and spring. Possible topics of interest include:

- writing faculty professional development
- writing program creation and design
- critical analysis and applications of discipline or national policies and statements that impact writing programs
- labor conditions: material, practical, fiscal
- WAC/WID/WC/CAC (or other sites of communication/writing in academic settings)
- teaching multimodal writing
- teaching in digital spaces
- theory, practice, and philosophy of writing program administration
- outreach and advocacy
- 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 (SLAC, HBCU, two-year colleges, Hispanic schools, non-traditional schools, concurrent work)
- interdisciplinary work that informs WPA practices

This list is not comprehensive. If you have questions about potential work for WPA: Writing Program Administration, please query the editors. We are particularly interested in publishing new voices and new topics.

Submission Guidelines

Check the website for complete submissions guidelines. Please include the cover sheet available at http://wpacouncil.org/info-for-authors. In general submissions should:

- be between 3,000–7,000 words; longer and shorter pieces will rarely be considered
• have identifying information removed for peer review: author name(s), track changes, comments, and properties cleared throughout
• include a short running head with page numbers
• include an abstract (200 words max) as part of the manuscript, following the title and preceding the body of the text
• have an accurate and correctly formatted works cited page
• include the cover sheet
• be saved as a .doc, .docx, or .rtf file. Do not send .pdf files. If you have special formatting needs, contact the editors.

More information regarding the formatting of the manuscript (specifically endnotes, tables, and pictures) is available at http://wpacouncil.org/node/1812. Manuscripts that don’t conform to the requirements will be returned to the author with a request to reformat.

Reviews

WPA: Writing Program Administration publishes review essays of books related to writing programs and their administration. Publishers are invited to recommend appropriate books to bookreviews@wpacouncil.org. If you are interested in reviewing texts, please contact the book review editor at bookreviews@wpacouncil.org

Announcements and Calls

Relevant announcements and calls for papers and/or conference participation will be published as space permits. Announcements should not exceed 500 words, and calls for proposals/participation should not exceed 1,000 words. Please include contact information and links for further information. Submission deadlines in calls should be no earlier than January 1 for the fall/winter issue and June 1 for the spring issue. Please email your calls and announcements to journal@wpacouncil.org and include the text both in the body of the message and as an MS Word or RTF attachment.

Correspondence

Correspondence relating to the journal, submissions, or editorial issues should be sent to journal@wpacouncil.org

Subscriptions

WPA: Writing Program Administration is published twice per year—fall and spring by the Council of Writing Program Administrators. Members of the Council of Writing Program Administrators receive a subscription to the journal as part of their membership. Join at http://wpacouncil.org/join-renew. Active members have access to online versions of current and past issues through the WPA website http://wpacouncil.org/journalarchives. Library subscription information is available at http://wpacouncil.org/library-memberships.
Contents

Letter from the Editors ................................................................. 7
Letter from the Book Review Editors ............................................ 11
In Memoriam: Lloyd Bitzer (1931–2016) ........................................ 12
    Kathleen Blake Yancey
In Memoriam: Carol Berkenkotter (1940–2016) ................................ 15
    J. Thomas Wright
In Memoriam: Theresa Jarnagin Enos (1935–2016) .......................... 17
    Tracy Ann Morse
Race, Silence, and Writing Program Administration: A Qualitative Study of US College Writing Programs .............................. 19
    Genevieve García de Müeller and Iris Ruiz
Grief and the New WPA ................................................................. 40
    Laura J. Davies
“How Do You Know That Works?”: A Mixed Methods Approach to Writing Program Assessment .................................................. 52
    Amy A. Lannin, Jonathan Cisco, Jes Philbrook, and Maxwell Philbrook
A Model of Efficiency: Pre-College Credit and the State Apparatus ....... 77
    Joyce Malek and Laura R. Micciche
Class Size for a Multilingual Mainstream: Empirical Explorations ...... 98
    Bradley Queen
On Learning to Teach: Letter to a New TA ........................................... 129
E. Shelley Reid

Letter to a New TA: Affect Addendum ............................................. 146
Elizabeth Saur and Jason Palmeri

Standard English and Colorblindness in Composition Studies:
Rhetorical Constructions of Racial and Linguistic Neutrality ........ 154
Bethany Davila

WPAs in Action: Vignettes from the Field

U-Turns, Pivots, and Gradual Arrivals: Navigating Midlife and
Mid-Career in Academe’s Changing Landscape ......................... 174
Peggy O’Neill

Travelogue

Hearing the Bass Line: Giving Attention to Writing at the
University of Tennessee, Knoxville ............................................. 180
Shirley K Rose and Kirsten Benson

Policy Review

Common Core State Standards Initiative for Writing Program
Administrators ................................................................. 193
Diane Kelly-Riley

Announcement ............................................................................. 221
Letter from the Editors

We welcome you to the journal’s Spring 2017 issue. In our final issue, we present to you a variety of work: articles, the annual Travelogue, a WPA in Action piece, and a major policy review of the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Some of the articles included in this issue respond to newer disciplinary questions—what does it mean to be socially just in a university/program/classroom—and some return to older questions to provide more support for our disciplinary claims: What is the definitive class size? Do writing intensive classes work? What happens when a new WPA is appointed?

We open the issue with In Memoriam to three of our colleagues: Lloyd Bitzer, Carol Berkenkotter, and Theresa Jarnigan Enos. All three had tremendous impact on our discipline, and their presence (and wisdom) will be missed. We thank Kathi Yancey, Thomas Wright, and Tracy Ann Morse for contributing their memories of working with (indirectly or directly) these stalwarts of the field.

Bookending the articles section of the issue are two pieces that examine teachers’ perceptions: one looks at perceptions of support for students at their school and one looks at teachers’ perceptions of papers they are evaluating. None of us will be surprised to learn that there remains much work—both within ourselves and within our organizations—that needs to be done before our programs, our universities, and our society are socially just, as Poe and Inoue describe in their introduction to the College English special issue on writing assessment as social justice.

“Race, Silence, and Writing Program Administration: A Qualitative Study of US College Writing Programs” by Genevieve García de Müeller and Iris Ruiz presents a study that helps us understand how writing instructors and administrators perceive the function of race in writing programs and how WPAs are positioned to help combat racism within the institution and curriculum.

In “Grief and the New WPA,” Laura Davies explores the experience of replacing the long-time WPA through the lens of grief theory. Exploring the ways that the loss of a previous WPA can affect both the new WPA and
the department, Davies concludes with advice and practical strategies for creating new relationships.

Amy A. Lannin, Jonathan Cisco, Jes Philbrook, and Maxwell Philbrook’s “‘How Do You Know That Works?: A Mixed Methods Approach to Writing Program Assessment” examines student perceptions and writing growth in writing-intensive courses. This mixed-methods study demonstrated both quantitatively and qualitatively positive writing growth and positive student attitudes towards writing intensive courses. The study also revealed how teachers changed their pedagogy as a result of teaching these courses.

Joyce Malek and Laura Micciche describe their efforts to work with a state-mandated policy that requires them to evaluate student work for pre-college credit. Working to both assuage the policy and maintain consistency with the goals of their own writing program, Malek and Micciche describe adapting to external pressure in a tale too many WPAs will recognize.

Bradley Queen’s essay “Class Size for a Multilingual Mainstream: Empirical Explorations” adds to the decades-long discussion of what the optimal class size might be for writing classrooms. Building on the NCTE/CCCC statement that class sizes should be limited to fewer than 20 (15 for remedial classes), Queen investigates the use of portfolio pedagogy with multilingual students. Queen’s empirical study shows, once again, how complex the connection between class size and writing instruction can be.

Last fall, when we received E. Shelley Reid’s “On Learning to Teach: Letter to a New TA,” we knew it would be useful to TAs and the WPAs who train them. While its epistolary form does not fit the format traditionally published in this journal, its value as a working document and its sweeping knowledge of disciplinary research struck us immediately. We asked Dr. Reid to engage in conversation with two other scholars, Dr. Katie Ryan and Dr. Jason Palmeri, about the piece and revision possibilities. The results were not only a strengthened piece, but also a response by Elizabeth Saur and Jason Palmeri to the invitation implicit in the epistolary format chosen by Dr. Reid. “Letter to a New TA: Affect Addendum” reminds us that teaching—and learning—is not just a cognitive task but also an emotional endeavor.

Bethany Davila’s “Standard English and Colorblindness in Composition Studies” examines student writing and the ways that readers impose racialized identities onto the texts. Particularly, Davila examines the ways that Standard English codes writing as white (and errors may code writing as other). Davila also offers possibilities for disrupting those readings to promote more colorblind assessments of student texts.
This issue also contains a WPAs in Action piece by Peggy O’Neill. In “U-Turns, Pivots, and Gradual Arrivals: Navigating Midlife and Mid-Career in Academe’s Changing Landscape,” O’Neill explores the midlife academic crisis that many in the field face. Offering reassurance that many are also in this situation as well as concrete suggestions for how to move beyond it, O’Neill’s piece looks at both the literature in the field as well as some academic and non-academic research on midlife. Finally, O’Neill explores the ideas of pivoting and hypermiling in order to regain a sense of composure and reduce job ennui.

As has been the tradition, Shirley K Rose interviewed Kirsten Benson, the local host for the upcoming 2017 WPA conference in Knoxville, Tennessee, for the Travelogue. The 2017 conference theme is “Solving Problems Together: Agency and Advocacy in the Age of Austerity.” In the Travelogue, Benson shares some of the local circumstances around her writing program, as well as places of interest for conference participants. We hope you enjoy the Travelogue.

Whereas a book review section generally closes the journal, this time Norbert Elliot and Jacob Babb offer a substantial policy review of the Common Core State Standards Initiative as they affect writing program administrators. Diane Kelly-Riley moves through the history of the policy, some of its major points, and the ways in which they will affect our profession should it continue to be the standard that remains in place.

Our work on the journal—3 years for Barb and 2 years for Lisa—has reminded us that hard work is always easier when you work with someone whose strengths shore up your weaknesses, that most writing can be tightened, that a good fact-checker is worth their weight in gold, and that our discipline remains, first and foremost, a teaching discipline.

Our reviewers have given generously of their time and expertise, offering encouragement, support, and suggestion in their reviews to those submitting manuscripts, and we offer them our deepest thanks. Many made themselves known, and some offered to work with authors. We are certain that no one will be surprised to know that Norbert Elliot has mentored many of the authors published in these pages.

Like the reviewers, members of the Editorial Board have generously given time, expertise, support, and encouragement to us. They have answered random, out-of-the-blue questions, have stewarded the Special Issue from start to finish, and have served as emergency reviewers. They were our ace-in-the-hole; we are grateful to them and have learned much from them, and we hope the new editors will be as lucky with their Editorial Board as we were with ours.
Others we owe thanks to include Sarah Ricard, fact-checker and MLA citation guru; Joel Wingard, who has provided volunteer copyediting for each issue at the proof stage; Kelsie Walker, ad manager; and Linda Adler-Kassner, Rita Malenczyk, and Susan Miller-Cochran, for their CWPA leadership and support. David Blakesley has been unfailingly patient with our questions and our missed deadlines. We thank Sherry Rankins-Robertson for her year as editor. The University of Arkansas at Little Rock has been exceedingly generous with its support.

Having worked in various capacities with them over the years, we know that the new editorial team of Lori Østergaard, Jim Nugent, and Jacob Babb, with Courtney Adams Wooten as book review editor, will do a marvelous job, and we look forward to reading the journal as it develops under their purview. We wish you strong submissions, speedy and kind reviewers, a good editorial board, easy copy-editing, and clean proofs. These last three years have been humbling, educational, and inspiring for us; may you have the same experience.

As always, don’t hesitate to contact us—or rather, the new editors—with ideas or concerns. The journal’s email is (and will remain) journal@wpa-council.org or wpaeditors@gmail.com.

—Barb and Lisa
Letter from the Book Review Editors

In Spring of 2015, we began our appointment as your book review editors. We write to you now to report on our collaborative work with our reviewers as we leave the stage and make way for incoming book review editor, Courtney Adams Wooten.

We began our tour by identifying twenty-two categories for reviews and four review genres. To dispel the notion that only tenured professors are qualified, we also asked your help in creating a new list of specialist reviewers without regard to seniority. Here is how the story unfolded:

With our colleagues, we published reviews in five issues and one special issue. We published seventeen traditional reviews, three multi-book reviews, one research report, and one policy report. Among our twenty-two contributors we count four graduate students, three instructors, four assistant professors, five associate professors, four professors, and two endowed/named professors. We have had editors of three of our field’s journals, as well as chairs and presidents of our organizations. Our reviewers represent the astonishing range of interests that come together in the uniquely pragmatic and theoretically-informed work of writing program administration.

Through so many different reviews of so many varied texts, we have come to realize how much attention is given to individual students at their desks. That deep and enduring commitment has tremendous moral value, and we have been privileged to witness it.

Words fail. Our gratitude does not. Play on, and catch the conscience of kings.

—Norbert Elliot
Book Review Editor

—Jacob Babb
Associate Book Review Editor
In Memoriam: Lloyd Bitzer (1931–2016)

Kathleen Blake Yancey

January 2017

Dear Lloyd—

It was with such sadness that I learned of your death. *Wikipedia* calls you an American rhetorician, which of course you were, and of the first order, but when, as a nascent doctoral student, I met you—through your texts, as academics do—I didn’t think of you in such exalted terms. I thought of you as one of the many scholars I encountered and learned from in a class on contemporary rhetoric.

That class, one I took as a doctoral student, was memorable in several ways. I was specializing in Rhetoric and Composition, a hard task in an English department that didn’t recognize either. Composition, probably because of the teaching, seemed within reach, rhetoric much less so. Precisely because I didn’t know much about rhetoric, I thought I should. In 1979, the English department at Purdue, where I was taking my degree, offered no courses in rhetoric; happily, I found a rhetoric course in Communication Studies, (literally) down the hall and (yet) around the world from English. Taught by Professor Don Burks, the class widened my world. We’d begin each class with the same question. “Where is meaning?” Dr. Burks would ask. “In people,” the students chorally replied, all but me. I was too astonished: in English, meaning was in texts. We read the scholarship of multiple contemporary rhetoricians, Douglas Ehninger, Henry Johnstone, and you among them. We wrote about rhetoric informally and formally, and I struggled to give it a definition.

Just like that class widened my world, “The Rhetorical Situation” helped me re-frame it. Such a simple title, such an important concept: the role that situation plays in shaping rhetoric. Rhetorical situation was, for me at least, a kind of threshold concept, transforming how I understood not only rhetoric, but also life itself, oriented to exigence, bounded by constraints, avail-
able for various kinds of action. Rhetorical situation articulated the classroom situation where I met you, expressed the classroom situation where I taught, framed potential rhetorical opportunities outside of school. I began asking students to think in terms of rhetorical situation, that is, to think explicitly about their writing tasks in terms of a rhetorical situation: What’s the purpose, who is the audience, what is the topic, and what role are you playing as author? To me, this was all such new, heady stuff. What I didn’t appreciate at the time was how new the concept was for all of us, even for you. The class was held in 1979; “The Rhetorical Situation” had been published in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* a mere eleven years earlier, in 1968.

Not everyone agreed with your approach, of course, even as they appreciated the salience of a rhetorical situation. Some claimed that you had it backwards: the situation didn’t evoke rhetoric, as you had it, but rather was created by the rhetor him or herself. Others claimed that the situation, as it were, was considerably more complex and nuanced: while both situation and rhetor matter, it is the ability of the rhetor to bring the topic, audience, and situation together that is the rhetorical task. Most recently, rhetorical situation has been re-contextualized through the concept of ecologies: rhetorical situations aren’t discrete so much as contributors to and participants in larger flows and fluxes. Still, the concept of the rhetorical situation prevails—and in so many ways. It’s commonly used in writing programs; it’s invoked in the WPA Outcomes Statement; it’s critical for any course in rhetoric. Put more generally, the rhetorical situation is now a key concept for college students developing as writers and studying rhetoric. That kind of influence? It’s heady stuff.

The rhetorical situation has also been useful in my scholarship, even—or perhaps especially—in research in fields quite apart from rhetoric proper. In “The Rhetorical Situation of Writing Assessment,” for example, I invoke two definitions of the rhetorical situation—yours and a repurposed definition—to theorize the relationship between writing assessments and the rhetorical situations that might invoke, inform, or respond to them. More specifically, I propose two ways of thinking about writing assessment. One: relying on what I called the *local exigence*, what you describe as an occasion or imperfection requiring response, all writing assessment is local. Because exigences are local, what appears as the same practice isn’t; it varies to accommodate those local exigences, as we see in the case of a particular kind of assessment, Directed Self Placement (DSP), where versions of DSP across a range of institutions (e.g., Colgate, Southern Illinois, and Grand Valley) differ. Two: relying on what I called a *self-created exigence* operating outside of the local, scholars working collaboratively can design an exigence to guide inquiry. In this case, I identify two portfolio-related
projects, Portnet and the Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research, whose purposes were quite similar: to include the needs, or exigences, of individual campuses but in the context of an emerging field as its own rhetorical situation with its own concerns and questions locating the research. The larger group thus identifies situations seeming to have enough commonality that they constitute a larger, more generic rhetorical situation; such a situation includes a self-designed exigence motivating a rhetorical response. All of this I saw only in the fullness of time: participating in Portnet and in the Coalition, I didn’t think in terms of a rhetorical situation, but in retrospect, that concept helps me understand it as critical for shared endeavors. As important, it helps me understand how such an approach can prompt new inquiries.

All of these musings are invoked, of course, by the rhetorical situation of your death, dear Lloyd. Although I never met you or corresponded with you or even saw you give a talk, your rhetorical situation dramatically shifted the way I experience the world. Profoundly, it has shaped the ways many of us in Rhetoric and Composition understand rhetoric—and the ways we teach and research.

For that and more, we thank you.

—kathleen blake yancey
Florida State University

Kathleen Blake Yancey, Kellogg W. Hunt Professor of English and Distinguished Research Professor at Florida State University, a public R1 institution, has served as the elected leader of several writing studies or literacy organizations, including the Council of Writing Program Administrators. Immediate Past Editor of College Composition and Communication, she has published over 100 refereed articles and book chapters and authored, edited, or co-edited 14 scholarly books, including Delivering College Composition; Writing Across Contexts; and A Rhetoric of Reflection. She has been recognized with several awards, including the CWPA Best Book Award and FSU Graduate Mentor Award.
In Memoriam: Carol Berkenkotter (1940–2016)

J. Thomas Wright

On September 26, 2016, Carol Berkenkotter signed the papers needed for me to receive my PhD. It was her last act in a full career. A week later, her lengthy battle with cancer came to an end. Neither the expectation to retire nor an exhausting illness had kept her from helping her students for as long as she possibly could.

She defined her students in a remarkably broad sense, sharing her impressive knowledge and careful feedback with anyone who could benefit. In my case, I joined this group two months after I began my doctoral studies at the University of Minnesota, well before I enrolled in a class with her. I had given a presentation in San Antonio, and she was in the audience. After my talk, she made a point of seeking me out and sharing some ideas. Much to my surprise, she was clear that she knew the kind of work I did. I had been familiar with her work, of course, and I had enrolled in that program with the hopes of learning more about it. But it had never occurred to me that she might have looked into what I was doing. If I had been speaking with others who knew her, I would not have been surprised. She was unfailingly generous with her time—not only to students throughout our program but also to scholars throughout the discipline.

Later I became her student in a more conventional sense, taking a class from her in the rhetoric of science. When I finished that, she asked me for help in wrapping up a book she was working on called Patient Tales: Case Histories and the Uses of Narrative in Psychiatry. The book had been written; all she needed was a copy editor. But we spent many hours and many lunches going over the content, talking about what to leave in and what to take out. These talks were far more for my benefit than hers. She already knew what she wanted to say. She also knew I needed training in that kind of thinking. She was paying me to give me private lessons on how to write an academic book.

I continued working with her for a year as her research assistant, and I still have boxes of notes and documents that came out of that. When Hurricane Matthew approached my house on the coast of Florida, the first thing I did to prepare was cover the window above those boxes.
Everything she shared with me came from the decades of research and writing that had created a global reputation for her work in genre theory. With Thomas Huckin, she wrote *Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication: Cognition/Culture/Power* (1995). This book immediately became known to genre theorists everywhere. Although genre theory isn’t my specialty, even I knew of it before I read any of her other work. It was highly relevant to my own studies in the rhetoric of science and several other areas. The scope of her influence is suggested in *Written Communication*’s “Special Issue on Narrative in Writing Research in Memory of Carol Berkenkotter.” From the discourses of psychiatry to the historical contexts of writing to the value of personal narrative studies, it’s clear that the way we do research now is different because of Carol’s efforts. The articles published in that special issue reflect just a small part of that.

It is not only professional scholars who do research differently because of Carol. Hundreds of undergraduates do, as well. For many of them, an early essay of Carol’s is their introduction to how research in writing studies is done—and, indeed, even that such a thing can be done at all. In 1983, Carol worked with Donald Murray on a pair of essays called “Decisions and Revisions: The Planning Strategies of a Publishing Writer” and “Response of a Laboratory Rat: Or, Being Protocoled.” These essays are now included in a successful first-year composition textbook called *Writing about Writing*, by Elizabeth Wardle—one of Carol’s former students—and Doug Downs. My colleagues and I have been using this book for the last six years. We consistently find that students who have never considered writing as something to be researched can easily follow Carol’s methods and see the value of them. When I first told Carol that we were using her work in our first-year composition program, she volunteered to answer questions my students had about it. Through her efforts, they began seeing their textbook as something written by real people who can be questioned and challenged, not as a collection of facts to be accepted uncritically and forgotten as soon as grades are posted.

Some of these students are now teachers themselves. Many of Carol’s students through the years are as well. Through us and through her writings, her influence is carried forward. I’m proud to be a part of that effort.

J. Thomas Wright is a lecturer in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Central Florida, a large public university with very high research activity. He has designed and taught courses in rhetoric and civic engagement, scientific writing, and medical discourse. He currently leads the department’s student ambassador program. His paper “Division in Antiquity: Kenneth Burke’s Puzzling Omission” received a top paper award from the Kenneth Burke Society.
In Memoriam: Theresa Jarnagin Enos (1935–2016)

Tracy Ann Morse

I know. We all do it. We can’t read Theresa’s name without hearing or doing the *th* sound at the beginning of it. All of us who had the privilege of being her students or working with her have our own stories of the first time Theresa corrected our pronunciation of her name. I was a lucky one. Before I ever met Theresa face-to-face or spoke to her, I had a message from Theresa on my answering machine that clearly recorded her Texas drawl, “Hi, Tracy, this is THEResa Enos” as a way of introduction. I played that message back several times to be sure I was hearing her correctly. When I first met Theresa face-to-face as a first-year PhD student in the Rhetoric, Composition, and Teaching of English (RCTE) program at the University of Arizona, I erred on the side of caution and called her “Dr. Enos.” She quickly corrected me and implored that I call her “Theresa with a ‘th’.” I know it may be silly to start an in memoriam with this story, but so many of us associate this distinction of her name as one among the many Theresa possessed.

I worked closely with Theresa when I served as assistant editor on *Rhetoric Review*. Theresa and I often sat back to back in her office working together on manuscripts and the production of the journal. Our conversations were often related to the work of the journal: Whose review was I waiting on (she gave me a list of reviewers, many of whom I would have to nag to return reviews in a timely manner)? Had I finished formatting that last article? Had I sent those manuscripts out to the reviewers? Her wealth of knowledge in rhetorical studies surrounded me in that office—literally in the stacks of her own books and others in and on the bookshelves and in our discussions—and I soaked in as much as I could. We would naturally slide into personal chats from time to time. Her sense of humor could be surprising since her professional demeanor was firm and sometimes not flexible. Some of my best memories of Theresa are those moments when she shared with me more about herself. At that time, she loved going out in the
RV on road trips. In fact, she decided to remove herself from my dissertation committee because my defense date was going to conflict with one of her road trips. She was a fan of and sometimes competed in ballroom dancing. She swore me to secrecy when she told me stories about extracurricular events from CCCC long, long ago.

Much of my memories from my time in the RCTE program at the University of Arizona is filled with the communal feeling that can be credited to our then matriarch, Theresa. The RCTE community has a tight bond and extensive family tree. We benefitted from Theresa’s leadership of our program and in the field. Theresa had opinions and she had standards. She expected much from the students in RCTE and in her classes, and we were all better for it. Theresa was tough and generous. In the wake of Columbine and 9/11, she pushed for and allowed space for the work of rhetorical studies to be more human and humane. She reinforced the professional development of students in the program. She shared her own notoriety with many of us who published with her or created special projects for Rhetoric Review. In her generosity, Theresa showed us ways to give back to our field and give space to effective mentoring.

Tracy Ann Morse is Director of Writing Foundations and an associate professor of rhetoric and composition in the Department of English at East Carolina University, a public four-year, doctoral university. Her research and writing are in the areas of disability studies, deaf studies, and composition studies. Her work has been published in Rhetoric Review, Disability Studies Quarterly, Inventio, and The Journal of Teaching Writing. Her book, Signs and Wonders: Religious Rhetoric and the Preservation of Sign Language (2014), was published by Gallaudet University Press. In addition, she co-edited Reclaiming Accountability: Using the Work of Re/Accreditation to Improve Writing Programs (2016, Utah State University Press) and Critical Conversations about Plagiarism (2013, Parlor Press).
Race, Silence, and Writing Program Administration: 
A Qualitative Study of US College Writing Programs

Genevieve García de Müeller and Iris Ruiz

ABSTRACT

While Writing Studies scholarship has interrogated race and college writing instruction, we argue that it still needs to substantially build upon this work in systematic ways that intersect race and writing program administration (Craig and Perryman-Clark; Green; Inoue; and Poe). This article discusses the findings of a survey administered in the spring of 2016. The results of the survey contribute to Writing Studies’ current understanding of how race functions within writing programs. While the contingent nature of the labor force in most writing programs is acknowledged, WPAs hold a great deal of power to affect change in writing program curricula due to their ability to dictate what happens in terms of pedagogical training, faculty development, assessment practices, and student support (Halpern). When it comes to the consideration of race and writing program administration, participants in this study argued that scholars of color often work in isolation recognizing that programs lack effective strategies to systematically implement race-based pedagogy or examine specific institutional resources to help combat racism on campuses.

As the field of Writing Studies solidifies its commitment to anti-racist scholarship, looking at the direct relationship between the role of race and university writing program administration is a critical task. A part of this task, and the intent of this qualitative survey-based study, is to understand how writing instructors and administrators perceive the function of race in writing programs. With writing programs serving on the frontlines of most US universities, understanding this connection seems especially salient. While Writing Studies scholarship has interrogated race and college writing instruction, we argue that it still needs to substantially build upon this work in systematic ways that intersect race and writing program administration (Craig and Perryman-Clark; Green; Inoue; and Poe).
In this article, we discuss the findings of a survey we administered in the spring of 2016. The results of the survey contribute to Writing Studies’ current understanding of how race functions within writing programs. While we acknowledge the contingent nature of the labor force in most writing programs, there is no doubt that WPAs hold a great deal of power to affect change in writing program curricula due to their ability to dictate what happens in terms of pedagogical training, faculty development, assessment practices, and student support (Halpern)—the areas that our survey focused upon.

Discourse about race in writing programs has been very scarce. This is largely attributed to writing programs’ historical privilege of white meritocratic discourse; however, recent conversations linking social justice to discourses of linguistic normativity, assessment reliability, and high-stakes pedagogical and ideological choices made in US writing programs (Poe et al.) show that race matters a great deal. For example, when high-stakes assessment practices ignore race disparities, students of color are affected at disproportionate rates (Inoue, “Self-Assessment”; Green). One of the problems current WPAs face when trying to account for race within these programmatic shifts is that white meritocracy continues to manifest in the many practices, assessment procedures, and curricular decisions (Villanueva; Roediger); however, “[i]f we consider the relationship between social justice and writing assessment, then conversations on race, language, and difference, within composition studies should change how assessment is handled within the classroom and writing programs in general” (Green 153).

Adding to this ongoing conversation, our survey data reveals that many writing programs either do not consider or only marginally consider race when developing and administering their writing programs. Interestingly, this oversight occurs while writing instructors and WPAs affirm that race is an important factor directly affecting student success resulting in an ironic silencing of race as a generative subject for writing program administration. The results of this survey further illustrate that while writing programs often fail to account for race at various levels, compositionists of color are helping bring race into writing curricula and the daily functions of US writing programs, either as administrators or as composition practitioners (Green; Perryman-Clark). Many of these same practitioners express feeling isolated in WPA conversations about their programmatic goals and aspirations for a more race-conscious writing program. This reveals that race is still an uncomfortable topic for many and that WPAs need strategies on how to talk about race without isolating composition instructors and scholars of color. In short, WPAs must learn how to work through the discom-
fort of race and WPA work in order to achieve anti-racist writing programs. Further exacerbating this problem is that people of color are underrepresented in the field of Writing Studies, which in many ways contributes to the lack of attention to race in Writing Studies journals, conference spaces, and professional organizational policy, and when race is acknowledged, it is mostly because of their work and advocacy (Kynard).

The acknowledgement of race is often reduced to a “category to delineate cultural groups that will be the focal subjects of research studies,” which fails to see the actual “relationship of race to the composing process” and “instead race becomes subsumed into the powerful tropes [or metaphors] of ‘basic writer,’ ‘stranger’ to the academy, or the trope of the generalized, marginalized ‘other’” (Prendergast 36). This failure to connect race to the composing process, practices, and the assessments thereof has had dire consequences for students of color because these tropes reduce them to metaphors that connote deficits rather than assets. Race needs to be named, interrogated, discussed, and "demetaphored" in ways that are specific, explicit, and additive.

One compelling critique of this problem of metaphors and race was offered by Jennifer Clary-Lemon in “The Racialization of Composition Studies: Scholarly Rhetoric of Race since 1990” where she examines the discourses of the journals *College Composition and Communication* and *College English* since 1990. She discovers that the majority of race-related works published in these journals rarely use the actual words *race* or *racism*. Instead, authors utilize vague metaphors such as “diversity, inclusion, and social justice” when alluding to racialized phenomena (Clary-Lemon W6). This metonymic slide has caused potentially productive discussions about race to lose their definition. One productive discussion was Steve Lamos’s book *Interests and Opportunities: Race, Racism, and University Writing Instruction in the Post-Civil Rights Era* where he traces the history of racism in basic writing. Victor Villanueva further notices racism’s disguise, stating, “the new racism embeds racism within a set of other categories—language, religion, culture, civilizations pluralized and writ large, a set of master tropes (or the master’s tropes)” (16).

This metaphorical/metonymical problem can be counteracted by scholarship that pays direct attention to race and writing programs. Daniel Barlow, for instance, looks at “the productive potential of racial inquiry in composition scholarship and pedagogy” in “Composing Post-Multiculturalism” (411). He claims that celebratory multiculturalism does not provide sufficient opportunities for critical inquiry into race and racism. He agrees with Clary-Lemon, stating that the field looks at race as a discursive problem (411), and while this is a productive point of critique, it still does not
move the field forward in a way that gets beyond either celebratory multiculturalism or discursive polemics. Race still seems to be a problem that is complex, context-dependent, and avoided as a point of departure, with exceptions such as composition scholars who have focused on rhetorics of race that challenge outdated, celebratory multicultural rhetorics and provide writing pedagogies with critical race dimensions (Smitherman; Gilyard; Kennedy et al.; Martinez; Prendergast; Jones Royster, Williams; Parks). Such critical expansions are the addition of critical race theory, whiteness studies, and critical historical research which look to add the missing voices of those considered absent from composition pedagogy and scholarship (Prendergast).

These scholars have demonstrated that race discourse, although perceived as discomforting, can inform and improve critical pedagogy. For example, scholars have looked at alternative counterpublics such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other public venues where literacy is associated with ethnonlinguistic diverse communities (Green; Gilyard; Perryman-Clark; Ruiz). One such study is Susan Jarratt’s “Classics and Counterpublics in Nineteenth Century Historically Black Colleges,” which looks at three different HBCUs: Fisk, Atlanta, and Howard universities to explore how these counterpublics contributed to African American literacy and education after the Civil War. Scholars have continually argued about how vital identity is to Writing Studies (Spack; Gilyard; Davila; Kynard), and there have been calls to mainstream diversity writing (Marzluf; Ratcliffe) or to account for codeswitching (Canagarajah, “Functions”), multilingualism (Creese and Martin), and translanguaging in the classroom (Canagarajah, “Clarifying”). Furthermore, studies have looked at teaching instruction in minority-majority institutions (Redd) or incorporating the everyday writing practices of linguistically diverse communities and students of color (Guerra; García de Müeller). Yet the field of writing program administration still has not paid enough attention to these counterpublics, which offer a wealth of advice for how to think about race in college writing programs. This inattention becomes even more pronounced in the survey results.

Our work builds on Asao Inoue’s Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies in which he writes,

> it is not fairness that we need in antiracist writing assessment ecologies, or any antiracist project—it is not judgment by the exact same standard that we need—it is revolutionary change, radically different methods, structures, and assumptions about the way things are now and how to distribute privileges. (56)
Inoue speaks of the difference in equality and equity—the ideas that fairness does not solve the problem of racial differences in the classroom. He is arguing for radical changes in the ways that writing programs function. We agree with Inoue’s claim and acknowledge that not only do race issues problematize how the field addresses assessment, but while intersecting race and writing studies, we found that there are considerable problems with how writing faculty and WPAs of color are treated when trying to address these issues Inoue is interrogating.

While contemporary scholarship often acknowledges race as an important factor to consider in the field, Writing Studies has yet to create a strong body of scholarship that focuses directly on race in WPA work or support systems for WPAs of color. In short, WPAs have yet to embed race as an integral criterion of their work. Staci M. Perryman-Clark and Collin Craig call for this in “Troubling the Boundaries: (De)Constructing WPA Identities at the Intersections of Race and Gender” where they write,

As first time attendees of one of the CWPA conferences, we noticed the limited representation of people of color, and we were left to wonder why. When and where do we enter this conversation and how might we be more visibly represented in CWPA? (38)

Thus, we see ourselves heeding these calls for intersecting race and WPA research by applying an antiracist lens to the field’s various methods. Our results show that writing instructors and WPAs of color feel they are most responsible for working on initiatives that change the perception of race issues in college writing programs while also feeling silenced by writing programs if and when they try to advocate for race-based initiatives.

**Study Design**

This multiple phase study is funded by the College Composition and Communications Research Initiative. This first phase is a survey-based study intended to demonstrate how race is currently perceived in WPA work. Our method of inquiry for this first phase is informed by Sally Barr-Ebest’s work “Gender Differences in Writing Program Administration” where she discusses how she administered a survey that looked at gender disparity. We applied this form of inquiry to race and ethnicity.

With the goal of illustrating the perception of race in writing programs, we developed a survey that asked participants to review the effectiveness of their universities, their writing programs, and their own personal strategies when dealing with issues of race. With the understanding that there are many duties and aspects of writing programs, for the purposes of the survey, we decided that most consist of four basic areas: student support,
pedagogy, assessment, and faculty (Charlton et al.; Barr-Ebest). We created questions that focused on race in these four writing program areas.

We asked respondents to rate their institutions, their writing programs, and their own personal effectiveness when dealing with race and racism across all four areas of writing programs using a 1–5 Likert scale with 5 being extremely effective, 4 being very effective, 3 being moderately effective, 2 being slightly effective, and 1 being not effective at all (Trochim). For example, we asked, “On a scale of 1–5, with 1 being not effective at all and 5 being extremely effective, how effective are the programs or initiatives in place at your institution to support racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse student populations?” This was followed by a question asking participants to explain their rating. The questions did not ask about racism explicitly although we were inclined to think we would get those types of responses. The questions asked about the effectiveness of a strategy to address issues of race and ethnicity and relied on the respondent to explain the rating in narrative form so as to understand the context of race at their institution. We administered the survey online with our participants recruited via professional listservs such as WPA-L, the CCCC Latinx Caucus Listserv, and the CCCC Black Caucus Listserv. These listservs were chosen to target WPAs and writing instructors from various institutions and of differing racial and ethnic backgrounds. All surveys were anonymous.

In total, we had fifty-nine respondents. Participants consisted of WPAs, composition instructors, and graduate students working in college writing programs. There were eight full professors, eleven associate professors, fifteen assistant professors, seven lecturers, two adjuncts, twelve graduate students, and four non-tenure track WPAs and Writing Center Directors who responded. The survey asked respondents to self-identify their race, ethnicity, and professional rank. Forty identified as white/Caucasian, eleven as Latino/Puerto Rican/Mexican, three as black/African American, two as Native American, and three as mixed. For the purposes of our data analysis for this article, we coded results as responses by white/Caucasians and responses by people of color (POC). We use the term people of color not to conflate experiences of diverse groups but rather to contrast the experiences of embodied racialized academics to those of white/Caucasian academics. The aim of this article is to highlight these contrasting experiences and perceptions, but further work needs to be done illustrating the specific experiences of various racially diverse people who work in writing programs. We also find it important to intersect the issues of race with issues of labor. Future studies on this intersection would add another layer to how racial experiences are crafted by positionality within the writing department.
Survey Discussion

Although the majority of respondents rated strategies as moderately effective, we found that white/Caucasian participants were more likely to respond that their institution, writing program, and personal strategies were very or extremely effective in addressing issues of race and ethnicity in the four writing program areas. POC respondents, however, were more likely to rate these strategies as slightly and not effective at all. When we combined the Caucasian/white and POC respondents answers of moderately, very and extremely effective, the average difference between how respondents answered based on race became much clearer. We, therefore, charted the answers based on this analysis of the data in table 1 and figure 1.

Table 1

POC vs. White/Caucasian Ratings of Strategies and Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Effective at All</th>
<th>Slightly Effective</th>
<th>Moderately Effective</th>
<th>Very Effective</th>
<th>Extremely Effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>POC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>9 (56%)</td>
<td>3 (18%)</td>
<td>4 (25%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>6 (37%)</td>
<td>3 (18%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>7 (43%)</td>
<td>4 (25%)</td>
<td>3 (18%)</td>
<td>2 (12%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student support</td>
<td>4 (25%)</td>
<td>5 (31%)</td>
<td>4 (25%)</td>
<td>3 (18%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White/Caucasian</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>6 (16%)</td>
<td>19 (52%)</td>
<td>8 (22%)</td>
<td>2 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>7 (19%)</td>
<td>8 (22%)</td>
<td>15 (41%)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>11 (30%)</td>
<td>12 (30%)</td>
<td>12 (33%)</td>
<td>3 (8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student support</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>12 (33%)</td>
<td>19 (52%)</td>
<td>2 (5%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WPA: Writing Program Administration, Volume 40, Number 2, Spring 2017
© Council of Writing Program Administrators
Fig. 1 Percentage breakdown of POC vs white/Caucasian ratings
When POC respondents rated a strategy as moderately to very effective, the narrative justification for the rating tended to explain the effectiveness as being a result of POC work on the strategy. This section is divided into the four areas of WPA work: student support, pedagogy, assessment, and faculty. In each part, we first describe the questions asked about each area of WPA work, then provide a percentage breakdown of responses given by white/Caucasian participants versus POC participants, and finally report some common responses.

**Student Support**

The student support questions covered two areas: 1) effectiveness of institutional programs or initiatives to support racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse student populations and 2) effectiveness of self-strategies in the comp classroom to support racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse student populations. We asked these questions about racially and linguistically diverse students because POC students who use non-Standard English are often indexed racially:

> Even though there is no inherent link between race and dialect, when one dialect is both “read” as White and deemed more acceptable than other dialects, it becomes raced in the reader’s mind and perpetuates Whiteness. [. . . ] Racialized language use also racializes language users; however, Whiteness and [Standard Language Ideology] mask this process by simultaneously racializing [Standard Edited American English] and arguing that [Standard Edited American English] is unaffiliated. (Davila 198)

This race-based indexicality often affects POC students in complex ways due to the intersection between race and linguistic diversity.

Very few POC respondents rated institutional strategies as effective. One respondent addressed the lack of valuing diverse students:

> No support for domestic students whose first language isn’t English. Little to no recognition of strengths multilingual students bring to campus or how to optimize them in classrooms to benefit all. Little recognition of the circumstances, interests, strengths, needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

Another POC respondent replied,

> We are very early into developing strategies in this area to promote the success and well being of diverse students in our classrooms, but
I don’t hold out much hope for the short term. We are at a loss for what we can do that doesn’t single students out or ostracize them as being labeled at-risk.

Both respondents are addressing the lack of student support in ways that link linguistic diversity to race and institutional environments that index racially and linguistically diverse students as at-risk and ignored.

Some POC respondents replied that the efforts of POCs have contributed to the effectiveness of programs such as one respondent who said, “We have a strong Director of Diversity, Inclusion and Multicultural Programs who is not white and who I work closely with to mentor students of color.” If POCs working on these initiatives have writing program and wider institutional support, successful strategies can be instituted and sustained. One respondent names a few successful strategies at their institution:

[There is] a diversity requirement for all undergraduates, a writing center that provides assistance for both undergraduates and graduate students as well as putting on workshops for faculty and students alike (staffed by undergraduate students who must have taken courses in tutoring and have a faculty recommendation before the students are hired by the Director of the writing center). Numerous courses, even those not designated as satisfying the ethnic studies or women and gender studies requirement, include works by non-European authors.

While some POCs talked about being supported by administrators, most suggested that POCs use strategies in isolation. One respondent said, “Minimal attempts have been made in combating racism in composition. And the only faculty who attempt to do so are the few minority faculty in the writing program.” There were some respondents that stated that success was direct result of a POC administrator: “Given the recent death of the university president, who was Black, I see a return to ‘administrative caution’ when addressing racism and a tendency to rest on laurels (earned by that president).” In this case, the success of the black president is being taken for granted rather than seen as an important model for how to maintain a working system.

Interestingly, the majority of white/Caucasian respondents rated the institutional student support programs as mostly effective, but when asked to justify this, many of the narrative rationales conflicted with the rating. One respondent stated, “I have no idea . . . seriously. There are an abundance of identity-based student run groups at my campus.” Another replied, “I worry [. . .] about the needs of American students of color because the campus population is overwhelmingly white and conserva-
tive” and another stated, “There’s much discussion of embracing diversity on campus via social events and special lectures/presentations, etc., but academically, instructors don’t exhibit this embrace in their teaching or assessment.” In many ways, these responses do not align with the rating of effectiveness the participants gave, reflect a notion that student support only means a recognition of diverse groups, and reduces support to special groups and lectures. The responses do not illustrate anti-racist institutional practices that initiate dialogue beyond recognition of the racial and linguistic minorities as the outside other, suggesting that there is no clear understanding of diversity initiatives beyond what Barlow references as celebratory multiculturalism (419).

Some white/Caucasian respondents also equated POC student support to remedial courses even though no such link was made or implied in the question. For example, one person responded, “the school got rid of basic writing courses because they lost funding from the state” and another stated, “Our basic writing courses seem to do well at helping underprepared students acclimate to the demands of college writing.” Again, the survey question only asked about support for students of color and linguistically diverse students. There was no question about basic writing or underprepared students. This dilemma leads us back to Prendergast’s claim that diversity often becomes co-opted by appeals to basic writers and other non-sequitur metaphors for racial minorities situating in the linguistic environment described by Davila.

On the issue of racism, some white/Caucasian respondents made a distinction between explicit and implicit racism:

While we do I think on the whole a good job of combatting overt racism, we are not always adept at addressing or recognizing microaggressions. This in part is due to the fact that our faculty is largely white, in part to lack of education about microaggressions.

Many respondents made this call for education in their responses, which in many ways intersects with the POC experience. POC academics are asking to be heard while white/Caucasian academics are asking to be educated. Both of these issues seem to be administrative concerns.

Despite some confusion and conflation by white/Caucasian respondents, there were some who justified their rating with concrete initiatives. One respondent stated,

We have worked very consciously in the last 5 years to change our curriculum to meet the changing demographics of our students. We do lots of professional development and are now working on putting diversity and inclusion into our merit documents.
Another replied, “There is good work going on in student support services and athletics. The Writing Program actively engages in supporting students of color and from non-Standard and non-English backgrounds, including Generation 1.5 students.” These responses suggest that programs and students benefit from race-based initiatives, and in order to be sustainable, race-based initiatives must have institutional support.

Pedagogy

We asked two questions about the effectiveness of strategies aimed at combating racism at the institutional level and in the first-year composition teaching practicum.

POC respondents either felt the strategies were not effective or, when they did mark a strategy as effective, it was because of an effort on their part:

There is no strategy specific to the composition classroom used to combat racism or colorism. But given that several of us teaching first-year writing are people of color and given that some of us have designed courses that relate to these issues (one faculty member looks at different representations of Martin Luther King, for example), these issues occasionally arise in individual classroom discussions or between faculty member and students who seek advice or understanding from the faculty member.

Without systemic support from their programs, POC respondents were doing this kind of work in their classrooms. For the most part, however, POC replied that there were either no strategies or that when POC addressed issues of race, they were silenced. For example, one respondent said, “I think the dominant faculty and staff often think they know more about diversity than they do, but there is still some eye-rolling, etc. when actually diverse people want to talk or assert themselves.” This conflict was a common theme in responses. The department wanted race-based initiatives, but when race was addressed explicitly by POC academics, they were ignored or aggressively silenced by white colleagues.

To the question of practicum, POC respondents mostly stated that race was never addressed or when it was addressed, it was problematic. One respondent said, “Mostly White people talking to other White people about race.” Finally, POC tied the effectiveness of the teaching practicum to the kind of material covered:

The teaching practicum required for graduate students includes many racially/linguistically oriented readings, including Royster’s “When the voice you hear is not your own” and readings by Villanueva. Monthly staff development meetings, required for NTT fac-
ulty, have featured sessions on race and the classroom, “teaching controversial topics,” and have offered a forum for voicing all kinds of concerns in the classroom/curriculum.

This response in particular gives a model for creating an environment that works to provide avenues of support for instructors working with race and ethnicity in the classroom. It was one of a few responses from POC academics that did not follow the narrative of silence but rather showed ways to combat that narrative.

Some white/Caucasian respondents were able to articulate very clear pedagogical initiatives their institution had put in place to combat racism and colorism; however, most were either not sure how to respond or felt as if they had little training or support in this area. Some respondents explained why initiatives were effective:

The students of color (a substantive percentage of the student population) have strong support systems and a strong academic and social presence on campus. The issues of racism are explicitly addressed in the Writing and Communication program’s extensive initial and ongoing orientation and professional development workshops.

Other white/Caucasian respondents were at a loss. One replied, “I really have no clue,” and another said, “I don’t know of any institutional strategies in place.” Some respondents felt they were unsupported in their efforts or were faced with a volatile racial space. For example, one person replied, “Our institution has done very little officially to combat racism or colorism in the institution and so if it can’t fight those fights outside of the comp classroom, how can it expect to fight them within it?” The majority seemed to understand that initiatives were there but were not sure how to employ them. For example, when one respondent said, “I address issues of perspective, but I do not know how to address issues of linguistic and rhetorical diversity in *writing*.” The respondents, again, seem to be calling for this race-based work to be explicitly addressed in their departments. When this explicit addressing of race does occur, white/Caucasian respondents felt more able to answers these questions in concrete ways.

The white/Caucasian respondents’ replies to the question about a racially aware teaching practicum were again conflicted. One respondent said, “I’m sorry. I don’t understand the question,” and another said, “There is no such training in place, nor required or suggested readings.” One response said these initiatives were “virtually non-existent at our campus,” and one said, “We include readings and discussion of theory during a few weeks of this course, and the conversations and intentions are honest. But theory and discussion in practice change.” One respondent who discussed linguist-
cally diverse POC students replied, “Training of graduate students to teach first year writing (FYW) prominently emphasizes working with multilingual students and readings in the relevant literature. That our FYW WPAs in recent years have national reputations on multilingual writing pedagogy has certainly helped.” This affirms the notion that strong institutional support for race-based initiatives was the result of a fostered culture of talking about issues of race by scholars in the department pushing for these initiatives to be programmatic.

Assessment

In the area of assessment, our survey asked, “How effective are the strategies used for assessing the writing of racially and linguistically diverse students in the first-year composition program?” We found the answers to this question particularly interesting, as they were complex and vastly different answers.

Most POC respondents explained that they take great care in assessing students of color and students from linguistically diverse backgrounds. The effectiveness of the assessment then was linked to the POC’s work on this issue while still suggesting that more people needed to continue this work:

I, along with other faculty members, have been asked to speak to first year composition teachers and others concerning this assessment. One issue is that the research in this area is not exactly robust, and it should be something WPA takes on in a serious way. It’s hard to convince others when the research is minimal.

This theme was common. In many responses, POC and white/Caucasian academics asked for more research to be done on race and assessment.

When POC rated assessment as ineffective, most replies suggested a lack of support or a hostile environment. One respondent replied, “We assess all students using the same rubric and criteria, and those are based in Standard English” while another said, “Even asking such a question is too difficult for those in power to contemplate. And as we know all too well, white feelings always trump the needs and aspirations of people of color.” Again, the theme of POC silencing is addressed. In this case, the POC respondent describes white/Caucasian academics as lacking knowledge and allowing their emotions to prevent progress.

Some white/Caucasian respondents suggested that although the assessment strategies were not effective, the onus to improve these strategies should be placed on faculty of color. For example, one reply stated, “Certainly opportunities for improvement exist in providing better strategies to address the needs of these students. It might be useful to turn to minority
faculty to address this area more effectively.” Finally, when a respondent rated the assessment practices as not effective, the personal context of the student was stated as one reason why. For example, one respondent had this reply:

Our first-year writing courses are incredibly demanding and anxiety-producing on account of the stakes-bearing portfolio review system, and our POC-to-Caucasian student fail rate is grossly disproportionate. Our system seems to be failing POC, who often have major personal challenges and responsibilities outside the classroom that compromise their potential for academic success.

Without knowing the institutional context for such a claim, it seems the respondent is indexing POC students as overburdened with complex lives outside of the classroom in comparison to their white counterparts. POC lives are seen as a deficit and a threat to their education whereas white student lives promote academic success. In many ways, this creates a picture of the POC student as bound to fail from a system that is not made for their complexity. Rather than making programmatic shifts that allow for complexity, POC students are failed and punished for this while white students are rewarded for their standardness.

When white/Caucasian respondents rated their program as moderately or very effective, their replies tended to cite specific reasons why. For example, one respondent said, “Our assessment rubric was shaped specifically not to unfairly mark non-native speaking patterns or indicators of multilingualism.” Another respondent explained the systemic ways assessment has been addressed:

Instructors are well connected to the Writing Center staff and often have conversations about linguistic diversity and inclusion in terms of student writing. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds (who are overwhelmingly non-white) are also able to participate in a Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) prior to the start of their first semester, where they are encouraged to embrace and explore the rich literacy traditions they come from while preparing them for the kinds of academic standard Englishes they will encounter in college.

This response particularly speaks to the common theme of administrative and institutional support. When race-based initiatives are grounded in and sustained by an institution and administrators that values students of color and their linguistic histories, then students benefit; instructors feel prepared; and programs are more able to address race in writing programs.
Faculty

The final question on the survey asked, “How effective are the strategies your administration has to affirm racial and ethnic diversity among faculty?”

POC responses were similar but tended to focus on personal experiences as one of a few POC faculty members on their campus. One notable response outlined the respondent’s entire experience:

It is difficult to be only one of a few people of color teaching at an institution with a minority-majority. I sometimes hear from students things that happen in other writing classrooms (a girl who failed a course because she did not participate in class without the instructor understanding that English was not her first language, and therefore, there was both cultural and linguistic barrier that she was struggling to overcome). For me, the urgency to think about inclusion, difference, power, are very present, and I think we are missing opportunities for a better understanding of what it means to teach minority students (i.e., it is never discussed in any meetings, when I mention it off hand, people seem uncomfortable, when I try to speak in meetings, I often feel overlooked and/or ignored).

This response again suggests that the isolation and silencing of POC scholars directly affects their ability to push for race-based initiatives to help students of color.

Some POC respondents explained the inability of their institution’s administration to effectively create strategies for recruitment and retention of POC. One reply stated, “Our administration has not taken an active approach to recruit faculty of color and seems to have no desire in doing so.” Another respondent explained how they navigate the conflict between initiatives and reality:

I would say they often say they affirm it, but what goes on behind closed doors is another story, especially when faculty of color (especially outspoken ones) are not included in the conversations. However, some administrators do listen to data and comparative analysis to more affirming institutions when it’s presented to them that may contradict this supposed affirmation. I used this strategy a number of times (shaming them with comparative data), and it was the most successful means to helping them move in the right direction of affirmation.

While this respondent again affirms that POC scholars are devalued, the respondent also suggests that embedding arguments of the benefits of racial
diversity in scholarship helps quite a lot. Some POC replies discussed the hostile environment on campus. One respondent said, “Very few NTT and tenured faculty are faculty of color, and those who have been hired have left either to contracts not being renewed, or to poor pay/benefits, or to perceptions of a hostile environment/not being listened to” and another replied, “Administration lacks even the most elementary vocabulary for addressing racial diversity.” The continued silencing of POC scholars and lack of a commitment to recruit and keep racially diverse faculty impacts students of color.

Common white/Caucasian responses to this were that faculty diversity was not an issue. For example, one respondent said, “Strong racial diversity exists in the campus leadership on all levels—chairs, directors, upper administration” and another said, “again not sure this is an issue.” Some respondents didn’t know how to answer. One respondent said, “I’m honestly not even sure how they do this, so I really can’t answer this question competently. However, we only have two tenure track faculty members who aren’t white,” while another replied, “I honestly have no idea how to answer this question. I wish there was an option to have no opinion,” and another said, “I have NO idea what the racial composition is of the entire university or faculty; in my program/department there’s no diversity.” Finally, some white/Caucasian respondents explained that while the programs were effective at recruitment, they were not effective at retention of POC faculty. For example, one respondent said, “Faculty of color don’t stay long at our institution, and staff of color are very uncomfortable as well. It’s a hostile environment.”

Implications

Most participants in the study affirmed that POC students are not served well in support, pedagogy, or assessment and that there are no clear administrative strategies to combat racism and colorism; however, participants also suggested that they believe they are doing well in the classroom. Some participants were able to point to concrete methods they were using in their courses to address race, while others rated their strategies as effective but their narrative explanations conflicted with their self-rating. This conflict seems to suggest that some white/Caucasian instructors might have good intentions but lack the critical knowledge to address race and ethnicity. Many participants stated they don’t have support by administration or the university as a whole with issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity efforts; that there is only minimal effort to make the faculty diverse racially and ethnically; and that when those recruitment strategies work, there is not a
support system for POC academics and, therefore, they leave. POC respondents repeatedly wrote about being silenced and devalued while white/Caucasian respondents asked to be educated on race-based initiatives.

On several occasions, there was a clear distinction between how POCs answered and how white/Caucasian respondents answered. There were a few instances where white/Caucasian respondents were at a loss for how to articulate responses to questions of race in writing programs. However, POCs often felt they bear the brunt of the work on race and ethnicity at their institutions and had to navigate hostile environments; nevertheless, when the participant, institution, and writing program put effort into researching how to address race and ethnicity; had comprehensive training in race issues; and clear systemic racial diversity directives, both white/Caucasian and POC respondents rated their institutional strategies as effective.

Conclusion

The history of race in writing program administration coupled with the data presented here creates a complex and pertinent illustration of how race functions in Writing Programs. While the sample of respondents is small and our findings cannot be seen as representative of the field as a whole, this study sets a precedent for this area of scholarship and shows the need for larger qualitative studies. When it comes to the consideration of race and writing program administration, participants argued that scholars of color often work in isolation, recognizing that programs lack effective strategies to systematically implement race-based pedagogy or examine specific institutional resources to help combat racism on campuses. Our survey suggests a perception gap between white respondents and people of color (POC) respondents. For example, we found that the lack of attention paid to race in WPA work creates undertheorized teaching models, curricula, and support programs that frustrate POC faculty who demonstrate a greater awareness of diversity initiatives or show that white respondents seem to be unaware of or complicit in ignoring diversity. To make matters more challenging, white respondents think diversity strategies are effective while in general POC do not, creating a clear disconnect in perceptions about how successful writing programs address differing levels of racial and linguistic diversity of their student bodies. This disconnect between white faculty and POC faculty, as our results show, should be attended to as it shapes WPA attitudes toward race that, in turn, shape the assumptions guiding writing program administration. The findings suggest that when writing instructors and institutions put resources and time towards researching and implementing race-based writing program strategies, POC students benefit,
POC academics feel supported, and white/Caucasian instructors are more able to address race in articulate and concrete ways.

**Works Cited**


—. “Self-Assessment as Programmatic Center: The First Year Writing Program and its Assessment at California State University, Fresno.” *Composition Forum*, vol. 20, 2009.


Redd, Teresa. “‘Tryin to make a dolla outa fifteen cent’: Teaching Composition with the Internet at an HBCU.” *Computers and Composition*, vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 359–73.


Genevieve García de Müeller is an Assistant Professor in the Writing and Language Studies Department at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, a Hispanic Serving Institution. She has a chapter in the anthology Linguistically Diverse Immigrant and Resident Writers (Routledge) titled “Digital DREAMS: The Rhetorical Power of Online Resources for DREAM Act Activists.” Her most current work, “Inviting Students to Determine for Themselves What It Means to Write Across the Disciplines” co-authored with Brian Hendrickson, is in the WAC Journal.

Iris D. Ruiz is a lecturer with continuing appointment status for the Merritt Writing Program of the University of California, Merced, the newest of the ten research intensive Universities of California. She is the author of Reclaiming Composition for Chicano/as and other Ethnic Minorities: A Critical History and Pedagogy (2016) and co-editor of Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition Studies: New Latinx Keywords for Theory and Pedagogy (2017), both published with Palgrave Macmillan. She was also the lead author of the NCTE position statement on the importance of Ethnic Studies for K–12 institutions.
Grief and the New WPA

Laura J. Davies

Abstract

A new writing program administrator replacing an outgoing WPA can set off a series of emotional and practical reverberations that can be difficult for the new WPA to understand. This essay discusses such a transition through the lens of grief theory, specifically the concepts of disenfranchised grief, secondary loss, mourning tasks, and the recursive nature of the grieving process. These concepts illuminate how the people in a writing program—its teachers, administrators, and staff—react when a WPA leaves a position or retires. This essay argues that WPAs need to acknowledge grief in the workplace, and it offers WPAs practical strategies for helping the people in their programs mourn productively and cope with loss.

Two years ago, with angst and department politics bubbling over, I sat down in my colleague’s office. David was my department-assigned faculty mentor, and he took that role seriously. He handed me a cup of coffee, looked me dead-on, and said, “It’s not you. They’re mourning the loss of Nancy.”

As I reflect on my first two years as the junior, untenured WPA, I keep coming back to David’s diagnosis that afternoon, a version of the classic “It’s not you—it’s me” breakup story. For much of that time, I was focused on what I could do or should do, who I was to the teachers in my program, how I needed to do everything just right. David’s comment reminded me that I am only part of the story. For the full-time and part-time lecturers in my writing program, that first year wasn’t Laura’s inaugural year. It was the first year without Nancy.

Grief is complicated. When we experience loss—be it the loss of a beloved family member, a friend, a colleague, a pet, a home, and so on—our grief often ripples out, pops up in unexpected spaces, and stays present and sore long after others deem it necessary. The more I think about it, the
more I’m beginning to understand my first two years as the new WPA as an exercise in managing the grief of the teachers in my first-year writing program.

When I reflect on it that way, my first two years remind me of my mother-in-law’s kitchen. My mother-in-law was a wonderful woman who taught preschool, played the piano beautifully, made casseroles with Velveeta cheese, bought too many Christmas presents, and loved her six children more than anything. Ten years ago, she was diagnosed with Stage IV pancreatic cancer at the age of 57. Soon after we heard the news, my husband and I decided to move back from New Hampshire and buy his childhood home, to be there to help as much as we could.

My mother-in-law lived eleven more months. I remember first tiptoeing around her in the kitchen, making scrambled eggs for my year-old son. The kitchen was her space. Before and immediately after her diagnosis, I remember her making batches of oatmeal muffins, trays of stuffed peppers, and vats of chili. As the cancer accelerated, she was in the kitchen less and less, until finally, she lay dying in her upstairs bedroom. Her sisters and children came, stayed, and went. I spent a lot of time in the kitchen, cooking with my mother-in-law’s pots and pans.

My husband and I lived in that house for six more years. For a long time, my own dishes, knives and forks, and skillets and cookie sheets stayed packed in cardboard boxes in the attic. I was the new woman of the house, yet the kitchen was not really mine. I knew that for my husband’s brother and sisters, the loss of their mother stung raw for a long time and in ways I couldn’t understand. I respected that, and I tried not to rock the boat. I pulled out my mother-in-law’s recipe cards and cooked Christmas dinner for his family, the first Christmas without their mom. I scored on the pot roast but botched the cinnamon rolls.

As time went on, I started to transform my mother-in-law’s kitchen into my kitchen. Every now and then, I’d open one of boxes in the attic and rediscover something, like a corkscrew apple peeler I received at my bridal shower, and add it to a kitchen drawer. I embarked on little re-organization projects, moving the coffee mugs from this shelf to that one. After a few years, I packed up her stack of plates and replaced them with my own. Without my mother-in-law there to ask, I didn’t know what things in the kitchen were really special or what was just junk stashed away in the cabinet above the refrigerator. Some of the spices were so old and stale, yet at first, I didn’t feel like I could trash them. Perhaps I was too concerned about my sisters- and brother-in-law’s feelings—they aren’t really the type of people who are going to notice (or care) that their mother’s oregano is in the garbage can. Still, I felt as if I was walking a fine line. I was trying to
balance their mourning with my desire to respect the space and memory of a woman I admired as well as my need to feel established and to move forward with my and my own family’s life. I wanted to do right by them, by her, by us, and by me. At times, doing all of that was impossible.

Sometimes at work, I have felt as if I am walking that same fine line but in Nancy’s kitchen. Nancy was hired as the WPA in the mid-1980s, an administrative role she remained in for nearly 30 years. She successfully argued for full-time, non-tenure-track lecturer lines for the writing program’s teachers, established a two-semester first-year writing sequence, founded a writing across the curriculum program, started a college-wide writing contest that features student writing from across the disciplines, and did a myriad of other things to encourage cross-disciplinary conversation about writing, improve the labor conditions for non-tenure-track faculty, and increase the rigor of writing instruction on campus. I know why the full-time, non-tenure-track lecturers in my writing program were grieving. I never knew her as a colleague, as she retired the semester before I came to the college and began my position. I am grateful for what she left me on this campus: a writing program that had significant administrative support, that was vertically integrated in the college’s core curriculum, and that relied minimally on part-time contingent labor.

I know I can’t be the new Nancy nor do I want that. There are some practices she put into place I want to do differently, and there are components of the first-year writing program and writing across the curriculum program that I want to revise. These past two years, I have struggled to honor the program’s past, which bears Nancy’s mark, while making way for the program’s future through changes in curriculum, assessment, and professional development. Part of the skepticism I have faced from my program’s teachers is because I am not just the new kid on the block—I am also a young, female, untenured jWPA without the institutional capital of her predecessor. I am the interloper in Nancy’s kitchen. I am sometimes frustrated because I know I am being compared to Nancy in terms of what she did and of what she might have done in the administrative situations I have faced in the past two years. What I know from my research on grief is that when a person is no longer present—either through death, retirement, or a change in position—others ascribe their desires onto that person to validate those desires: “Nancy would have never [insert controversial departmental decision here,]” or “Nancy would definitely have [insert action here].” C. S. Lewis noted that grief and nostalgia distort how we remember the people we’ve lost, “with [their] supposed likings becoming a thinner and thinner disguise for [our] own” (9). A person’s absence allows us to invent views of what she would do, how he would react, or what she would say if he or she
were here now, even if that view is an inaccurate, idealistic, and at times convenient to our own desires.

Much of the literature about new, transitioning, or junior WPAs focuses on what the new WPA can do or should do (Dew and Horning; Enos and Borrowman; Fulford; Micciche). What I’ve seen first-hand, though, is that the dynamics of writing program administration are only partly about you. When a person leaves a writing program, especially a person who has an influential and highly visible position, an undercurrent of grief pervades the program and can surface in unexpected ways. This is true even if the person was not beloved or a long-standing fixture in the writing program like Nancy was. Ideas, insights, initiatives, procedures, possibilities—all are lost, and this change and loss is deeply felt. Instead of dismissing or ignoring this grief, we should ask ourselves, “How might new WPAs use grief theory to acknowledge the uncertainty that accompanies change and to help the people in their programs anticipate and mourn workplace loss?”

To some, grief may seem a heavy-handed term to describe what happens when a WPA leaves a program, especially if they are still alive. But grief is not just about death. People grieve as they experience concrete and abstract losses, including those that occur during life and work transitions. As program leaders, WPAs can benefit from knowing about grief theory so that they can acknowledge workplace loss during transitions, understand more fully the affective responses that happen during transitions, and help the people in their programs mourn loss before, during, and after transitions.

After my moment of enlightenment in David’s office, I began to research theories of grief and mourning. I immediately noticed the similarities between the grieving process and the writing process: both are complex, contingent, and often misunderstood. For example, one of the most commonly cited grief theories is Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’s five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. She developed this theory through her research on how terminally ill patients talked about their own dying, research that she presents in her 1969 book, On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy, and Their Families. Although Kübler-Ross’s theory was not presented as a one-size-fits-all grieving process, the five stages of grief model has been applied to situations vastly beyond the scope of her study on terminally ill patients. Examples of these include dying outside of a hospital setting, the grief of children, the trauma of sudden and violent deaths, and the emotional responses of the family and friends who lose a loved one. The popular take-up of Kübler-Ross’s theory has promoted a progress narrative about grief in American culture, in which the goal of mourning and grief is that a person ultimately accepts the loss, moves on, and is whole again. In reality, there is no such
thing as a rigid grief timeline with discrete beginnings, stages, and endings. Like writing, grief is ongoing and recursive.

Grief is also rhetorical. Grief does not obey positivist rules and cannot be theorized objectively because loss does not occur in a vacuum: the ways a person mourns are influenced by the larger context of the loss. Just as rhetorical action is intrinsically connected to the situation, a person’s grief is also shaped by the situation (Bitzer 6). In his book, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, William Worden argues that the grieving process is affected by several “mediators of mourning,” including who the person was that died, the mourner’s relationship with that person, how the person died, and the other losses the mourner experienced in the past (57). Worden, along with other psychologists who have studied grief, critiques the passive role the griever plays in Kübler-Ross’s five stages of grief model. Instead of treating the griever as a person who is subjected to certain feelings, Worden’s theory of grief, often called the four tasks of mourning, acknowledges the griever’s agency by naming tasks that a person chooses to do as they go through the mourning process: accepting the loss, working through the pain of grief, adjusting to life without the person, and finding a way to stay connected to the person while still embracing the present. Worden’s word choice here is important. *Grief* is a person’s instinctive feelings of sorrow that accompany loss; *mourning* is the deliberate expression of that sorrow. All the tasks attend to action or what a person can do to mourn in response to grief.

The theory of disenfranchised grief resonated with me as I thought about the circumstances of the change at my institutions. In contemporary American society, it’s acceptable to grieve a parent, a child, a sibling, or a close friend. Those are recognized as significant losses. Other losses, such as a miscarriage, the death of a pet, a parent’s diagnosis of dementia, or the loss of a home, are seen as less important and less grievable. People who grieve these seemingly insignificant things are often told to “get over it” or “move on.” Psychologist Kenneth J. Doka calls this “disenfranchised grief,” when people are deprived of the “need, right, role, or capacity to grieve” (3). Because there is no sanctioned forum for people to share and express their grief, their feelings of anger, sadness, and abandonment are dismissed and suppressed.

I am now able to see how disenfranchised grief has affected the lecturers in my writing program. To other full-time, tenure-track faculty at the college, Nancy was a well-liked and well-respected colleague who did the necessary administrative tasks to keep the college’s writing program running, and now I fill that box on the organizational chart. To most of the full-time, non-tenure-track lecturers in the writing program, though, Nancy
was more than an administrative figure: she was a confidant, a mentor, an advocate. Nancy’s WPA work and her presence opened up an opportunity for the non-tenure-track lecturers to forge a professional identity. Losing her as their WPA created a host of largely unacknowledged secondary losses and changes for them: the loss of their identity; the loss of a familiar support network; changes in the systems and procedures that shape their work life; and differences in their perception of how they belong to the writing program and the larger English department. Each of those secondary losses is a loss that needed to be mourned, and that contributed to the many, often conflicted emotions the lecturers experienced (and still experience) in the grieving process, including feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and fear.

The academic calendar and our academic workplaces compounded and contributed to the disenfranchised grief. There was a retirement reception for Nancy at the end of her last semester, and kind words were spoken, and a cake was presented. In the early summer, Nancy moved her books and boxes out of her office, and I moved in a month later. By the time the next academic year began in August, my name was on the door and the website. The college had moved on and replaced Nancy with me—her presence all but erased. Although the college and I were looking forward to the future—new students, new classes, and a new academic year—many of the non-tenure-track lecturers reacted negatively to the transition. The structure of the college’s teaching schedule as well as the established rhythms and practices of the college’s writing program also contributed to the persistence of the lecturers’ disenfranchised grief and unrecognized secondary losses. The college has no dedicated common hour for faculty meetings during the week, and the writing program traditionally held just one program-wide meeting at the end of the semester. Without a public, legitimized institutional space for the program to come together and talk on a more frequent basis, the lecturers’ grief was not recognized or even openly addressed.

I realize now, perhaps too late, that part of a new WPA’s job is to acknowledge the grief that accompanies transition and to find ways to help the people in her program mourn the constellation of losses they might have experienced. Ideally, the outgoing WPA, the other faculty in the program or department, and other administrators at the institution would prepare for the transition in advance. Part of that transition preparation should be anticipating workplace loss and finding ways to support the mourning process that accompanies that loss. However, a WPA transition is not always planned or anticipated. In those situations, and especially when the incoming WPA is new to the institution, new WPAs should reach out to other administrators and department or program colleagues. Colleagues from within and outside the writing program can help a new WPA under-
stand how a program’s history and institutional context might affect the ways people may react to and mourn the loss of a leader.

How might WPAs openly address the disenfranchised grief that accompanies changes in leadership and help the people within their programs mourn? To answer this question, I draw heavily from psychologist Therese A. Rando’s theoretical framework of the mourning process and the practical strategies for mourning explained by Beth L. Hewett. Rando’s theory, called the Six R Processes of Mourning, argues that the end-goal in the mourning process is not to eliminate grief. Rather, the purpose of mourning is to discover ways to join the past and the present and to live with the loss (63). This end goal requires going through a series of interrelated processes. Rando’s processes are similar to Worden’s and include confronting the loss, remembering the person who is now gone, adjusting to life without that person, and reinvesting in new people and relationships. Like Worden, both Rando and Hewett emphasize the action of mourning instead of the feeling of grief. This focus on mourning is intentional. Hewett explains that mourning “is an externalized response to the grief that we can choose to engage or forgo,” and she advocates using practical, deliberate mourning activities in order to address the pain of grief and loss (More Good Words: Practical Activities for Mourning). WPAs cannot get rid of the grief people in their program may feel, but they can help people in their program intentionally mourn by acting as “companions,” as described by Alan Wolfelt (17). It is not a WPA’s job to serve as a counselor or to tell the people in his program what they should feel or do. Rather, it is our job to listen, to be present, and to set up an environment that removes the stigma of grieving workplace and secondary losses.

The activities below, drawn from Rando’s and Hewitt’s work, can help WPAs plan for the grief that may happen during transitions in program leadership. These activities can support the mourning process as well as serve as opportunities for the writing program to publicly reflect on its identity, history, and future.

*Announce the transition as early as possible.*

We don’t always know when a colleague will leave or when a transition is imminent. If possible, announcing a retirement, resignation, or change in position early can help the people prepare for the transition. Grief can be even more difficult to deal with when the loss is sudden and unexpected. An important first step for the mourning process is acknowledging the loss, and this can begin before a person leaves. If you are a WPA who is planning on leaving, letting people know ahead of time gives them the opportunity
to talk about the many ways the transition may affect them, to express their thanks, and to say goodbye.

*Archive and share past administrative documents.*

Nancy left me a binder and a zip drive filled with important administrative files: agendas and minutes of program meetings, proposals, curricular documents, assessment plans, syllabi, and assignments. I am grateful for her generosity in compiling this binder and these files, and I continually refer to them for insight into how my writing program was constructed and how it evolved over time. As Shirley K Rose and Irwin Weiser argued, WPAs need to see archiving their program’s records as an integral part of their administrative work. Not only is archiving helpful for the new WPA, it can also be seen as part of the mourning process, as it is a proactive way a WPA and a writing program can keep the program’s past alive and relevant. Making plans to curate and manage an archive of administrative documents is a deliberate and practical mourning activity that members of a writing program can contribute towards before, during, and after a transition in leadership. Where appropriate, the WPA might ask people to help with parts (or all) of this project, in order to provide a sense of closure.

*Recognize that the transition is different for everyone involved.*

The new WPA should remember that every person in her program had a different relationship with the former WPA, and this relationship influences each person’s professional identity and sense of well-being. Some people may have worked with the former WPA for decades; others may have only known her for a few semesters. Change creates upheaval and fissures, and the transition will shuffle established routines and relationships within the program, perhaps opening up leadership opportunities for newer members of the program and displacing others. The new WPA should recognize the secondary losses that emerge from this change and know that the resulting adjustment after the transition will impact how people in the program relate to one another.

*Find ways to remember and honor the past.*

Outside of my chair’s office, there are two engraved academic award plaques, one for Van Byrd and one for Robert Rhodes—both of whom taught at our institution for decades and were influential fixtures in the life of the department. Every April, our department gives these two awards to two of our current students. What I like so much is that above both award plaques hangs a faded snapshot of Robert and Van, smiling together at a
Both men passed away this year, yet I remember them almost every day when I see this picture and read their names on these plaques.

Grief is compounded by fear, and as Hewett explains, one aspect of this fear arises from the worry that we will forget the person who is lost (37). If we forget about this person, we may lose a part of our identity that was shaped by our relationship with them. One way a writing program can deliberately and publicly remember a person who is gone is by naming things after them, such as awards, classroom or meeting spaces, or a program’s professional library. To name something is to perform a powerful rhetorical act. Naming brings the person’s name back into the life of the writing program, and it argues that the work this person did for the program is still valuable, even as the program changes in the future. It is important, though, to think carefully before choosing to memorialize a person in this particular way, as it could set up a precedent that may be difficult to follow in the future.

Welcome the new WPA publicly and early.

Many writing programs have an established calendar of events that include program-wide workshops, kick-off meetings, or an in-house teaching conference. Often, these events function as rituals that define a program’s identity. If there is an event that is traditionally held at the beginning of the academic year, when a new WPA typically begins in their role, it may make sense to deliberately use that event to welcome the new WPA to the writing program. Rando explains that two important mourning tasks are acknowledging what has been lost and deciding to be open to reinvesting in new relationships. By organizing a public welcome for the new WPA, the people in a writing program can be supported as they work through these mourning processes. Hosting the welcome early, ideally before the semester begins, circumvents the rushed, awkward hallway introductions that may otherwise happen in the flurry of the first few weeks. The new WPA doesn’t need to give a speech or lay out a plan for curricular change—in fact, it’s best that the new WPA do neither. Rather, the point of the meeting is to set up a public, institutionally-sanctioned environment in which the people in the program can work together to welcome a new leader, and the new WPA has the opportunity to learn names and get to know the people in her program. A welcome party is often a good way to do this.
Spend the first year (or two) listening and learning.

This suggestion is nothing new—a number of WPAs and academics have written about the strength that comes with slowness, stillness, and space (Fulford; Micciche; Berg and Seeber). Instead of succumbing to the whirling hamster wheel that seems to define our corporatized institutions, new WPAs can deliberately decide to “defer action” (Micciche 87). In doing so, WPAs can make room for the mourning that needs to happen before many of the people in the writing program can productively work together towards the program’s future. This listening is purposeful, not passive inaction. Listening allows a new WPA to discover assumptions and insights about the program’s students, the program’s history, and the institution. I learned a great deal when I invited teachers to get a cup of coffee, when I offered to sit in on their classes, when I asked them to walk with me over to the library, or when they stopped by my office to chat.

As we know, it is important to remember that a writing program, like any human organization, is not a time capsule. It lives, grows, and changes; indeed, the only constant is change. Because change is inevitable, loss and its corollary feelings of grief are as well. New WPAs cannot let these feelings of grief paralyze their programs nor palliate the grief by perpetually postponing changes. New WPAs need to make their writing programs their own—they need to move the coffee mugs and put their things in the kitchen. At the same time, new WPAs cannot ignore the legitimate feelings of grief the people in their program feel as they come to terms with the losses and secondary losses that happen during WPA transitions. Although confronting grief is uncomfortable, new WPAs can address it and make room for it by designing and leading practical mourning activities.

As leaders, we are called to take care of the people within our program by attending to both their professional and emotional needs. We have theorized the role of affect, emotion, and empathy in the writing classroom and in our work as teachers (Lindquist; Robillard; Worsham). We also need to consider how the emotions that arise from human relationships—grief, joy, love, shame, worry, hope, and so on—affect our workplaces and our writing programs.

Notes

1. Nancy is a pseudonym.

Works Cited


Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the many people who helped me think through and revise this piece. My sister-in-law, Eleanor Haley, a social worker who co-founded the nationally recognized website What’s Your
Grief, often says “grief makes you crazy.” My conversations with her over the years have helped me understand the complexities of grief. My mentor and friend Rebecca Moore Howard encouraged me to write up this essay, which began as a CWPA conference presentation. My faculty writing group colleagues—Geoff Bender, Tyler Bradway, David Franke, Laura Gathagan, Andrea Harbin, and Matt Lessig—supported me throughout the writing process. The teachers in my writing program have taught me the importance of listening and acknowledging grief. Finally, I would like to thank the WPA: Writing Program Administration journal editors and reviewers for their careful reading of this essay and apt revisions suggestions. Special thanks to reviewer Beth L. Hewett, who generously shared her own wealth of knowledge about grief and mourning and, in doing so, helped me strengthen this piece.

Laura J. Davies is Assistant Professor of English and Director of Campus Writing Programs at SUNY Cortland, a Regional public state university that grants bachelor and masters degrees. She researches writing teacher pedagogy, histories of writing program administration, and student reading and writing practices. Her work has been published in WPA: Writing Program Administration and Composition Studies. Her current project investigates how military tropes such as command complicate our field’s representation of the ethic of care in the first-year writing classroom.
"How Do You Know That Works?": A Mixed Methods Approach to Writing Program Assessment

Amy A. Lannin, Jonathan Cisco, Jes Philbrook, and Maxwell Philbrook

Abstract

Writing Program Administrators know the importance and effectiveness of multidisciplinary writing instruction, but convincing different stakeholders that such a pursuit is worthy of campus-wide investment is often a challenge. This article shows how one large university writing program approached its own program assessment in an effort to convince multiple stakeholders of the program’s effectiveness to improve critical thinking and writing across the disciplines. The authors conducted a mixed-methods case study of two writing intensive (WI) courses in order to explore student writing and student/faculty perceptions of their WI experiences. The authors found that students significantly improved across written drafts and held highly positive feelings toward their courses and their WI experiences. Students identified the benefits of WI courses, such as the value of authentic writing assignments, the critical thinking required of their assignments, and the improvement of their conceptual thinking. The authors argue that ongoing program assessment using a variety of methods can show the effectiveness of multiple layers of writing program work.

Introduction

“It works!” is the ready answer we share when asked about writing across the curriculum at our large university. However, as new leaders in this established WAC/WID program, we soon wished for an expanded explanation of the successes. This need was truly apparent when the Campus Writing Program (CWP) leaders were invited to share the updates of the nearly thirty-year-old program with the Faculty Council. We shared facts and figures about the more than 400 Writing Intensive (WI) courses approved by
the eighteen-member Campus Writing Board that annually reach 14,000 students across all undergraduate programs on our campus of nearly 40,000 students. Then, an engineering professor on the Council asked the perennial WAC question, “Does it work?”

That moment in a Faculty Council meeting helped launch our program assessment; we wanted to approach assessment from our own inquiry rather than from a mandate. This would keep ourselves open to the process and the writing experience of our students and not completely focused on the end as it measures up against a pre-determined rubric or outcome (Gallagher). We wanted to more systematically review WI courses at the student level, understand aspects of the program that might not be working well, and offer data to those outside of the field (like our engineering professor) that this program does work.

Questions of the program’s effectiveness had certainly been central to our thinking since each of us began in our CWP positions. We were aware that, on average, students successfully complete (C- or better) 2.5 WI courses on the way to graduation. We also had steady involvement and support of committed WI faculty. But our analysis of the program’s work had not included any student writing samples and minimal student input regarding their WI experiences. The student voices and words were missing from our CWP data.

**Research Questions and Foundations**

In conducting this assessment, we set out to study the effectiveness of a small sample of WI courses to answer the question of “Does this work?” More specifically, the following research questions guided our inquiry:

- How do students’ WI experiences align with WI Guidelines?
  - How is writing in WI courses helping students think critically about course content?
  - How are WI courses supporting students’ writing in the disciplines?
- How are Writing Intensive courses helping faculty reach the learning outcomes of their courses?

We recognized that these questions are complex and that information we provide on the effectiveness of this program needed to reach a variety of disciplinary audiences. This assessment project builds on studies and reviews about this university’s well-known Campus Writing Program (Rice; Townsend et al.; M. D. Patton). Rice uses snapshots to understand the work of the program through network assessment. Townsend et al. pro-
vide a historical macro view of the program, highlighting the struggles and successes of nearly thirty years of existence. In her micro-level case study, Marty Patton focuses on one department, Civil Engineering, to examine the writing assignments, instruction, and experiences of writers so as to build on WAC/WID theories. Our current study is along the lines of Marty Patton’s micro-level look into particular WI courses.

Assessment is “an important and valuable component both of program management and of an effective educational environment” (Yancey and Huot 8) and so we seek to make program assessment part of our writing culture so as to see more clearly what is happening in our program, share our findings as part of our educational goals, and seek ways to improve upon what we are doing. Models of program assessment, such as Michael Carter’s and Chris Anson and Deanna Dannels’s at North Carolina State University provided the basis of a team approach to assessment that includes faculty in the analysis of WAC program features. Based on Carter’s process for program assessment, three values anchored our work:

1) student centered, i.e., it should place students at the center of the process by focusing on student learning outcomes;

2) faculty driven, i.e., it should encourage broad faculty investment in and responsibility for teaching and assessing program learning outcomes; and

3) meaningful, i.e., it should provide data and the means for faculty to make valid and appropriate improvements in their programs. (Carter 8)

We sought student input, faculty collaboration, and useful results. As Walvoord stresses, assessment plans should be kept simple, sustainable, and ongoing. We sought to create assessment that was a natural part of our work each year, much like an annual report with meaningful student data included.

Condon argues that WAC programs need to consider the purpose of program assessments, to demonstrate to administration that the investments are paying off in student learning, despite the fact “that writing itself seems more consistent with chaos theory than with the epistemology expressed in positivism” (29). Knowing that our potential audiences are of varied backgrounds, we chose research methods that would speak to a broad range of stakeholders to “employ multiple measures, some quantitative and some qualitative” (Condon 46).

In explaining program assessment through the lens of an ecology model, White, Elliot, and Peckham describe the “humility” needed in
such an assessment due to the limits of what we can learn, because “only an informed instructor, watching a student develop over time, can hope to make a valid claim about the totality of the writing ability of that student” (32). By collecting several samples of student writing over the semester, and talking with students and instructors about their teaching, we hoped to gain a better understanding of teacher and student day-to-day work in a WI course. From an ecological model perspective, we were looking at what can be observed, knowing that there is much more that we cannot see and that these are snapshots into this time and place, not a final statement of constancy.

Working on assessment projects with faculty from across the disciplines provided us with a more detailed focus on students’ learning experiences in WI courses. Faculty involved in this study had the particular goal of making changes to teaching, writing assignments, assessments, and adapting to online teaching. Thus, the purpose of the assessment data is more than just numerical finding. The purpose of the data was also about the process involved, as faculty and writing program representatives read student writing, assignments, and rubrics together, and as we look collectively at survey and interview data.

We offer one perspective on how WPAs can conduct assessment of writing at the program or department level, even without large amounts of funds or people. The study—which we view as a pilot study—focused in-depth on two WI courses. In this report, we provide a description of our writing program, the background of the study, the data collected and analyzed, the findings, and the implications.

The Campus Writing Program

Campus Writing Program (CWP) provides support for faculty to design and teach WI courses across campus. Our mission is to support faculty as the primary agents of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) theories and practices in educating students through principles of “writing-to-learn” and “learning-to-write.” We believe that teaching by these principles will enhance students’ critical thinking abilities and better engage them in complex problem solving while they learn to communicate with clear, effective language in discipline-specific ways. (“About CWP”)

We have found, largely through this study, that these principles of writing-to-learn and learning-to-write are not distinct dichotomies but synergistically influence one another.
All undergraduate students are to take two WI courses, and one must be an upper-level course in the major. Faculty submit WI course proposals for each semester they would like to teach a WI course. These proposals are reviewed by CWP Coordinators and then by one of the sub-committees of faculty on the Campus Writing Board (CWB). WI Faculty are supported with workshops and consultations regarding the design and teaching of writing in the disciplines as well as financial support in the way of funds to supplement teaching assistants for courses exceeding 20 students. There are also funds for which faculty can apply to pursue a WI project, such as creating or revising a WI course.

The writing program is comprised of a director who is on faculty in English Education and two program administrators from English and from Literacy Education. All CWP staff have PhDs and teach WI courses in their academic departments. CWP also has 1–2 graduate research assistants each year, usually from the Departments of English or English Education. This blending from different colleges and backgrounds mirrors the work we do and regularly brings together faculty and graduate students from very different disciplines. This cross-disciplinary approach is a hallmark of the work CWP achieves and a richness noted by WAC scholars (Bazerman; Cornwell and Stoddard). This richness also appeared in our research, as we bring different disciplinary approaches to the work. Thus, in this study we experienced a process of interdisciplinary research, which is in line with Ed White’s admonition that “program evaluation ought always to be the responsibility of a team, representing different discourse communities” (199).

Methodology

Our program assessment used a mixed-methods methodology to not only learn about the perspectives of faculty and students but also to examine student writing. Specifically, we used what Creswell calls a multistage evaluation design through two case studies, with the “bounded system” (Merriam 40) of our case study being the two WI courses from which we gathered data. Program or activities refers to the individual courses in which the participant students were enrolled.

Participants consisted of students and faculty. A total of 57 students enrolled in one of two 3000-level WI courses participated in the study: Genetics and Society (24 students) and New Products Marketing (33 students). Because these were upper-level classes, the majority of the students were upperclassmen and had enrolled in a previous WI course on campus. We used purposive sampling to identify two established WI courses and
faculty members in different disciplines to obtain a more generalized view of our writing program (Patton). The two instructors also participated. The professor of the first course, Genetics and Society, is an associate professor in Biological Sciences. The professor of the second course, New Products Marketing, is a teaching professor in Agricultural Economics. Both professors hold PhDs and taught WI courses prior to this study.

Our data were collected from a number of sources, and all data collection procedures were approved by and in accordance with the university’s Institutional Review Board. Over the course of the study, we collected data from faculty interviews, student interviews, syllabi and writing prompts, student papers, and surveys:

- We interviewed both faculty WI instructors after each of their respective courses ended for the semester. Each interview lasted 60 minutes and followed Seidman’s open-ended interview format. As per the semi-structured approach, the faculty members were encouraged to elaborate on their responses. The following questions guided the interviews: How did your WI course go over the semester? Can you compare learning in your WI course to learning in a course that uses minimal to no writing? In your opinion, in what ways can writing impact one’s learning?
- Five students agreed to a sixty-minute in-depth interview while enrolled in the course. We followed the guided questions above, changing only the reference to the students taking the course, rather than teaching a course. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.
- We collected and reviewed the most recent syllabi and writing assignments of the two courses. Assignments for the Genetics and Society course consisted of a series of microthemes pertaining to scientific controversy. The writing assignments for New Products Marketing included short business memos and larger marketing business plans. We used syllabi and assignment prompts to help identify and contextualize our qualitative analyses of student papers and interviews and the initial development of our rubric with which we assessed the papers.
- We analyzed and scored student papers from both courses. In the Genetics and Society course, 20 students agreed to share their written work for 3 of the 7 microthemes with 2 drafts for each paper. This gave us approximately 120 separate student papers for analysis. In the New Products Marketing course, 13 students agreed to share their written work in the course for the two major assignments, a Promotional Plan and a Competitive Analysis on a product of their choos-
ing. The sample from this course gave us approximately 50 separate students’ papers for analysis.

- To supplement the interviews, 14 students responded to an anonymous emailed survey via Qualtrics. The survey mirrored the open-ended guiding questions in the interview and included Likert-scale instruments that asked students to rate their feelings on writing in their disciplines. The survey included a thermometer score (0–100) of students’ feelings about WI courses on campus.

We conducted both quantitative and qualitative analysis on the collected data. The quantitative data consisted of the sample student papers and their assigned scores; the qualitative data included faculty interviews, student surveys, and interviews.

The quantitative analysis was used to see if student writing improved over time. We used paired-samples t-tests to determine 1) how much the paper scores increased from rough draft to final drafts and 2) if the increases in scores were statistically significant (Wooldridge). Like all inferential statistics tests, paired-samples t-tests hold assumptions of the underlying data, including that the distribution of the differences in the dependent variable (e.g., paper scores between rough and final drafts) be approximately normally distributed. This is particularly important in the realm of writing assessment, which may suffer from smaller sample sizes and thus be at risk for violating statistical assumptions (Elliot et al.) As sample sizes exceed 30, normality becomes less of a concern and can typically be addressed visually via Normal Q-Q Plots; with our limited sample sizes, however, it is necessary to directly test for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test. In the Shapiro-Wilk test, a significant level exceeding .05 indicates normally distributed data. All of our Shapiro-Wilk tests satisfied normality and indicated that the data do not violate the assumption of normality necessary for paired-sample t-tests. So, while our sample size is small, it assumes a normal distribution.

To grade the papers, we gathered five writing program staff and graduate students, all with experience with WI courses at our institution and with scoring writing in large scale assessments (such as Advanced Placement writing assessments and National Writing Project Analytic Writing Continuum System). Our Writing Program staff developed a rubric that was used to assess the student writing against the WI Guidelines, rather than course outcomes (See Appendix A for full rubric). We read and assessed each draft of the assignments with two overall scores: 1) analytic scores on five traits (focus, development, organization, style, and editing) and 2) a holistic score (0–100).
To maintain consistency while scoring papers, our five scorers held norming sessions before they assessed each type of paper and assignment according to the rubric, focusing both on trait-by-trait scores and overall holistic scores. The scorers discussed and reassessed scores that differed by more than 10 points on a 100-point scale. The group’s inter-rater reliability, as measured by a two-way consistency intraclass correlation coefficient, was .763 for single measures and an average measure of .942, \( p < .0001 \), indicating a high level of consistency among the scorers.

The primary purpose of the qualitative data was to compliment and contextualize our quantitative results. We used a grounded theory design to analyze the qualitative data (Glaser and Strauss). Grounded theory design allows wide-variety of data sources, with the researchers being the “primary instrument(s) of data collection and analysis” (Merriam 29). We used a constant comparison method by first identifying patterns in one data source and comparing those patterns with other data sources (Glaser and Strauss; Merriam).

Our analyses consisted of three phases using Dedoose software. In Phase I, a team of two researchers began open coding of the student surveys, student interviews, and the instructor interviews. Phase I ended with a consultation from a separate team, two members of the writing program staff who acted as a counterpoint to the coders’ initial data investigation. In Phase II, the coders began axial coding as codes across the data began to emerge. Some codes became obsolete while others combined into separate codes. In Phase III, the data and axial codes were cross-checked with student papers, class assignments, and course syllabi. For example, during Phase I analysis of student and faculty interviews, we identified open codes related to procedural versus conceptual thinking and wrestling with disciplinary debates. In Phase II, we determined that students and faculty may have all been referring to the more general theme of critical thinking. After reviewing student papers, class assignments, and course syllabi during Phase III, the research team determined that faculty and students believed that their writing intensive courses promoted critical thinking toward conceptual thinking. In sum, our qualitative data analysis was a cumulative process in accordance with grounded theory methodology.

Collecting data from this large scope of sources and conducting both qualitative and quantitative analysis allowed for a richer description of how our program is working. We can point to data collected using quantitative research methods to show that our students’ writing is improving. But to make these results more persuasive to a variety of audiences, we can also point to our qualitative results to show why it is working.
Findings

The quantitative and qualitative data and analysis provided new and deeper insights about our program.

Quantitative Findings

Our quantitative assessment of student writing showed us that students were doing good work. In general, rough drafts and final drafts were of high quality in both courses. For example, rough drafts for Microthemes 5, 6, and 7 hovered around a B to B+ average (87.9%, 86.8%, 86.9% respectively), and rough drafts for the Competitive Analysis and Promotional Plan papers tended to have B averages (85.7% and 86.5%, respectively).

To contextualize our discussion even further, the survey assessed students’ perceptions of their WI courses; students reported they had high positive feelings toward their experiences in these courses. We asked all of the students to rate their “feelings toward your writing intensive experience” on a scale of 0–100 to not only capture their current WI experience but also any previous experiences in courses they took. The closer the thermometer score was to 100, the warmer or more positive the students’ feelings. Across both courses, participants rated their feelings toward their WI courses at 79.6, indicating high positive feelings. When the single bottom outlier was removed, the resulting score was 86.7, indicating what we would view as very positive feelings toward WI experiences.

In the Genetics and Society course, we found that student improvement between rough and final drafts was inconsistent for all papers analyzed. Depending on the assignment, students’ scores tended to increase on both analytic and holistic rubrics, though these improvements varied. The results of the paired samples t-tests, which measure the statistical significance of improved scores from rough to final drafts, are shown in tables 1 and 2, including the average scores for rough and final drafts. Using the analytic rubric to assess Microthemes 5–7 showed us that students significantly increased their scores from rough draft to final draft by 3.2% for Microtheme 5 (SD=5.19), 2.3% for Microtheme 6 (SD=6.91), and 5% for Microtheme 7 (SD=3.6). The increases for Microthemes 5 and 7 were statistically significant at 95% confidence or above, \( t(14) = 2.29, p < .05 \) and \( t(9) = 4.19, p < .05 \), respectively. Using the holistic rubric, we saw significant increases for Microtheme 6 and 7 of 3.2% and 5.4% at 95% confidence or above, respectively. Further analyses indicated that students’ scores may have increased longitudinally from Microtheme 5’s final drafts to Microtheme 7’s final drafts at nearly 99% confidence, \( t(8) = 3.8, p < .001 \); however, we are hesitant to identify this as a solid finding, given the
Table 1
Results of paired samples t-test on mean difference of rough draft and final draft scores using analytic rubric. Average rough and final drafts are also shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Microtheme 5</th>
<th>Microtheme 6</th>
<th>Microtheme 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85.63</td>
<td>86.77</td>
<td>84.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>89.11</td>
<td>89.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>5.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>6.91</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.17, 6.17</td>
<td>-0.86, 5.58</td>
<td>2.27, 7.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.29*</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>4.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% CI for Mean Difference

* p < .01 ** p < .001
Table 2
Results of paired samples t-test on mean difference of rough draft and final draft scores using holistic rubric. Average rough and final drafts are also shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Microtheme</th>
<th>Average Rough Draft</th>
<th>Average Final Draft</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Dev</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>95% CI for Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>84.93</td>
<td>87.86</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-1.88, 7.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>6.79</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.23, 6.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>84.89</td>
<td>90.33</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.75, 8.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .01  **p < .001
Table 3
Results of paired samples t-test on mean difference of rough draft and final draft scores using analytic rubric. Average rough and final drafts are also shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average Rough Draft</th>
<th>Average Final Draft</th>
<th>Average Score Increase</th>
<th>Std. Dev</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitive Analysis</td>
<td>85.86</td>
<td>89.99</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.38, 7.86</td>
<td>2.40*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional Plan</td>
<td>86.51</td>
<td>89.06</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.71, 4.38</td>
<td>3.00**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01 ** p < .001
Table 4 Results of paired samples t-test on mean difference of rough draft and final draft scores using holistic rubric.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average Rough Draft</th>
<th>Average Final Draft</th>
<th>Average Score Increase</th>
<th>Std. Dev</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>95% CI for Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitive Analysis</td>
<td>84.46</td>
<td>87.46</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>2.38, 8.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional Plan</td>
<td>86.62</td>
<td>90.23</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.65**</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.65**</td>
<td>1.46, 5.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The New Products Marketing course’s discipline-specific writing assignments tended to show more consistent improvement, as shown in tables 3 and 4. Using the analytic rubric to assess the Competitive Analysis and Promotional Plan papers showed us that students had statistically significant increases of 4.1% (SD=6.2) and 2.5% (SD=3.2) at 95% confidence and above, with \( t(13) = 2.4, p < .05 \) and \( t(14) = 3, p < .05 \) respectively. Similar
results were found using the holistic rubric for the Promotional Plan paper, with a significant increase of 3.6% (SD=3.6), \( t(13) = 3.7, p < .01 \).

Our quantitative results indicated that students were composing strong work in both WI courses, even in rough draft form. Student participants’ also strongly approved of their WI courses. We feel this was particularly noteworthy, given that students were asked about their WI experiences while completing final papers and projects in those courses. Finally, our quantitative analyses found general improvement from rough draft to final draft in both courses, though we saw more consistent improvement with discipline-specific assignments.

**Qualitative Themes: Qualities of the WI Experience**

While our quantitative analysis showed us that students reported positive feelings toward their WI courses and demonstrated improvement on their papers over time, our qualitative results showed much more complex findings. The grounded, inductive analyses of student surveys and interviews of both students and faculty revealed qualities of the WI experience that impacts student learning (See list of themes in figure 1). These qualities include the development of critical thinking toward conceptual understanding, teaching practices that foster a learning environment, and opportunities for peer interaction. WI Courses help students reach the learning outcomes of the Campus Writing Program through authentic writing assignments that support students’ writing in the disciplines.

**Qualitative Themes and Qualities of WI Experience**

**Writing Impacts Learning**

- Students and faculty believe writing intensive courses promote critical thinking toward conceptual learning
- WI Faculty exhibit a reflective stance in their teaching, which fosters student learning
- WI courses promote faculty-to-student and student-to-student interaction, which enhances the learning environment

**WI Courses Help Students Reach the Learning Outcomes of the Campus Writing Program**

- Authentic writing assignments support students’ writing in the disciplines
- WI courses are effective and worth studying in more depth

Fig. 1. Qualitative themes and qualities of the writing intensive experience from student and faculty participants
Writing impacts learning. As a WAC program, we promote the uses of writing to learn practices, regularly providing faculty with copies of John Bean's Engaging Ideas. In workshops, we engage faculty and teaching assistants in writing activities to support writing to learn, such as informal in-class writing and revision strategies to promote the messy process of thinking through drafts of writing. Participants in our study, students and faculty, shared this view and affirmed the vital role of writing to impact learning.

Students and faculty believe writing intensive courses promote critical thinking associated with conceptual learning. Many of the student participants expressed how their writing assignments in their WI courses forced them to think more deeply about course content. Whether the students discussed the rigor of microthemes concerning genetics and society or the discipline specific requirements of writing promotional plans, the participants discussed the power of critical thinking in their writing. For instance, one student stated:

As far as retention, I remember things I wrote about better because I had to come up with ideas. I had to form the thoughts that I was going to give in the paper. So, the act of doing that helps you to think and remember things better. (Student interview)

That “act of doing” (Dewey) and its importance was echoed by the instructors. In particular, the Agricultural Economics instructor argued that critical thinking was inherent in all of the assignments:

They really have to think about the market and their competition and their customers. But they can’t really state any facts about any of that. They have to think about the general situation of the market. They have to come up with there’s no right or wrong answer about who their customer is. It’s more about, “I believe my customer is . . .”—these segmentations, this demographic group, in this location, with this lifestyle, and why. It’s not like they can look it up on Wikipedia. They have to really reason it out. (Instructor interview)

Our analysis identified that critical thinking was a foundation upon which each of the course instructors built their assignments. This encouraged students to think outside of rote content, better comprehend that content, and apply their knowledge to authentic assignments. Perhaps most importantly, without being prompted, the student participants identified this quality of critical thinking in writing.

In our discussions with the student participants regarding their WI courses, students often contrasted their WI experiences with their other courses that were not Writing Intensive. Students analyzed these courses
in terms of comprehension and retention of content material. One student enrolled in the New Products Marketing class contrasted bullet-point thinking with conceptual thinking:

One thing I really liked about writing intensive courses is that it challenges you to think about the topics instead of kind of memorize the facts and definitions. And you get a deep understanding of what it means to promote a product instead of a definition of product promotion, definition of marketing, . . . Instead of “memorize these definitions, memorize these facts,” Writing Intensive really allows you to kind of think of it in a new light . . . conceptual thinking instead of just like bullet-point thinking. (Student interview)

Such outcomes align with the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing’s habits of mind: openness, engagement, flexibility, and metacognition (CWPA, NCTE, and NWP). These outcomes enable students to become more skillful, critical thinkers.

Writing Intensive faculty exhibit a reflective stance in their teaching, which fosters student learning. Teaching a WI course requires commitment on the part of a faculty member. Despite no extra compensation or course release, we find consistent support from our faculty in their own attention to teaching practices, their assignment designs, and their interest in getting feedback. A surprising finding was the degree to which our two instructors reflected on their own teaching practices, particularly how their own experiences as students, teachers, and professionals affected how and what they taught. This focus on teaching practices shows how student learning is fostered in a WI course. The effectiveness of the instructor is vital to student learning, and our study gave us a glimpse into one of the ways this seems to happen.

The biology instructor, a woman in a male-dominated field, consistently tied her pedagogy to her own experience as a learner, researcher, and woman. She discussed at length how her course design, particularly the peer review process, was a function of reflecting on her own educational experiences:

So minority students find themselves excluded from these groups, or just socially not part of the network, and so they try to work things on their own. And they may work very, very, very hard at it, but they don’t even know that other students are all talking to each other . . . I was in a similar position being a female at a mostly male engineer school. I didn’t realize that all the other students were get-
ting together to work on problems until I was a senior. And I thought it was cheating to talk to other students about the problems. (Instructor interview)

The New Products Marketing instructor, on the other hand, connected his pedagogy to his extensive experience in the corporate world. As a high-level executive and consultant, this instructor felt frustrated by new recruits who, despite being intelligent, were unable to appropriately write or present in a business setting. He thus focused his course to provide only enough content necessary to practice these skills through real world scenarios:

If they can grasp and apply [the content through this method], then two years from now they’re going to remember a lot more than if I just gave them a book and said, “Here, read this.” I think one of the best things I did was give them real world scenarios. I mean, when you give them that context, they “get it.” They know what to do. They get what they need to do. You never have those issues with “I’m not quite sure what you mean here” when you give them a scenario. (Instructor interview)

Whether it was the inclusive and interactive environments of the extensive group work we saw in the biology course or the late-night emails from a company’s CEO requesting an end-of-the-day report, both instructors used reflective teaching practices to provide their students with useful and meaningful content through writing assignments.

**WI courses promote faculty-to-student and student-to-student interaction, which enhances the learning environment.** In addition to contrasting WI and non-WI courses in terms of comprehension and retention, some students argued that the interactive nature of WI courses (e.g., receiving feedback on multiple drafts) encouraged learning relationships:

I think obviously the writing intensive courses are more interactive. [In most non writing intensive courses], there’s not many homework assignments, and basically just exams or one assignment, and I just think [writing intensive] is more interactive. You kind of learn more about the work that you are submitting because you are getting feedback and there’s constant communication with your professor or TA. (Student interview)

As this student identified, the social nature of a WI course also enhances the learning of the content. One way such interaction happens is through peer review of student writing. Our analyses of these two WI courses found that proper peer review strategies were often a highlight of the entire course. Both courses established a thorough peer review process, comprised of in-
and out-of-class group meetings and discussing both group papers and individual writing.

Student participants typically focused on the compounding effect peer review had on their ideas:

Here you really got feedback directly from the other students that were also writing the paper. I think that’s very beneficial, not only for helping you write your own, helping your writing style, but also helping you to develop more ideas and think about the assignment. (Student interview)

The compounding effect referred to affected ideas and, as one student mentioned, the organization of thoughts, which resulted in major structural changes to that student’s paper. Peer review also exposed students to alternative or contrasting ideas on the subject. One student wrote:

We got the chance to discuss them [microthemes] with a group of peers, and that allows you to, not only forces you to explain your position to other people, but you also get to hear other people’s position. (Student survey)

The role of peer review was a topic that emerged in both the student and the faculty interviews. Both instructors discussed how much time and effort was required for properly establishing workable peer review in their classrooms. The biology instructor formed groups through a series of in-class surveys meant to identify students’ strengths, weaknesses, and interests, whereas the New Products Marketing instructor insisted that the groups mimic the randomness of the corporate environment. Regardless of the initial process, however, both instructors were adamant that strong peer review strategies were essential for students who would otherwise not be involved:

[Peer review] happens to be particularly effective for minority students who otherwise get excluded from the informal study groups that form [outside of] our courses . . . if you can get that going, that helps all the students. It helps the strongest students. It helps the weakest students. And I think it works in everything from calculus to genetics in society. (Instructor interview)

The strategies and effectiveness of peer review thus became another surprising finding in our analyses, both from the students and the instructors. Though our initial impressions were that the courses used effective peer review strategies, we did not expect that the students themselves would focus on it as an essential quality to their WI experiences. Students echoed Elbow’s assertion that writing is a generative act in the context of peer
review, as it enabled them to enhance their own ideas, add to others’, and restructure their ways of thinking and comprehending the content. Instructors viewed peer review not as a minor thing to initiate another level of review, but an essential process that mimics what good writing is all about. The knowledge we gained from these interviews allowed us a way to counter some faculty’s assumption (expressed during training workshops) that students review their fellow students’ papers with indifference, providing minor edits and some praise, but little meaningful feedback.

**WI courses help students reach the learning outcomes of the Campus Writing Program.** As mentioned previously, this program assessment was site-based, locally-controlled, and context-sensitive, as Huot asserts assessment should be (171). We looked at how the writing samples aligned with the CWP outcomes. In addition to the quantitative findings, the qualitative data provided by participants in our study helped us to see how the writing experiences aligned with learning outcomes.

**Authentic writing assignments support students’ writing in the disciplines.** Student participants shared how the writing assignments in their courses were not just about writing; rather, many of the assignments provided an authentic writing experience, an experience that in some way mimics discipline specific writing and thinking practices. This was particularly the case with the Agricultural Economics course. In that course, students wrote not only competitive analyses and promotional plans, but also SWOT analyses (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) and memos written to company CEOs. One student shared how the authentic assignments encouraged writing to learn:

> I had to write memos for Ag Econ, and I feel that these assignments helped me to better understand the material I was writing about. I believe it will also help me in future memos that I will have to write in my professional life. (Student survey)

Another student echoed the student above by discussing how authentic writing assignments encourage discipline specific thinking:

> Writing intensive courses kind of change you. This is how you’re supposed to think in [a] business environment, this is how you formulate your thoughts to convey your idea to maybe in a call center, or a colleague. So, [WI courses] kind of keep going back to the conceptual thinking but kind of really broadens your perspective on how you’re expected to think. If I was trying to learn the way someone is thinking, if I am the boss and one of my employees is writing to
me—It helps me to know that they understand better through writing instead of just kind of yes/no or black and white type of thinking. (Student interview)

From these and other student responses, we see that the authentic writing experiences encouraged what several participants identified as conceptual thinking, a means by which writing allowed students to view the complexities of disciplinary language and thought. Such a focus on authentic writing experiences is a hallmark of many WI courses. The value that students placed on the relevant writing assignments in their discipline fits with what Hilgers et al. found in their students’ preference of the WI courses in the major due to the relevance and the expectation that these courses were part of professional preparation. In a study of 2,101 college-level writing assignments, Dan Melzer also found that writing assignments as part of a WAC initiative demonstrated a greater range of authentic writing for the discipline.

**WI courses are worth studying in depth.** The increased rigor of WI courses might presuppose that students would prefer non-WI courses; we found the opposite. Although the student participants unanimously agreed that WI courses were more difficult and more time-intensive, many were also quick to discuss how much more they learned when compared to their other courses. For many, the divergence from bullet-point thinking to conceptual thinking, though difficult, was a means through which to make the content their own, paired with a supporting environment that provided meaningful feedback to works in progress.

Students tended to compare this aspect of their WI courses to other courses:

> In some of the non-writing intensive courses, it seems to me that [in] . . . non-writing intensive courses, the professor really just pushes the facts . . . this is what you need to know . . . this is what you are required to be successful. (Student interview)

This divergence from black and white thinking to conceptual thinking through authentic assignments seemed to be a key variable in determining why the students placed such value on their WI experiences.

This feedback from a small sample of those involved in our WI program demonstrates the rich findings that await as we continue to study courses, faculty, and students’ experiences. Similar to Wendy Strachan’s in-depth study of the Simon Fraser University’s WI pilot program, WPAs have opportunities to look into aspects such as professional development, student writing, and student learning.
One of the surprising aspects of this project was the direction interviewees went when asked about their WI experience. For both students and faculty, this was a chance to reflect on the processes and practices of writing and teaching of writing. Interviews seemed to help students be more aware of their writing experiences, much like the participants in Hilgers et al.’s study at the University of Hawaii, and they helped instructors reflect on their own learning and how that has influenced their teaching. The findings align with the values of the study by maintaining a student-focus, involving WI faculty, and providing meaningful data toward program quality and continued improvement (Carter 8).

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations affect the generalizability of this study. First, the sample sizes for the student papers were small. While our analyses met the assumption of normality for paired-samples t-tests via the Shapiro-Wilk test for each dependent variable, the sample sizes should be noted. Furthermore, our study suffered from selection bias in that students self-selected to be part of the study. Finally, our study is limited with regard to the types of papers we analyzed. While we are confident that the Promotional Plans and Competitive Analyses measured authentic writing experiences, the microthemes in the Biology course varied and were difficult to compare with each other. Despite these limitations, we believe our mixed-methods approach to assessment enabled us to begin answering questions related to both our students and our program as a whole. The methods provide some transferability to other writing programs seeking to assess their programs in similar ways. Below, we return to our questions and discuss how our data may provide answers.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In conducting this program assessment, we sought to understand more about our own program, how it worked within the institution, and how our assessments worked when placed in a larger conversation. Our quantitative and qualitative findings showed us that our program does indeed work at the campus level, as well as easily being assessed using national standards. The findings also provide us with valuable information to share with our faculty during workshops and seminars about how students saw and valued writing, the strength of the writing produced, and how faculty across campus were shaping assignments to meet WI guidelines. As one might expect, faculty gravitate toward these findings when we share them in our faculty workshops. Clear evidence of writing improvement from draft to draft,
along with student reflections on their WI experiences, provide our faculty more confidence and context as they approach their next WI course, and provide all WPAs with a potential mechanism to use to measure the success of their own WI courses.

Notes

1. This study was conducted under University of Missouri Campus IRB #1207058.

2. We believe a mixed methods analysis, in addition to mimicking the interdisciplinary nature of our work as writing program administrators, holds several benefits to a purely qualitative or quantitative design (Creswell and Clark). A purely qualitative approach would enable us to identify the unique ways in which students think about our university writing program, but we would not be able to share more generalizable findings to a quantitatively geared audience; a purely quantitative approach would enable us to see a more macro level view of our students’ experiences, but we would be unable to identify those unique characteristics nor contextualize quantitative responses.

Appendix A: Analytic and Holistic Rubric

https://goo.gl/nyDfpF

Works Cited

“About CWP.” Campus Writing Program, Campus Writing Program, 10 September 2014.


Hilgers, Thomas, Edna L. Hussey, and Monica Stitt-Bergh. “‘As You’re Writing, You Have These Epiphanies’: What College Students Say about Writing and Learning in their Majors.” Written Communication, vol. 16, no. 3, 1999, pp. 317–53.


**Acknowledgments**

We wish to acknowledge Dr. Bonita Selting and Dr. Naomi Clark for their assistance throughout this project.

Amy Lannin is Director of the Campus Writing Program, a large WAC/WID initiative at the University of Missouri, an R1 institution. In addition, Lannin is an assistant professor of English education in the College of Education. Through collaboration with several institutions in the Missouri Writing Projects Network, Lannin has led efforts in STEM Literacy and Cross Content Literacy programs funded by the external and state department of education grants. Since 2015, she has served as editor of *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, the annual publication of the Literacy Research Association. She has a chapter in Finer’s and White-Farnham’s edited book, *Writing Program Architecture: Thirty Cases for Reference and Research* published by Utah State University Press in 2017.

Jonathan Cisco is the Assistant Director of the Campus Writing Program at the University of Missouri, an R1 institution. In addition to training faculty in disciplinary reading and writing pedagogies, he currently teaches Reading and Writing in the Content Area courses to preservice teachers at the University of Missouri. His research focuses on literacy in higher education using mixed methodologies.

Jes Philbrook is Writing Instructor and Coordinator of Doctoral Writing Assessment in the Writing Center at Walden University, an online, R3 institution headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Jes is also a doctoral candidate in English with a focus in
in Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Missouri, where she served as the graduate assistant in the Campus Writing Program. Her other works can be found in Forum: Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty.

Maxwell Philbrook is Writing Instructor and Coordinator of Social Media Resources in the Writing Center at Walden University, an online, R3 institution based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Additionally, he is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Missouri. His dissertation explores how the circulation of texts and arguments is influenced by transnational pressures, and how critical literacy practices can provide useful tools for reading this global circulation.
A Model of Efficiency: Pre-College Credit and the State Apparatus

Joyce Malek and Laura R. Micciche

Abstract

This article describes one program’s adventures with pre-college credit initiatives and their wider implications for writing programs. We show that mandated state policy, determined largely by political and economic factors rather than by educational ones, regulates and constrains writing curriculum. Despite the many challenges to autonomy and program integrity posed by state interference, we argue that writing teachers and administrators can engage in coalition-building with various stakeholders—local businesses, faculty across disciplines, and students—to speak back to state encroachment on writing education.

During a recent tour of her city’s nationally recognized college-prep high school, Laura listened as the school principal informed the tour group that the school offers more Advanced Placement (AP) courses than any other high school in the state. The principal added that the AP curriculum positions students to bypass courses like English composition. “And we know nobody wants to take THAT course!” he added. Heads nodded, though one person near Laura spoke under her breath, “I used to teach composition,” a barely articulated defense of THAT course.

Our local high school may boast the largest number of AP offerings in the area, but in most other ways it is no anomaly. The availability of AP and other college-credit opportunities such as dual enrollment courses for high school students is widespread and shows no signs of waning. In fact, dual enrollment programs of one kind or another have become so pervasive that in 2013, the CWPA released the “CWPA Position Statement on Pre-College Credit for Writing,” offering guidelines for forming judgments about localized dual enrollment initiatives and other ways of earning pre-college credit so that stakeholders (students, parents, schools, state initiatives, and so forth) can understand the diverse variables at play in each of these programs. In the midst of the proliferating ways students can earn
college credit, we take stock of the consequences for teachers, students, programs, and the field of composition studies. What follows is one program’s adventures with pre-college credit initiatives and an argument for how they speak to wider implications of credit programs originating outside composition classes, the likes of which include AP, International Baccalaureate, and concurrent enrollment credit, as noted in the CWPA statement (1).

In Spring 2008, through a circuitous email message, we learned of the Ohio Board of Regents’ (OBR) proposal for changing how state institutions of higher education award AP credit. The proposed changes would lower the cut-off for AP scores necessary to earn college credit in nearly every subject area. For English, this meant that students who earned a score of 3 (whereas 4 had been the previous standard) on either the Language and Composition or the Literature and Composition exam would be exempt from taking our first-quarter composition course. Our assistant dean sent a draft of the proposal to cross-college advisors, charged with helping first-year students enroll in classes and invited them to post feedback on a discussion board that had been created on our university’s course management system. The message was not sent to anyone in the writing program directly but was forwarded to Joyce, then interim director of composition, by an advisor in the English department.

We should have realized from the beginning that the policy change was a foregone conclusion, not a proposed change. In retrospect, the signs were clear: limited circulation of information to staff not positioned to object to or question the merits of the proposal; private discussion board to which only a small handful of people were invited to contribute; request for feedback rather than an invitation to discuss the policy collectively; exclusion of writing faculty. Yet, upon reading about the proposed change, we thought—naively as it turned out—that by networking with writing faculty and administrators at affected Ohio institutions in order to develop a cross-institutional objection to the change, we could intervene in the policy change or become part of the discussion. Neither came to pass.

The chair of the OBR committee justified the group’s recommendation to grant credit for a 3 by reporting that a “strong majority (over 75%)” of board members had approved the policy and that the OBR decided to move forward with the proposal. To be fair, in a private email to Laura, a member of the OBR committee who was serving as writing director on his campus, admitted that he and his colleagues were unhappy about the change in policy, providing a glimpse of the conflicted subject positions that administrators often uneasily occupy. It’s our view that the subcommittee chair’s role was largely over-determined; the call for the changed policy was enacted from the top down by the OBR in an effort to maximize efficiency across
state institutions. This move aligned with then-Governor Strickland’s goal to create a University System of Ohio, such as the ones in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and California. A related goal was to increase student enrollment in Ohio state colleges and universities by making it possible for more students to earn college credit while in high school.

The OBR’s sudden AP policy change left us with the distinct sense that our program, along with other Ohio composition programs, had been hijacked by the state for purposes that had little to do with student learning. This change effectively and unabashedly interpellates students as customers and education as commodity. Driven by economic factors, the policy’s intended outcome was to make higher education in Ohio more attractive by emphasizing efficiency of enrollment and potential economic value for prospective students. Its effect is to foreground managerial concerns by creating an organizational structure that prioritizes the flow of bodies into the university. As a result, definitions of and standards for writing competency and conversations about how that gets determined and by whom are forced into the background. As directors of a large composition program, we experienced the OBR’s decision and the way it was arrived at as a direct challenge to faculty ownership of programs and policies underwriting them. We recognized the state’s treatment of universities hinged on a construction of “students as currency,” as Jesse Swan puts it, and, just as bad, “knowledge and courses as property or objects suitable for trafficking” (114). Our goal in this article is to explore how mandated state policy, determined largely by political and economic factors rather than by educational ones, regulates and constrains writing curriculum, effectively trafficking credit to build state-based brand loyalty via an uninterrupted pipeline connecting high school students to postsecondary institutions across the state—in our case, Ohio high school students and Ohio postsecondary institutions.

We begin by contextualizing pre-college credit programs within Ohio, all of which blur the transition between high school and college. We explore what’s at stake in pre-college credit programs for students, professors, and the discipline of writing when managerial priorities trump educational ones. Finally, we reflect on our own complicity in pre-college credit programs, noting that, as WPAs, we experience our dedication to our department’s existing writing program—complete with transfer agreements, standardized placement and curricula, and a stratified work-force—as a challenge to our ability to respond effectively to the state’s mandate. In other words, despite our best intentions, we work within and perpetuate a flawed system that continually calls on WPAs to react to policies that often compromise imaginative ways to organize learning and teaching in our large public institution. At the same time, as we suggest in the final section, coalition-
building with various stakeholders—local businesses, faculty across disciplines, and students—presents opportunities for writing programs to exercise agency and speak back to state encroachment on writing education.

**Pre-College Credit Programs in Ohio**

The OBR’s decision to lower the credit threshold for AP awards across the state must be understood against the backdrop of Ohio’s repeated efforts to mount and sustain successful pre-college credit programs. The appearance and disappearance of various programs in Ohio seems to reflect the general trajectory of postsecondary education as it shifts from an educational mission-driven model to a consumer-driven one. This shift might be read as the latest evidence that, as Gary Rhoades and Sheila Slaughter claim, university faculty are “managed professionals” vulnerable at any time to restructuring from without (43). Bousquet identifies managerialism as the “core subjectivity of the discipline of rhetoric and composition,” which he links to “the university’s accelerated move toward corporate partnership, executive control, and acceptance of profitability and accumulation as values in decision making” (“Composition” 23). Because of the large scale of many writing programs and the contingent labor force that overwhelmingly staffs writing courses across the country, first-year required writing courses are often configured as opportunistic sites for launching initiatives ranging from common book programs to learning community efforts to summer programs for first-generation college students. FYC is often viewed as a one-space-fits-all, due in no small measure to the still ambivalent identity of a general education writing course that continues to be viewed as content-less and skills-driven. This ambivalence also makes FYC susceptible to changes in administrative policies within institutions as well as outside them, including state-based initiatives that shift FYC to high schools or exempt college-bound students from first-year college writing instruction altogether through AP credit awards.

Efforts to increase access to higher education are often framed—legitimately, we believe—in the context of economic stability for citizens and regions. As such, programs range from those reaching under-represented and low-income families to those targeting at-risk youth to those designed for aspiring musicians, artists, and engineers. Still others provide students with an early start by offering courses in the summer prior to fall enrollment, which may include developmental coursework. Such programs, generally free or subsidized by states and/or colleges and universities (Lowe), recently received national support from the Department of Education.
As former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced in October 2015, students from low-income backgrounds now may gain early access to Federal Pell Grants to take dual enrollment courses. Duncan, the architect of the program, described the $20 million dollar experiment, initially limited to 2016–2017, as an effort to decrease “barrier[s] to access for some students, particularly those from low-income families” (“Fact Sheet”). Because “66% of institutions report that some parents and students contributed toward tuition” for concurrent enrollment programs, low-income students participate at a lower rate (Lowe). NCTE TYCA Chair Eva Payne worries that low-income students may be further disadvantaged later down the road: “If a portion of their lifetime Pell Grant award is siphoned off while the student is still in high school, already poor students will be faced with taking on greater student loan debt.” She also notes that the good intentions of the Pell Grant program are not backed by “specific plans to support this more vulnerable student population,” revealing the absence of long-term planning necessary to sustain the participation of the very low-income students the program is meant to serve.

The lack of sustainability planning for pre-college credit programs strikes a chord with us because Ohio’s efforts to sustain such programs have waxed and waned for nearly thirty years. In fact, the programs have been so numerous and have gone by so many names that the flagship university in Ohio has developed a glossary of eleven program names to help users navigate the ever-changing college-credit landscape (see ugeducation.osu.edu/collegecreditplus-glossary.shtml). In 1989, Ohio initiated Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), which allowed 11th and 12th graders to enroll in college courses, earning credit in both high school and college (KnowledgeWorks 2). In 1997, the program expanded to include 9th and 10th graders (as of 2007, Ohio is one of six states in the US to offer dual enrollment options to 9th and 10th graders). By 2006, reinvesting in PSEO was a significant initiative of Governor Strickland’s campaign platform and constituted $5.7 million of his state budget once in office (8). According to a 2007 report, *The Promise of Dual Enrollment: Assessing Ohio's Early College Access Policy*, between 1998 and 2004, “more than 55,000 students earned credit that could be applied to college degrees” and more than half “take more than six credit hours a semester” (KnowledgeWorks 3). Student participation documented during that period was overwhelmingly homogeneous: “[n]early 9 out of 10 PSEO participants are white and two out of three are female” (4).

In 2008, Governor Strickland introduced yet another dual enrollment program, Seniors to Sophomores (STS), which allows qualifying high school students to spend their senior year on a participating Ohio college or
university campus where they can enroll in a full load of courses. In turn, these students become eligible to enter an Ohio institution as sophomores, eliminating their first year of college. The STS program responded to the fact that Ohio citizens attend college at a rate below the national average, that baccalaureate attainment is 39th lowest in the nation, and that the National Report Card gives Ohio an F for affordability (“Access Pathway”).

In April 2008, Governor Strickland and Chancellor Fingerhut announced forty-two recipients of Early Adopter grants for high schools participating in STS, funding that reimbursed high schools for the per-pupil state funding they lost when students spent their senior year at college. Despite this, STS was short-lived and had limited results due in large part to lack of state or university support. Two years after its inception, The Columbus Dispatch reported reasons for the program’s lackluster attraction to students:

Some of the 49 school districts that tried the new program learned that it wasn’t feasible for students to spend their entire school day on campus. Rural students often were too far from campus to attend college, principals didn’t want to lose per-pupil funding for those students, and the students didn’t like the idea of missing out on the senior year experience at their high schools. (“College Program”)

The article goes on to note that after the first year of grant funding, participation dropped dramatically; one school went from 34 students in the pilot year to 19 the second, another from 35 to zero.

Like other fast-track initiatives, STS was ultimately repackaged, along with other pre-college credit initiatives across Ohio, and bundled under what is now called College Credit Plus (CCP). Using college readiness benchmarks established by individual colleges and universities, this program admits students from grades 7 through 12 to take university courses for college credit. Courses are taught at high schools, colleges, and online. Entry requirements for students at our university include high school transcripts, ACT or SAT scores, and scores from a university math placement test. Rather than using grade and/or test score thresholds for entry requirements, student records are assessed holistically and are reviewed against a newly developed state benchmark, “Uniform Standards for Remediation-Free Status.” These standards apply to math, science, reading, and writing and are meant to insure that all students are “deemed remediation free in a subject” before enrolling in a college credit-bearing course (1). A 2016 update of remediation standards developed in 2012, the new standards, as the title suggests, must have been motivated by students entering dual enrollment programs ill-equipped to deal with college-level work. However,
we have been unable to trace the history of these standards. Through their participation in CCP, students can earn up to 30 college credit hours per academic year, not to exceed 120 college credit hours total while enrolled in the program (“College Credit Plus”). Given that “completion of a three or more credit-hour college course converts to 1.0 Carnegie unit earned at the high school,” a CCP student could complete the first two years of college and satisfy her high school graduation requirement at the same time, decreasing the time to a college diploma by two years (“College Credit Plus”). While there are risks for the student—for example, failing a college course impacts high school GPA and graduation requirements—this option is attractive because college courses taken under CCP are free, paid for by the state. The economic advantages are obvious, even if fast tracking a college education is not, in our view, advantageous for students.

While we are deeply disturbed by the growth of pre-college credit arrangements, we are also skeptical of certain aspects of CCP’s longevity, namely credentialing high school faculty to teach college courses to their high school students. Nonetheless, it’s true that the writing program has frequently been positioned in a defensive pose because of our university’s lack of long-term sustainability planning and general rush to follow the money promised by swelling enrollments and to capitalize on whatever idea trickles down from the state or national levels. Most recently, for instance, faculty in history, Spanish, French, math, and English composition were asked to produce a proposal for developing 18-hour certificate programs credentialing high school teachers without master’s degrees in the discipline or subfield to teach college courses in high schools for the CCP program. Those already holding master’s degrees can apply for credentialing without completing the certificate program. In our case, high school faculty with master’s degrees or those completing the certificate would be credentialled as University of Cincinnati Volunteer Adjuncts eligible to teach our first-year college composition course in their high schools. The irony of participating in a program that outsources the work of our labor force is not lost on us. We were given two weeks in summer 2015 to develop a certificate program that had to go through university and state approval. We had to do it without developing new courses and without requesting additional funds for staffing, even as we were told to expect an influx of area high school teachers seeking this credential. We wrote the certificate proposal and that summer one high school teacher applied to the program, was admitted, and enrolled in a course that counts toward the certificate requirement. Since developing the certificate, we’ve learned that our involvement in CCP dual credit enrollment entails other commitments for which we had not planned and for which funding is not guaranteed after the first year: being available
for regular consultations, conducting at least one full-class period observation at the participant’s high school, helping design the dual credit course along with its syllabi and assignments, and assisting with assessment of high school student writing. Ironically, however, university faculty would not be eligible to teach our courses in high schools, the courses we would train high school faculty to teach, because under Ohio licensing agreements, we would not have the appropriate licensure. As distressing as this scenario is, we are not convinced the certification and subsequent teaching and mentoring will endure because the state and university have not yet made long-term funding commitments to it. Unlike dual credit credentialing and certification, however, we know that AP credit is institutionalized and here to stay.

AP for the Win?

The AP program is admittedly a fertile site for fast-tracking economic incentives because of its widespread appeal and institutionalized presence, both of which are noted in the College Board’s 2014–2015 AP Program Guide: “Most two- and four-year colleges and universities worldwide recognize AP in the admissions process and accept successful exam scores for credit, placement, or both” (3). Laura’s high school tour made clear that high schools have gotten the message about the widespread acceptance of AP scores by postsecondary institutions.

In theory, students can earn anywhere from three to upwards of thirty-six (and, in some cases, more) college credits as a result of AP exams. At our university, this would amount to in-state tuition savings ranging from approximately $1,377 for a 3-credit course to $11,000 for a full year of college credit; out-of-state tuition savings of $3,300 for a 3-credit course and up to $26,334 for a year. It’s no wonder, then, that parents and students are willing to spend the current rate of $91 per AP exam in the hopes of earning college credit (“AP Exam”). No surprise either that the AP credit policy is viewed as a viable way to entice potential students, or “dependent consumers” as Swan terms them, to attend Ohio institutions.

Although we were not empowered to say so at the time—our voices were effectively excluded while state officials made policy affecting our curriculum, staffing, and enrollment—we read the OBR’s action as symptomatic of the managerial and very often anti-intellectual impulse guiding contemporary higher education. Managerial motives, which guide the class of technobureaucrats, shaped the OBR’s commitment to develop organizational structures that privilege efficiency and control consumer cost. Whereas the OBR foregrounded the material conditions making this
managerial move appear necessary and possible—i.e., the increasing cost of higher education, Ohio’s high attrition rate between high school and college, and the ailing economy—the board simultaneously and not surprisingly failed to address issues of great urgency to most writing specialists: how this change would affect student learning, general education goals, and reasonable criteria for writing competency beyond the first-year course. To frame the issue in economic language, the OBR over-invested in college credit for profit and under-invested in learning. As a result, it was not necessary to include writing specialists like us in the decision-making process, for clearly our response would predictably center on student learning, program goals, and evidence illustrating readiness for an intermediate writing course by students who earn a score of 3 on an AP exam. The way the AP policy change was instituted in Ohio signals an alarming statist creep that removes power and control from programs and trained faculty in order to empower and privilege state economic interests.

AP credit and its function as a placement tool directly affects our composition program at the University of Cincinnati, an urban Research I institution, which serves over 6,000 undergraduate students per year in general education writing courses. Prior to the state-mandated AP exemption of 3, our program had accepted a score of 4 as credit for our first-quarter composition course, English 101, a portfolio-based course focused on analysis and argument. The higher score was justified in part because students were required to produce a rhetorical analysis in 101, a difficult task for students even after several weeks of instruction. More generally, though, the complexity of thought that students were expected to exhibit in 101 warranted, to the then-director of composition and to upper administrators who were persuaded by his argument, a higher exemption cut-off. The higher score was also consistent with that of other universities and colleges across the state. In this light, the argument to establish an AP exemption of 3 to align standards among all state public higher education institutions seemed specious to us for all sorts of reasons, including the flattening of differences between schools across the state. But as we discovered, we not only had no choice but to accept the lower standard, we were also blindsided by the office of enrollment management, which instituted the change one full year ahead of the two-year implementation time frame in an effort to capture qualified students sooner.

We emerged from this experience questioning how a 3 or 4 should be interpreted by colleges. To give some context for the scores and what they are supposed to denote, the College Board offers the following rating index (“AP Scores”):
5 = extremely well qualified [for college credit]  
4 = well qualified  
3 = qualified  
2 = possibly qualified  
1 = no recommendation  
AP Exam scores of 5 are equivalent to grades of A+ and A in the corresponding college course. AP Exam scores of 4 are equivalent to grades of A-, B+, and B in college. AP Exam scores of 3 are equivalent to grades of B-, C+, and C in college (22).  
There are many issues to wrangle with here, not the least of which is the College Board’s confidence in determining what counts as equivalent to A, B, C, D, and F grades at varying institutions and in suggesting that a timed exam result can be considered equivalent to a course.  
Our interest, however, is in the description of what it takes to earn a 3, most notably, mediocre performance and minimal effort, as articulated in the 2008 AP Program Guide (no longer accessible): “Generally, to obtain a grade of 3 or higher on an AP Exam, students need to answer a little more than 50 percent of the multiple-choice questions correctly and do acceptable work on the free-response section” (40). It’s disquieting, to say the least, that such lackluster performance—completing correctly just over half of the multiple-choice questions that are largely irrelevant to writing teachers in the first place and producing acceptable (whatever that means) work on the writing portion—forms the basis for exempting students from a first-year composition course. The minimum requirements illustrate the low regard for the first year of college writing instruction. More significantly, the practice of exempting students from writing classes undermines conceptions of writing widely embraced by composition teachers: writing as a tool for active participation in democratic culture, writing as a way of composing selves as well as communities and cultures. Despite our efforts to design a curriculum that asks students to understand communication as a rhetorical practice that calls for careful understanding of self and other, individual and community, and our attention to research as an inquiry-based exercise in how to keep questions open and how to work responsibly with the words of others, AP scoring interpellates our composition course as equivalent to a minimally acceptable free response to three acontextual-prompts for an unspecified audience. The notion that writing is something other than a measurable skill does not figure into the institutional credit apparatus.  
The rhetorical power of writing is made to seem absurd in this context where economic realities trump learning, thinking, and growing. This point
is made particularly clear because the change to exempt students from FYC based on a score of 3 rather than 4 was not predicated on research indicating that student learning is better served, or for that matter, on any research whatsoever. In this sense, there was no pretense about the motivation for the change; indeed, there is no need for pretense, particularly when we consider the pervasive managerial model that increasingly organizes and constrains intellectual work in the academy (i.e., Bousquet et al.; Johnson et al.; Readings; Rhoades). This model is now the default rather than the exception and so presumably requires no justification. It is this default status that impresses upon us just how little our rhetoric about writing signifies outside our discipline. Because most of what we do at UC, like the discipline at large, operates on the assumption that writing matters to citizenship and to critical agency, we are often ill-equipped to counter with much credibility economic arguments that ostentatiously flout this assumption.

In the OBR’s proposal for changing AP credit awards, the committee outlines the philosophy informing the changes, including the following statement from an internal document: “There should be a balance between maintaining standards and advantaging students in awarding AP credits.” How will this balance be achieved? Who are the stakeholders who get to determine what constitutes balance or standards? The desire for balance cited by the OBR takes for granted the idea that a way of advantaging students is to award them college credit for high school learning. More specifically, we are to believe that providing students fewer opportunities for writing advantages them. Decreasing writing opportunities for our students is particularly distressing to us because our university has converted from quarters to semesters. In the new configuration, students are required to take one first-year writing course (they formerly took two), followed by one mid-career writing course ideally taken during a student’s sophomore year. The OBR’s decision to use a score of 3 for exemption has meant that some students skip writing courses altogether during their first-year of college. Yet to become confident, competent writers, we believe students need practice, reflection, and instruction. Current research on writing transfer suggests that when students get out of the practice of writing, their skills diminish—an unsurprising consequence for which we have many points of comparison in everyday life (see Beaufort). Even if students do emerge from high school as accomplished writers, there’s good reason to believe that these writers can become better writers as they gain more practice, write for different audiences, and increase their awareness of discourse conventions across the disciplines and in public writing contexts (see Whitley and Paulsen).
Despite its stature and effect on student enrollment, few college faculty stop to ask if “America’s colleges and universities [should] grant college credit through tests given by agencies outside education?” (Mahala and Vivion 51). How many college English professors know what is currently being tested by the SAT, ACT, GRE, or AP exams? How many realize that there are two AP exams for English—Language and Composition and Literature and Composition? For the most part, educational tests and the credits or placements they beget are handled by admissions offices, without the knowledge (and, let’s face it, interest) of college teachers. Many college teachers would be surprised to learn just how ubiquitous the College Board’s presence is in the culture of schooling. In the AP Program Summary Report for 2014, for instance, we learn that the total number of exams taken during that year was 4,176,200 by 2,342,528 students, a 6 percent increase from 2013 (“Program”). Of those, 505,244 exams in English Language and Composition and 397,477 in English Literature and Composition were administered, for a grand total of 902,721 exams in English. “The 10th Annual AP Report to the Nation” boasts that in the ten years between 2003 and 2013, the number of AP exams taken increased by 1,824,503 (7). AP constitutes a significant portion of the College Board’s stamp on education and its revenue:

[T]he expansion of AP has nearly doubled the number of students who have been given access to the opportunity of AP, more than quadrupled the number of low-income graduates who have been given this opportunity and the expansion has resulted in a larger increase in successful AP experiences than not . . . (6)

This statement contradicts the findings of a study conducted by William Lichten that the increase in the numbers of AP exams taken show clearly that the “average test performance level has dropped” and does not match college standards (1).

But, alas, as David Blakesly points out in “Directed Self-Placement in the University,” AP writing policies are not primarily about writing or learning. There is a clear ideological function involved in placement practices, entangled as they are with the enactment of state power, financial incentives, and the politics of college enrollment. Blakesley contends that “we continue to underestimate how such forces of power regulate and forestall change, as well as how they compromise the forms of rhetoric we rely on to support change or rationalize our successes” (11). Blakesley’s point hits close to home. As we strategized how to contest the state’s decision, we became increasingly aware of our limited rhetorical power. We rely on rhetoric that communicates to insiders but fails to imagine a world in
which writing is merely a measurable skill and a 3-credit course to check off, despite the fact that this view often wins the day. This realization is key because if we fail to contend with the larger political forces that encroach on our work, then we cannot begin to ask important questions about the interests served by our programs and our positions in them, unwittingly or unwittingly, and the potential conflict between these interests and student learning. In their 1993 article, “The Role of AP and the Composition Program,” Mahala and Vivion ominously warn that

the economic and political forces we describe in this paper are likely to continue to shape the development of AP programs and policy more than departmental debate unless WPAs and other well-positioned educators do more to inform colleagues about AP. (44)

They say that reliance on AP will likely continue and expand for the following reasons, which 22 years later remain astonishingly relevant: “Mandates for standardized assessment, escalating college costs, and growing student anxiety about incurring debt in an economy where college degrees don’t necessarily translate into jobs” (45).

Reflection and Looking Forward

What, then, are writing specialists to do with our hopes for a citizenry empowered and activated by writing’s potential? How can we reconcile a social vision of writing and composing with state imperatives to increase tuition dollars and to create streamlined education systems that seek ease and stability rather than complication and disruption, characteristics that we align with the complexity of literacy practices? As well-intentioned WPAs, how do we come to see and alter our own roles in this conflict? What kind of economy are we perpetuating within writing programs themselves and to what end?

Our positions as WPAs and composition faculty embody points of tension. State-mandated changes not only put us in a reactive stance, continually off-balance as we respond to crisis, but the changes also have the potential to threaten our faculty’s livelihood. Decreased need for sections of composition results in cutbacks in faculty, many of whom are hired on a contingency basis. Our status within departments and institutions results from the view of composition as a skills-based course, taught most often by non-specialists without protection of tenure or, in some cases, contracts that extend beyond a term.

Issues of status and legitimacy are old news, but they continue to affect our ability to act as agents on behalf of our faculty and writing programs and cloud any argument we might make on behalf of students. We
acknowledge, then, that our argument is a conflicted one: by calling into question the economic exigencies that appear to drive curriculum, we are also arguing our own relevance against a larger bureaucratic structure that dismisses our professionalism while at the same time reminding us of our tacit consent in maintaining the status quo.

Our narrative highlights how writing programs are structured and envisioned in ways that make them vulnerable to managerial creep and to state encroachment. Composition’s required status is one factor that ties it to state-mandated credit agreements. While we are not ready to cast our lot with the abolitionists, for we value FYC as a productive starting point for so many of our students, we offer this as an example of how working within reproduces and perhaps even invites predictable problems and fails to envision other ways of doing our work. The writing studies movement may be a promising model for reimagining our work and who does it. By advocating for a curriculum that positions students as writing researchers and teachers as having some knowledge of writing scholarship, Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle challenge the way composition is imagined and taught at most institutions. Given our recent and ongoing experiences, however, we’re confident that state officials would discount this challenge as long as the overriding goal of educational reform remains creating efficiency and minimizing differences across Ohio institutions.

Ultimately, we feel ambivalent and a bit adrift making suggestions and crafting strategies for intervention. Perhaps in the eight years that have elapsed since we first began this project, we have become habituated to the new normal, a landscape characterized by fiscal austerity and educational decision-making in the hands of technobureaucrats (Governor Scott Walker’s assault on the University of Wisconsin system comes to mind here). Yet we do see some signs of hope, particularly in the form of partnerships with potential stake-holders. To that end, we close by commenting on coalition-building across colleges, with local businesses, with high school teachers, and with students. We believe that coalition politics has a great deal of potential for creating change, particularly when anchored in economic issues of a community or profession.

Our university’s College of Allied Health Sciences (CAHS) Writing Fellows Program developed as a result of concerns from area health care employers regarding employees’ poor writing skills. Recognizing that they did not offer writing instruction or support to students in their programs, CAHS faculty responded to this concern by contacting faculty in English composition and asking us to teach them how to teach writing in their courses. Together with CAHS, composition administrators designed a series of workshops to help faculty in health sciences devise writing assign-
ments, activities, and rubrics in an effort to infuse writing across the CAHS curriculum. The workshops, now in their fourth year, have affected over thirty faculty who have agreed to mentor colleagues seeking to improve writing, learning, and writing instruction in their courses. This experience suggests that proactive WPAs can leverage contacts across the curriculum to stand in support of writing instruction in the first-year, second-year, and beyond when confronted by pressures to outsource FYC to high schools or wherever else. We see more faculty and colleges involved in writing instruction as a good thing. Expanding the base of stakeholders who support sustained, thoughtful writing instruction represents a substantial alliance and, in this case, links writing to employment success, a pairing that speaks to state board members more clearly than does writing instruction as a powerful basis for rhetorical flexibility, critical citizenry, or institutional change—descriptors that might better align with how compositionists view the work of writing programs.

On that note, writing faculty might also consider local businesses allies in our efforts to sustain and expand writing initiatives. We can partner with employers to find out what they really value in writing practices and use that information to assess the extent to which our courses prepare students for a variety of rhetorical tasks. When working with social work faculty in CAHS, for example, we learned that employers value reflective writing abilities and critical thinking (an admittedly elusive catch-all). Although social work students were expected to do reflective writing in their major coursework, they received little to no instruction in how to apply that knowledge to the site of client care. We used this information as the basis for teacher-training workshops with CAHS faculty, which created opportunities for rich dialogue across departments within CAHS on writing skills and preparation. These dialogues led to the creation of writing rubrics, scaffolded assignments, and purposeful assignment designs.

Working with CAHS heightened our sense that, among other things, if writing programs follow the managerial model, we lose important connections between literacy and social mobility, connections that affect our students’ economic futures and compel businesses to spend over 3 billion dollars annually to address writing deficiencies (National Commission on Writing 4). It’s no small irony that states’ efforts to streamline access to higher education by limiting or eliminating writing instruction in college is predicated on economics at the front end while ignoring economic disadvantages at the back end: employers seek workers with good writing skills. If one of the primary goals of higher education is to prepare students for employment, then graduating students who have the rhetorical knowledge and writing skills to adapt to a variety of situations should begin in the
first year and be reinforced throughout their college careers. More writing instruction, not less, would be in the best interest of students, disciplines, and states. Thus, linking writing instruction to an issue that legislators can appreciate—job readiness—is increasingly important, even if not primarily what drives those of us who teach writing and administer programs (see Brandt for a thorough study of the role of writing in our current economy).

Given the proliferation of dual enrollment policies rolling out across the country, another option for writing faculty is to influence as much as possible what is taught in dual enrollment high school composition courses, how, and by whom. While the conditions were not ideal when we created the 18-credit hour Graduate Certificate for Teachers of English program for CCP, the program put us in a position to shape expectations regarding preparation and requirements for teaching college composition courses. For instance, our program requires study of theories of composing, digital composing, teaching college writing, research methods in writing studies, and a style or grammar course, all of which help us foreground writing instruction in current theoretical and practical contexts. In other words, rather than a quick how-to, we aimed to immerse the teachers in theoretical, methodological, and rhetorical debates about how best to teach writing, respond to the needs of diverse students, and envision classrooms as sites for research and meaning-making.

Another possibility when faced with pressures to accommodate state-designed credentialing initiatives is to refuse to participate: our affiliate two-year colleges have taken this position. Qualified high school students participate in courses taught on the campuses under the post-secondary enrollment option, but the colleges have chosen not to partner with high school teachers seeking certification to teach college composition in high schools. While we cannot opt out of state-mandated AP exemptions, we can argue that we lack the resources to mentor high school faculty and other tasks associated with CCP, as our two-year counterparts have done. In the long run, like STS, without guaranteed funding in place beyond the first year, the CCP plan may end up being unsustainable. But it is likely that efforts to exempt more students from first-year writing or eliminate it altogether will press on, wasting faculty time and exhausting our energies in arguing the benefits of writing instruction embedded within the FYC curriculum. While arguments at national or state levels prove often impenetrable by faculty, we might try a different approach. We could flip the script and harness the energies of those most affected by these policies: our students.

By eliciting feedback from students about their writing needs, we can partner with them to design curricula while balancing the integrity of our
writing programs. An instructive model for this idea is available in Colleen Whitley and Deirdre Paulsen’s “What do the Students Think?” in which they report on findings from a research study focused on students’ comparisons between their AP and FYC courses. Working with a group of honors students enrolled at Brigham Young University who are required to take FYC regardless of AP score, the researchers found that “students in our survey repeatedly said that while their high school AP courses has prepared them to enter [the honors FYC], the AP courses were not replacements for it” (91). Among the more revealing findings were that students had minimal experience conducting research for a paper prior to their FYC courses. In fact, the researchers quote a handful of respondents who reported that they had never done a research paper in their high school classes.

Even more than partnering with students to design curricula, we might consider coalition-building with students to argue for the value of FYC. If asked, would students advocate for writing courses as valuable to their education? FYC courses are for students: what would happen if we get them involved in public conversations about the value of our courses, especially juniors and seniors who have accrued experience in major courses that might help them gauge how they apply what they’ve learned. This could be a risky move, as students might very well affirm the local principal’s view that no one wants to take these courses. We might find, though, that students offer arguments for FYC, or for a refashioned idea of FYC, that help teachers and administrators make the case for relevance and viability in terms that legislators might actually hear. When the consumer says they want or value something, the managers might just listen. This cynical take notwithstanding, involving students in a public process of assessing the relevance of FYC could illuminate problems and deficiencies as well as productive functions of current courses and programs. As a result, we might have to give up some of our most cherished beliefs and values and further build on our strengths.

In the many state policies aimed at efficiency and access, state boards assume that students (and their parents) want college on the quick in order to save money. Is the shortened college experience important to students? What’s lost in the lost years? Should there be room in college, in writing classrooms, for what Carrie S. Leverenz identifies as design thinking, which requires time, collaboration, failure, and improvisation? For Leverenz, academic writing is a “creative act of making, one in which writers make not only texts, but themselves and their worlds” (3). Is such a description relevant and/or persuasive to students? Both state officials and compositionists could develop a better sense of the needs of students we serve by partnering with them on issues that press on their futures. By joining with students
in mapping out the ways that writing works or can work for them, we can aim to make THAT course one they opt into. Who knows, perhaps state governments will follow suit.

Notes

1. Writing specialists have offered conflicting views on AP scoring practices, especially in relation to the quotas established in advance of scoring to determine the proportion of 5s, 4s, 3s, 2s, and 1s. For a critique of this practice, see Vopat. For an alternative view that seeks to contextualize scoring techniques, see Jolliffe and Phelan. See also Lichten in Hansen et al. for statistical data demonstrating the steep decline in standards for granting a 3 on the exam. For critiques of the test and its role as a predictor of college success, see Foster; Mahala and Vivion.

2. Exam descriptions are as follows:

**AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION EXAM: 3 HOURS 15 MINUTES**

The AP English Language and Composition Exam employs multiple-choice questions to test students’ skills in rhetorical analysis of prose passages. Students are also required to write three essays that demonstrate their skill in rhetorical analysis, argumentation, and synthesis of information from multiple sources to support the students’ own argument. Although the skills tested on the exam remain essentially the same from year to year, there may be some variation in format of the free-response (essay) questions.

Format of Assessment

**Section I:** Multiple Choice: 52-55 Questions | 60 Minutes | 45% of Exam Score

- Includes excerpts from several non-fiction texts
- Each excerpt is accompanied by several multiple-choice questions

**Section II:** Free Response: 3 Free-Response Questions | 2 Hours 15 Minutes | 55% of Exam Score

- 15 minutes for reading source materials for the synthesis prompt (in the free-response section)
- 120 minutes to write essay responses to the 3 free-response questions (“AP English Language”)

**AP ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION EXAM: 3 HOURS**

The AP English Literature and Composition Exam employs multiple-choice questions and free-response prompts to test students’ skills in literary analysis of passages from prose and poetry texts.

Format of Assessment

**Section I:** Multiple Choice | 60 Minutes | 55 Questions | 45% of Exam Score

- Includes excerpts from several published works of drama, poetry, or prose fiction
• Each excerpt is accompanied by several multiple-choice questions or prompts

Section II: Free Response | 120 Minutes | 3 Free-Response Questions | 55% of Exam Score

• Students have 120 minutes to write essay responses to three free-response prompts from the following categories:
  o A literary analysis of a given poem
  o A literary analysis of a given passage of prose fiction
  o An analysis that examines a specific concept, issue, or element in a work of literary merit selected by the student (“AP English Literature”)

Works Cited


“The AP English Language and Composition Exam.” AP Central. College Board.


College Board. “AP Exam Fees and Fee Reductions.” apstudent.collegeboard.org/takingtheexam/exam-fees.


“CCP for Public School Students.” University of Cincinnati, 2016, admissions.uc.edu/ccp/ccpapplicationoverview.html.


“Uniform Statewide Standards for Remediation-Free Status.” Established by the Presidents of Ohio’s Public Colleges and Universities.


Joyce Malek is professor of English and coordinator of first-year writing in the McMicken College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Cincinnati, where she teaches the practicum for graduate teaching assistants, courses in first and second-year writing, and rhetorical grammar. Since 2006, she has administered the English Composition Program, which serves over 6,000 students annually in first and second-year writing courses.

Laura R. Micciche is former director of composition and associate professor of English at the University of Cincinnati, where she teaches courses in first-year through graduate-level writing, contemporary and feminist rhetorics, and writing pedagogy. She has published A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion and Composition Studies with Dale Jacobs, and Doing Emotion: Rhetoric, Writing, Teaching. Acknowledging Writing Partners is forthcoming in 2017. Her articles have appeared, most recently, in Composition Forum, Computers and Composition, Reader, CCC, and College English.
Class Size for a Multilingual Mainstream: Empirical Explorations

Bradley Queen

Abstract

This article presents the findings of an exploratory study that synthesizes local empirical and statistical data to argue about the performances of students, categorized into distinctive linguistic cohorts, in mainstream composition sections of different sizes. The data suggests that section sizes of between fifteen and nineteen enhance the learning environments of all students within a majority multilingual student demographic when portfolio pedagogies are used, a conclusion that offers support ultimately to the policy recommendations on class sizes advocated by the NCTE/CCCC.

Introduction

The NCTE/CCCC position statement on class sizes, “Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing,” recommends that

Institutions can provide reasonable and equitable working conditions by establishing teaching loads and class sizes that are consistent with disciplinary norms. No more than 20 students should be permitted in any writing class. Ideally, classes should be limited to 15. Remedial or developmental sections should be limited to a maximum of 15 students.

For writing classes with specialized student populations, the “Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers” offers an accompanying set of policies: a cap of twenty students per section “in mainstream classes with a substantial number of second language writers,” and a maximum cap of fifteen for classes “made up exclusively of second language writers.” All such class sizes can enable “sound writing instruction and reasonable and equitable working conditions” to coexist.
Empirical research on class sizes in postsecondary writing contexts has been hard to come by, as noted by Horning (2007), who could not find “a solid empirical study to demonstrate, once and for all, that smaller classes help students become more effective writers in college” (11). This can present problems for WPAs when using the white paper recommendations in reports to upper administration about learning outcomes and course caps, workloads, and fair labor practices. Without field-specific and local empirical research that critically analyzes the relationship between class sizes and teaching and learning, this dearth of research may contribute to and reaffirm political economies that marginalize composition programs and writing teachers.

This localized study examines class sizes and linguistic demographics in a mainstream gateway writing course that basic writers must pass before registering for general education composition courses. The project gathers a thick body of local evidence—two assessments of portfolios, longitudinal course evaluation data, and an array of descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and linguistic demographic data—to forward arguments about the performances of students, categorized into distinctive linguistic cohorts, in composition sections of different sizes.

Together these data suggest that in the context of the mainstream writing course studied, section sizes of between fifteen and nineteen enhance the learning environments of all students within a majority multilingual student demographic when portfolio pedagogies are used. Moreover, on the instructional side of the teaching and learning dialectic, such class sizes enable instructional techniques that attend capably to linguistic diversity, benefitting a polyglot student population with different levels of proficiency in written English and distinct reservoirs of cultural and institutional knowledge.

**The Local Context: A Multilingual Mainstream**

At the University of California, Irvine (UCI), a mainstream composition class looks more like a specialized one where the vast majority of students are multilingual. Writing A, Introduction to Writing and Rhetoric, is the most critically situated of the three writing sequence courses because of the pedagogical exigencies presented by the changing linguistic demographics of its student population. Sitting between the Academic English/ESL Program and two courses that fulfill the lower-division writing requirement, WrA is a vital pedagogical bridge for basic writers.

In recent years, WrA has seen the proportion of its international students expand steadily. In the 2013–2014 academic year, Composition
received permission and funding from the Humanities Dean to experiment with section sizes by lowering the caps on fifteen WrA classes to fifteen students, down from the course cap of twenty. The following fall, the course caps for all three of Composition’s courses—A, B, and C—were lowered to nineteen under the auspices of a pilot. The number of sections delivered expanded apace, from 388 in 2013–2014 to 470 in 2014–2015, as did WrA’s offerings: 65 sections in 2013–2014, 86 in 2014–2015, and 77 in 2015–2016. By the spring term of 2015, the international student population in WrA reached almost 70%.

Admissions data from across the University of California system documents a significant expansion in the undergraduate international student population. The pattern registers a 28.5% increase from the fall of 2012 to the fall of 2013, another 18% bump in 2014, and another 12.8% in 2015 (UC).

Predictably then the proportion of new undergraduates who report a “primary home language” as “another language only” has also grown markedly over the past few years. When potential UC students fill out the sys-
tem’s common application, they come across the About You section. Among various other demographic questions, they find this one, “What language did you learn to speak first?” When the data is processed by admissions offices, responses are given one of three First Language Codes (FLC): 1) English Only, 2) English and Another, or 3) Another Language Only.

At UCI, the proportion of FLC 3 students within the incoming freshmen cohort increased to just over 40% in 2015, up from 16% in 2005, while the English-only proportion has declined, from 49% in 2005 to 27% in 2015. Meanwhile, the proportion of new students who report as FLC 2 has remained steady from 2005 to 2015 at 37% on average (OIR). These shifts affirm trends in US higher education (Ruiz; IIE; Hussar and Bailey).

Literature Review: Factors Impacting the Conversation about Class Size

Factor One: Impact of Class Size on Learning

Over the past decades, researchers throughout academia have argued about class sizes in studies ranging across disciplines and educational levels. The resulting research has been characterized as “broad, diverse, diffuse, and generally unwieldy” (Fleming et al. 7); the findings described as “conflicting, inconclusive, and disappointingly meager” (Robinson and Wittebols 1). Horning’s 2007 inability to find the definitive article on class size is echoed in the historical literature of other disciplines. Searching through previous research, particularly in other fields, though, can add to and complicate our understanding of the issue of class size in writing studies. As
far back as 1979, for example, social scientists Glass and Smith noted that “Review after review of the topic has dissolved into cynical despair or epistemological confusion” (2). The fickle nature of the conclusions offered by many studies, so claim compositionists Farrell and Jensen in 2000, still allows “interested parties to support any argument” (322).

Nevertheless, in their first of two meta-analyses, Glass and Smith claim they found “a clear and strong relationship between class size and achievement” (15). In their second, which developed 371 comparisons from 59 studies, they claim “more is learned in smaller classes,” with the relationship between class size and achievement slightly stronger at the secondary level than at the elementary (15). However, in 1989 another meta-study by educational economist Eric Hanushek drew from 189 studies and found “no strong evidence that teacher-student ratios . . . have the expected positive effects on student achievement” (47). While the research in elementary and secondary contexts relies on the fundamental hypothesis that smaller class sizes for all students but especially for at-risk populations, language learners, and special needs students can enhance learning and achievement across subjects, the multidisciplinary research on class sizes in postsecondary contexts has focused on questioning the following assumption: “Small class sizes are neither necessary nor sufficient to ensure high quality student learning, growth and development. What matters is not the size of the class but what goes on in the class” (Gilbert 5).

Factor Two: Impact of Institutional/Economic Factors on Class Size

Recent research on class sizes in postsecondary contexts recognizes the difficulties with determining empirically what goes on in classrooms, what factors influence learning environments, and what forms of evidence should be used to analyze teaching and learning. In addition, though, and more explicitly, economic studies make key contributions by theorizing class size as situated within the material financial conditions of local institutions. According to institutional research analyst Steve Chatman, class sizes are tied to “reductionist efficiency goals that consider only production costs” (Chatman 615). Postsecondary institutions attempt to create more efficient ways of delivering instruction and often privilege economic costs and benefits over educational outcomes and the quality of the teaching itself (Cuseo). From this perspective, class sizes become functions of “both institutional and course characteristics with institutional characteristics dominating” (Chatman 628; Correa).

According to economics professors James Monks and Robert Schmidt, such claims can be extended. They argue that class size may be endogenous
to research designs that study its effects on learning and teaching. Existing studies “combine and confound class size effects and total student responsibility effects” (2) where the latter refers to an instructor’s overall workload during a given term. Monks and Schmidt use student evaluations to argue that the interpretive correlations between class sizes and learning outcomes are already situated within total workload effects for each instructor and learning environments whose dynamics are influenced by class size as situated.

Such claims have much to tell us about researching class sizes through course-fixed effects, or what might also be called the environmental dynamics of teaching and learning. Regardless of their concerns, ultimately, Monks and Schmidt found that “class size has a negative and statistically significant (at the 95% level or greater) impact on the amount of critical and analytical thinking required in the course, the effectiveness of the teaching methods,” and other pedagogical dynamics (13). Class size then does seem to play a role in student achievement, the quality of instruction, and the environmental dynamics of learning itself.

**Factor Three: Student Evaluations, Teaching Effectiveness, and Class Sizes**

Definitions of effective teaching vary across institutions, fields, disciplines, and class sizes. The association therefore—among the size of a class, effective teaching, and registers of learning—must be situated, perhaps within a particular course in a first-year composition sequence. While student evaluations of teaching seem to offer consistent mechanisms for measurement, standardized processes for determining effective writing instruction do not exist at the postsecondary level. Moreover, many within composition studies—most recently, Adams Wooten, Ray, and Babb in Fall 2016 *WPA: Writing Program Administration*—have taken issue with teaching evaluations as the main body of evidence in a teacher’s performance record. While they provide quantitative and qualitative data that can be efficiently compiled and analyzed, evaluations can conflate the formative with the summative, the discussion of writing pedagogies with accountability defined by abstract criteria and opaque procedures. Such criticism has persisted for decades.

Alongside the politics of student evaluations comes research from various academic disciplines documenting the ways student teaching evaluations offer distorted interpretations of a teacher, of teaching effectiveness, or of learning itself. Student evaluations can privilege affective responses over more substantive reflections: how much students like a teacher or whether they were entertained in a particular class can obfuscate more important
determinations of learning and teaching (Centra; Boring et al.). Written comments on evaluation forms can be cruel and riddled with projective anger (Lindahl and Unger). Studies analyzing the influence of gender and gender roles on evaluation results offer mixed and inconclusive findings (Feldman; Freeman; Young et al.). The relationship between race and ethnicity and student ratings needs more analysis within specific disciplines and across institutions (Centra). Inquiries that ask whether student evaluations are influenced by low workloads, leniency in grading, perceptions of expected grades, and levels of rigor are answered only by studies focusing on specific pedagogical contexts (Clayson; Marsh and Roche).

While race, gender, and ethnicity are biasing factors in teaching evaluations, another that needs to be considered is class sizes. There does seem to be a correlation between class size and student evaluations of teaching and learning in postsecondary contexts. As far back as 1993, education professor John Centra argued that studies found biasing relationships in which smaller classes received higher student ratings, especially in “the dimensions of rapport and interaction with students” (qtd. in Feldman 66). While sociologist Kenneth Feldman’s meta-analysis did argue that “overall or global ratings of teachers are as likely to be inversely associated with class size as not to be related at all” (66), Feldman took note of pedagogical aspects involving interpersonal interactions to conclude that “two-thirds to three-fourths of the associations (in available studies) between students’ ratings on these dimensions and class size are inverse and statistically significant” (Feldman 71–72). The larger the class, generally speaking, the lower the ratings for such aspects of teaching and learning; the smaller the class, the higher the ratings.

Ultimately, Feldman argued that the degree of potential bias as it could be attributed to class size could not be separated from “what it is student ratings measure . . . and how validly they do so” (80). In other words, class size is a fundamental pedagogical element that can correlate with self-reported perceptions of teaching and learning and with learning outcomes themselves (Bedard and Kuhn; Chapman et al.).

When combining Feldman’s conclusions with Monks and Schmidt’s arguments, a tenable theoretical position emerges to justify using student evaluations as they are here: as key indicators of pedagogical environments within which class size can figure significantly. Current scholarship, in arguing that course evaluations may be unreliable indicators of pedagogical effectiveness, has refocused the use of evaluations for environmental interpretations of teaching and learning and of the pedagogies delivered. Class size, therefore, has become one fundamental aspect among others that can correlate with the performances of students and teachers, and it is among
the major elements defining local classroom environments, in which pedagogical emphases, class level, disciplinary orientation, and overall instructor workload may also be influential. Class sizes and course evaluation data together have become telling evidence when used for formative research within a writing program, especially when put into conversation with other forms of programmatic evidence, such as writing assessment data. The results section reports on such a conversation.

Research Questions, Data Sources, and Procedures

Research Questions

As part of the lowered class size pilot, the composition program was asked to assess the effects of smaller section sizes. In addition to the shifting linguistic demographics, the adoption of a portfolio curriculum, and the transition to a new learning management system, the lowering of course caps added another variable to be studied during an intense moment of curricular reform.

Using the following sources of data, we asked these questions over the course of three academic school years (2013–2014, 2014–2015, and 2015–2016).

1) Do students categorized into institutionally-defined linguistic cohorts perform differently in writing classes of different sizes?

2) Do the conclusions presented in this study support the NCTE/CCCC policy recommendations for class sizes in first-year composition courses?

The data sources are as follows: 1) writing assessment data (see tables 2, 3, 4, and 5); 2) course evaluations (see fig. 3 and table 6); 3) demographic data (see fig. 1, 2, and table 1), and 4) grade data (see fig. 4 and Appendix A).

Procedures

Statistical Analysis: Descriptive and Inferential

The means in all rubric categories from both writing assessments were subjected to F-tests to look for statistical significance in the three linguistic cohorts in classes of different sizes, in the first assessment ≤15 and ≥18, and in the second ≤19. The class sizes for the first assessment were determined by section sizes at the end of terms. The class-size limit for the second was set by the course cap since there was little variability in section size. Inter-rater agreement counts and percentages from each assessment were compiled and compared, and inferential statistics were compiled for each of the twelve rubric categories for both writing assessments to derive consistency and consensus estimates (Stemler). Pearson and kappa coefficients were
Table 1
Participant Characteristics: First and Second Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Count Assessment 1</th>
<th>Count Assessment 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n = 258</td>
<td>n = 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undeclared</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School, Department, or Program of Primary Major or Affiliation</td>
<td>Dept. of Pharmaceutical Sciences</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information and Computer Sciences</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program in Public Health</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School of Biological Sciences</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School of Business</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School of Education</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School of Engineering</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School of Humanities</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School of Physical Sciences</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School of Social Ecology</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School of Social Sciences</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School of the Arts</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unaffiliated &amp; Undeclared</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15.11%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (con’d)
Participant Characteristics: First and Second Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Assessment 1</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Assessment 2</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>n = 258</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>n = 130</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visa</td>
<td>International Student</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>56.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent Resident</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Includes Undocumented)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
<td></td>
<td>161</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Language Code (FLC)</td>
<td>FLC 1: English Only</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FLC 2: English &amp; Another Language</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FLC 3: Another Language Only</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undeclared</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Language Only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(FLC 3) &amp; Visa</td>
<td>International Student</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>73.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent Resident</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English &amp; Another Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(FLC 2) &amp; Visa</td>
<td>International Student</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent Resident</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>58.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Only (FLC 1) &amp; Visa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International Student</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Permanent Resident</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
Comparison of First & Second Assessments: Interrater Agreement, Counts & Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number (Percentage)</th>
<th>Exact agreement</th>
<th>Adjacent</th>
<th>Scores differ by 2</th>
<th>Scores differ by 3</th>
<th>Scores differ by 4 or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Holistic Score</td>
<td>78 (30.2)</td>
<td>113 (43.8)</td>
<td>52 (20.2)</td>
<td>11 (4.3)</td>
<td>1 (0.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Rhetorical Awareness</td>
<td>63 (24.4)</td>
<td>128 (49.6)</td>
<td>49 (19.5)</td>
<td>10 (3.9)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Self-reflection, Depth &amp; Complexity</td>
<td>65 (25.2)</td>
<td>105 (40.7)</td>
<td>52 (20.2)</td>
<td>9 (3.5)</td>
<td>2 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Awareness of Style, Voice &amp; Revision Strategies</td>
<td>65 (25.2)</td>
<td>119 (46.1)</td>
<td>51 (19.8)</td>
<td>14 (5.4)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Complexity of Arguments, Persuasiveness &amp; Evidence</td>
<td>72 (27.9)</td>
<td>93 (36.0)</td>
<td>70 (27.1)</td>
<td>14 (5.4)</td>
<td>3 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Clarity of Thinking &amp; Expression</td>
<td>69 (26.7)</td>
<td>108 (41.9)</td>
<td>57 (22.1)</td>
<td>16 (6.2)</td>
<td>2 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Mechanics, Usage &amp; Awareness of Conventions</td>
<td>83 (32.2)</td>
<td>115 (44.6)</td>
<td>39 (15.1)</td>
<td>12 (4.7)</td>
<td>1 (0.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Exposition &amp; Argument</td>
<td>75 (29.1)</td>
<td>108 (41.9)</td>
<td>59 (22.9)</td>
<td>15 (5.8)</td>
<td>1 (0.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Command of Language &amp; Rhetoric</td>
<td>89 (34.5)</td>
<td>107 (41.5)</td>
<td>48 (18.6)</td>
<td>13 (5.0)</td>
<td>1 (0.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Clarity &amp; Readability</td>
<td>86 (33.3)</td>
<td>118 (45.7)</td>
<td>38 (14.7)</td>
<td>11 (4.3)</td>
<td>5 (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Narrative Development &amp; Control</td>
<td>75 (29.1)</td>
<td>108 (41.9)</td>
<td>52 (20.2)</td>
<td>19 (7.4)</td>
<td>4 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Mechanics &amp; Conventions</td>
<td>84 (32.6)</td>
<td>117 (45.3)</td>
<td>44 (17.1)</td>
<td>10 (3.9)</td>
<td>2 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison of First & Second Assessments: Interrater Agreement, Counts & Percentages

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment 2</th>
<th>All Students (n = 130)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exact agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 (40)</td>
<td>53 (40.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49 (37.7)</td>
<td>52 (40.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 (30)</td>
<td>41 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 (31.5)</td>
<td>44 (33.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 (33.1)</td>
<td>46 (35.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 (33.1)</td>
<td>47 (36.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49 (37.7)</td>
<td>52 (40.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 (26.9)</td>
<td>35 (26.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 (42.3)</td>
<td>57 (43.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 (34.6)</td>
<td>50 (38.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 (34.8)</td>
<td>46 (35.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57 (43.8)</td>
<td>61 (46.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
used to compare interrater reliability across the two assessments. Additionally, means from the course evaluation data were subjected to t-tests, and Pearson’s product-moment correlation was used to look for statistical significance correlated with changes in section sizes and the pedagogical change to portfolio methods.

**Discussion and Data Analysis**

**Writing Assessment Overview**

At the end of the 2013–2014 academic year, final portfolios were selected at random for the first assessment from among the entire body of students who took WrA. A random number table was used. The fifteen sections capped at fifteen were randomly selected and merged with the samples from fifty sections. Each sample was read twice by two of sixteen readers, each an experienced teacher in WrA.

The results were divided by linguistic demographics as defined by the three cohorts of First Language Codes (FLC) within sections of different sizes. When cross referenced with visa codes and with the results of writing assessments, the FLC codes enabled interpretations of each institutionally defined linguistic category (see table 1) across the rubric (see tables 4 and 5).

Comparisons among the FLC cohorts for the first assessment were made within the two class sizes, ≥18 and ≤15. Readers read portfolios remotely. Each of the sixteen readers was given an equal sample set, accessed the rubric online, and filled it out for each sample assigned. No calibration was conducted in the first year other than the weekly staff meetings among the teachers of WrA. No adjudication was performed on the results. Since portfolio pedagogy was new to WrA at the time and its teachers were in the process of adjusting to it and to the shifting linguistic demographics, this first assessment sought to take a preliminary look at WrA’s new portfolio curriculum and its attendant methods of judging student work.

A second writing assessment was conducted after the 2016 winter term with samples selected using a random number table. The same rubric from 2013–2014 was used. The five raters for this assessment, again expert WrA teachers, went through a three-hour calibration session prior to conducting the rest of the assessment remotely. An adjudication method was used, and both non-adjudicated and adjudicated scores report agreement and reliability indicators (Collins et al.; Kelly-Riley and Elliot). Adjudication by a third rater, another WrA expert reader, was conducted for scores that differed by two or more on the six-point scale. The third reader read the sample in question, looked at both scores, leveled a third score, and then eliminated a discrepant score (Johnson et al.; Scharf et al.).
Rubric

The rubric categories (see tables 2, 3, 4, and 5) derive from two sources: 1) a faculty survey about pedagogical emphases and 2) common course materials. The rubric comprises two main domains, with the first portfolio and the second final essay. The rubric uses a scale from 5 to 0: Excellent (5), Very Good (4), Good (3), Average (2), Below Average (1), Failing (0).

In the portfolio domain, six trait categories follow the holistic evaluation. The final essay domain comprises five traits that evaluate this traditional student product. These two domains embody productive tensions within WrA’s evolving curriculum: between portfolio grading and traditional essay grading, and between products and processes as the objects of pedagogical focus, attunement, and assessment.

Interrater Agreement and Reliability

Two statistical forms of interrater agreement are reported for each assessment: descriptive statistics counting the agreement numbers and percentages for each rubric item (see table 2) and inferential statistics reporting consistency and consensus estimates that indicate patterns of agreement (see table 3). Regarding the latter, the kappa statistic measures exact agreement among raters; the weighted form is used to emphasize larger disagreements. The Pearson correlation indicates the consistent nature of patterns of agreements. Together, these empirical registers show reliability as a variegated and multilayered metric for understanding portfolio assessment as a formative heuristic that can reveal productive tensions within a common curriculum.

For WrA’s teachers, their recently adopted holistic grading method—in which each teacher provided feedback to their own students for three cycles of process work and drafted essays, and leveled the one course grade via the final portfolio—became a focal point for curricular attunement once the data from the first assessment was disseminated. The left sides of tables 2 and 3 record the results. In terms of the exact agreement percentages, none of the measures are robust. When combined with the adjacent percentages, a number of categories in each domain move above 70%: in the portfolio domain, four of the seven portfolio categories, holistic (74%); rhetorical awareness (74%); awareness of style, voice, and revision (71.3%); and mechanics, usage, and awareness of conventions (76.8%); and in the final essay domain, all five areas, exposition and argumentation (71%), command (76%), clarity and readability (79%), narrative development and control (71%), and mechanics and conventions (77.9%).
Table 3
Interrater Reliability Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment 1</th>
<th>Assessment 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( n = 258 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic Score</td>
<td>.45***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.35***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-adjudicated Pearson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-adjudicated Weighted Kappa</td>
<td>.46***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjudicated Pearson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-adjudicated Weighted Kappa</td>
<td>.47***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjudicated Weighted Kappa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Awareness</td>
<td>.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.19***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection, Depth &amp; Complexity</td>
<td>.42***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reflection, Depth &amp; Complexity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OfDay, Style, Voice &amp; Revision Strategies</td>
<td>.35***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.19***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity of Arguments, Persuasiveness &amp; Evidence</td>
<td>.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3 (con’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>n = 258</th>
<th>Assessment 2</th>
<th>n = 130</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-adjudicated Pearson</td>
<td>Non-adjudicated Weighted Kappa</td>
<td>Adjudicated Pearson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Portfolio: Clarity of Thinking &amp; Expression</strong></td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>.18***</td>
<td>.40***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Portfolio: Mechanics, Usage &amp; Awareness of Conventions</strong></td>
<td>.34***</td>
<td>.22***</td>
<td>.42***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Essay: Exposition &amp; Argumentation</strong></td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td>.23***</td>
<td>.39***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Essay: Command of Language &amp; Rhetoric</strong></td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>.23***</td>
<td>.53***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Essay: Clarity &amp; Readability</strong></td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td>.41***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Essay: Narrative Development &amp; Control</strong></td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td>.36***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Essay: Mechanics &amp; Conventions</strong></td>
<td>.29***</td>
<td>.18***</td>
<td>.45***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** p < .0001
** p < .001
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Size ≤ 15</th>
<th>Mean (5 = Excellent, 2 = Average, 0 = Failing)</th>
<th>Class Size ≥ 18</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>df</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Holistic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2,141</td>
<td>0.6 (nss)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Rhetorical Awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2,136</td>
<td>0.6 (nss)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Self-reflection, Depth &amp; Complexity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2,124</td>
<td>0.3 (nss)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Awareness of Style, Voice &amp; Revision Strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2,138</td>
<td>1.2 (nss)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Complexity of Arguments, Persuasiveness &amp; Evidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2,138</td>
<td>0.4 (nss)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Clarity of Thinking &amp; Expression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2,138</td>
<td>0.9 (nss)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Mechanics, Usage &amp; Awareness of Conventions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2,138</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Exposition &amp; Argumentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2,142</td>
<td>0.3 (nss)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Command of Language &amp; Rhetoric</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2,142</td>
<td>2.1 (nss)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Clarity &amp; Readability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2,142</td>
<td>1.9 (nss)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Narrative Development &amp; Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2,142</td>
<td>0.4 (nss)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Mechanics &amp; Conventions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2,141</td>
<td>4.5**</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05 Note: p values not statistically significant at the 0.05 level are designated as nss

**p < .01
Table 5 Assessment 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Size ≤ 19</th>
<th>Mean (5 = Excellent, 2 = Average, 0 = Failing)</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Holistic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2, 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Rhetorical Awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2, 126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Self-reflection, Depth &amp; Complexity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2, 125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Awareness of Style, Voice &amp; Revision Strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2, 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Complexity of Arguments, Persuasiveness &amp; Evidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2, 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Clarity of Thinking &amp; Expression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2, 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: Mechanics, Usage &amp; Awareness of Conventions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2, 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Exposition &amp; Argumentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2, 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Command of Language &amp; Rhetoric</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2, 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Clarity &amp; Readability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2, 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Narrative Development &amp; Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2, 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Essay: Mechanics &amp; Conventions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2, 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLC 3</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .01

Note: p values not statistically significant at the 0.05 level are designated as nss
While these percentages may seem moderately strong, none of the rubric categories registers a weighted kappa coefficient that indicates more than a medium level of reliability on the scale recommended by White, Elliot, and Peckham for use when assessing portfolios. This scale’s coefficient ranges—specific to portfolios, which are intricate constructs whose complexity may be distorted by scales and “standards obtained from elementalist measures,” such as those applied to timed writing placement exams (123)—are slightly less stringent than conventional psychometric scales. The non-adjudicated weighted kappa scale defines the high range as .69–.6, the medium range as .23–.45, and the low range as .1–.22. On this scale, which is more forgiving than an unweighted kappa scale, a number of rubric areas document low consensus agreement numbers (see table 3). In the portfolio domain, five of seven fall here; in the final essay domain, three of five. The remaining kappa numbers for each fall within medium, and they are on the low end of this range. Furthermore, all of the non-adjudicated Pearson coefficients register a medium level of consistent judgment in which high is .71–.48, medium is .47–.23, and low is .22–.1.

In sum, readers found only weak levels of consensus about how the students performed across all rubric traits, and they agreed and disagreed in moderately consistent patterns. Such results suggest this community of teachers had not yet developed a clear and common understanding of the pedagogical values of WrA’s holistic method of grading students, in which students are given a single grade for the portfolio and the distinct assignments are not graded.

Catalyzed by such data, three strategies for curricular attunement were recommended.

1) Develop a more clearly articulated sequence of assignments.
2) Consider grading these assignments and the final portfolio separately, and develop a common method for the holistic grading of end-of-term portfolios.
3) Develop a robust sample of portfolios, and discuss them regularly as a group.

In response, the WrA teaching staff accepted the assignment sequence recommendation, framing it as three papers: the first an imitation, the second a genre analysis, and the third a traditional academic essay. The portfolio assignment remained essentially the same. The third suggestion also took. The teachers discussed sample portfolios more regularly in cohort meetings held in addition to regular meetings. This gradual process, in which bottom-up pedagogical strategies evolved alongside formative curricular assessment, helped create cohort acceptance of new curricular emphases and enable flexible adaptations to shifting demographics.
The agreement counts and reliability statistics (see table 2 and table 3) for the second assessment suggest that such attunement strategies also moved WrA teachers closer toward locating common sensibilities for adjudicating the work of their students. Exact agreement numbers before adjudication are marginally higher in every area in both domains except the exposition and argumentation area of the final essay domain. Where formative programmatic assessment is the focus and the writing construct—final portfolios—is more complex and richly textured, such measures need to be used to further discussion among teachers about interpretive methods.

Due to this formative orientation, the second assessment’s adjudicated counts and percentages need to be viewed with skepticism. The act of adjudication in this case was used to motivate further discussion about methods of interpreting portfolios, not to bolster reliability measures. Nevertheless, even with the adjudicated counts and percentages bracketed, the inferential statistics support the claim that the curricular attunement strategies set in motion by the first assessment enabled WrA teachers to establish some measure of value-laden common ground.

Consensus is more solid, with six of seven non-adjudicated kappa scores in the portfolio domain now registering within the medium range of .23–.45, and four of five scores within the final essay domain following suit. The consistency estimates for ten of twelve categories rate as medium for non-adjudicated Pearson scores, and the other two rate as high, with the holistic portfolio score as one of the them. All non-adjudicated coefficients for both estimates are highly statistically significant at $p < .001$. Together, the agreement and reliability data from both assessments reveal productive tensions even as they document moderately reliable readings across all rubric categories.

Writing Assessment Data

All three language cohorts register above average performances for the holistic portfolio evaluation with no statistical significance resulting from the comparison among FLC means within the two class sizes for the first assessment (see table 4). Notably, the FLC 2 group records higher means in the portfolio domain and generally outscores the other two in class sizes of ≤15. Nevertheless, no statistical significance results from the comparison among FLC means within the two class sizes in any of the portfolio domain categories except in the area termed mechanics, usage, and awareness of conventions. The significance is stronger in the larger section size, but present in the smaller too, as might be expected in this area defined by awareness of traditional aspects of proficiency with written academic English, with those
students designated as ESL students scoring the lowest. While mechanics and usage are not usually considered an area of meta-cognition, in the rubric’s portfolio domain, readers analyzed how students discussed and analyzed their awareness of such things.

The final essay domain demonstrates similar patterns of statistical significance in both section size groups. One variable records statistical significance, that of mechanics and conventions. No areas of higher order rhetorical or analytical skill show statistically significant differences among the FLC cohorts within each section size grouping, but all three cohorts perform solidly, with the FLC 2 cohort generally strongest in the smaller size but frequently even with FLC 1 in both sizes. The FLC 1 is generally highest in the larger size and the FLC 3 generally the lowest, but even at moments with each of the other two and highest in the larger size in the final essay’s narrative development and control category. The only area of statistical significance in the final essay domain for each section size locates within mechanics and conventions.

Notably, the FLC 3 cohort attains higher-than-or-equal-to means in the larger class size when compared with the FLC 3 in the smaller in every rubric category except for the mechanics, usage, and awareness of conventions area in the portfolio domain and the mechanics and conventions area of the final essay domain. Both of these means come in incrementally higher in the smaller section size. When considering that the FLC 2 population in the smaller size scored higher-than-or-equal-to in every rubric category than the FLC 2 cohort in the larger sections, these data suggest that the larger classes may focus more studiously on higher order strategies and skills and may have less time to focus on sentence level crafting. But these results are only suggestive, and tests for statistical significance were not run across FLC cohorts within the two class sizes due in parts to the tepid nature of the kappa and Pearson measures for the first assessment and to the lack of statistical significance across the rubric areas in each class size.

The results from the second assessment look similar to the first (see table 5). All three language cohorts perform solidly, but the FLC 2 and FLC 3 groups generally outperform a small FLC 1 cohort. The FLC 2 and FLC 3 cohorts register stronger means in most trait areas in both domains except for the portfolio holistic and the mechanics, usage and conventions category, and the clarity and readability category in the final essay domain. Only the usage, conventions, and mechanics areas have any statistical significance.

The outcomes of both assessments show students in all groups performing well, according to their teachers even as they deliver an inconclusive response to question one: do student categorized into institutionally-defined linguistic cohorts perform differently in writing classes of different
sizes? When considering the policy recommendations queried in question two, these data suggest that the lines drawn between the specialized and mainstream recommendations may be too soft to carry advocacy positions for smaller class sizes in both domains. Moreover, the writing assessment data, which includes the agreement and reliability evidence, indicates that different kinds of data must be used to offer ecological descriptions of class sizes in writing intensive courses and to theorize field-specific measures of portfolio assessment.

Course Evaluations and Class Sizes

Well before the spike in international student enrollment occurs in the fall of 2011, the Composition Program had been tracking student evaluation numbers. In figure 3, all courses from Fall 2007 to Spring of 2014—2,236 sections—document an average overall instructor rating of 6.1 and an overall course rating of 5.9 on a 1 to 7 scale, with 7 at the high end. On the evaluation form, the overall course rating says, “Overall, this course improved my writing,” and the overall instructor rating says, “Overall, the instructor is effective, and I would take another class with her/him.” While both of the overall ratings demonstrate solid numbers, the overall instructor rating noticeably averages higher than the overall course rating cumulatively, suggesting students may prefer the personalities of the instructors and their ways of comporting over the learning environment and the substance of the pedagogies.

This relationship looks a bit different when considering the 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 academic years, the first two years in which all of Composition’s sections had max caps of nineteen students. Both measures tick up, with the instructor rating moving up by 0.3 and the course rating by 0.4. The relationship looks different yet again when considering the fifteen sections of WrA delivered during 2013–2014. These sections, with caps of fifteen, call into question the pattern between the overall indicators. The course rating comes in at 6.5, incrementally higher than the instructor rating of 6.4. While the census method used may offer only broad generalizations, these small ticks suggest that WrA students in classes capped at fifteen highly valued their curricular environments, within which class size seems to figure significantly.

To make fine-tuned interpretations of the relationship between class sizes and course evaluation numbers, tests were run for statistical significance (see table 6). The first comparison drew from five measures on evaluations gathered for all classes from Fall 2007 to Spring 2015 with enrollment sizes of \( \leq 19 \) and \( \geq 21 \). All means for the smaller sections came in higher, and all traits show high statistical significance.
Fig. 3. Overall Course Ratings, Overall Instructor Ratings, and Course Caps
Table 6. Comparison of Evaluation Traits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Classes</th>
<th>Class Size Comparison</th>
<th>≤ 19</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td></td>
<td>865</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td>865</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open &amp; Fair</td>
<td></td>
<td>865</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Instructor Rating</td>
<td></td>
<td>865</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Course Rating</td>
<td></td>
<td>865</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>2563</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>≤ 15</th>
<th>≥ 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Traits WRA</th>
<th>≤ 19</th>
<th>≥ 21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre Portfolio</th>
<th>Post Portfolio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05
**p<.01
***p<.001

Note: p values not statistically significant are designated as nss
The second comparison involves enrollment sizes at \( \leq 15 \) and \( \geq 18 \). All means for the classes with the smaller population are higher. Here, just two categories—stimulated interest and overall course rating—show some statistical significance. Together, the comparisons suggest that writing sections with caps lower than nineteen influence positively both the students’ affective perceptions of their teachers and their impressions of their learning environments. They also suggest that sizes of between fifteen and nineteen and beneath fifteen may not influence significantly the students’ impressions of their teachers, but sections of such sizes may enhance learning environments and influence positively students’ perceptions of course-specific pedagogies.

When applied to just WrA, comparisons of sizes at \( \leq 19 \) and \( \geq 21 \) yield similar results. All means for the smaller class size are higher and highly statistically significant. The Pearson correlation as applied to all available WrA sections (\( n = 344 \)) shows that the stimulated interest category (\( r = -0.335 \)) and the overall course rating (\( r = -0.376 \)) register high statistical significance (\( p < .001 \)) in the pre/post portfolio pedagogy comparison. Together, these data suggest that the larger a section becomes, the less interested the students become and the less they appreciate their learning environments; the smaller it becomes, the more interested the students become in the course and the more they value their learning environments. These conclusions, however interesting they seem, should be viewed as tentative due to the lack of statistical significance demonstrated by the writing assessment data. Nevertheless, as environmental registers, the course evaluation data offers solidly suggestive evidence about learning environments, class sizes, and portfolio pedagogy.

One might argue that grade inflation influences the upward movement of these numbers. The relationship between grades, whether actual or anticipated, and evaluation scores has been problematic for researchers. Some claim higher grades along with higher evaluations reflect greater learning, others that such a situation reflects a lack of rigor (Smith et al.; Krautmann and Saun). Some conclude “that course evaluations do indeed reflect student learning” when considering specific pedagogical environments (Belche et al. 710, 718; Clayson, 26–27). This relationship describes the validity hypothesis, which claims that students who have learned more receive higher grades or the grades they deserve and “will naturally rate the professor more highly because of the knowledge they have gained in the course” (Patrick 241). When students think they have learned something, they give course-related and environmental elements ratings that can register as statistically significant, as we have seen thus far.
In WrA, evaluation numbers have gone up even as grades for its FLC 3 majority have trended downward. The proportion of FLC 3 students within the non-pass rate has increased, as the non-pass rate has remained consistent (see fig. 4), and the middle categories of the grade ranges for this cohort show only somewhat discernable patterns (see Appendix A). Over time, this cohort claims increasingly larger proportions of the B/B- and C+/C groups, a downward trend.

These patterns demonstrate neither grade inflation nor grade deflation, either of which might be expected in response to changing demographics, the adoption of portfolio methods, and shrinking class sizes. The grade data suggests that anticipated or actual grades are not biasing factors when WrA
students rate instructors and learning environments. Smaller class sizes seem to enhance learning environments for WrA’s polyglot mainstream.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, and to return the study’s research questions, the writing assessment data suggests multiple interpretations. One answer is yes: students within distinctive linguistic cohorts perform differently in proficiency-driven categories within classes of different sizes. The FLC 3 students, as expected, perform lower in all the section sizes in the proficiency areas in each of the two domains on the rubric. The FLC 3 cohort in the smallest section sizes performed incrementally better than the FLC 3 cohorts in the larger sizes in the proficiency areas. Another answer is no: the cohorts do not perform differently in classes of fifteen-to-nineteen students in all other categories. Within the rest of the rubric categories patterns in performance results cannot be discerned, and little statistical significance was discovered. Such evidence suggests that smaller class sizes, accompanied by portfolio pedagogies, enable teaching strategies in mainstream writing classes that attend capably to students with widely divergent proficiency levels in written English.

The synthesis presented here—of environmental data that taps learning’s affective domains with performance data that emphasizes its cognitive domains—would be untenable without theoretical advances in construct validity. With validity reconceived over the past few decades as argumentation (Huot; Moss), writing studies scholars have moved to problematize psychometric definitions of reliability, with the reliability scale used here as a primary example (White et al.; Elliot et al.). Such developments enable researchers to document the rich complexity of local writing constructs—student portfolios in this study—which provide the evidentiary foundation for the material synthesis where assessment theory integrates with local empiricism to engage pressing field-specific questions.

Ultimately, this exploratory study supports the policies on class sizes advocated by the NCTE/CCCC, even if it does not confirm the distinctions between the recommendations for mainstream and specialized classrooms. Such separate recommendations may not only contradict each other but may also perpetuate discriminatory barriers for multilingual students and stymie pedagogical reforms that should attend to shifting linguistic demographics. In sum, the evidence presented suggests that class sizes of between fifteen and nineteen for basic and first-year writing do foster sound learning environments in which a multilingual student population defines the mainstream writing classroom.
Notes

1. This study has been approved by IRB (HS# 2015-2208).

Appendix A: FLC 3 Grade Distribution

https://goo.gl/zovybD

Works Cited


——. “Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing.” March 2015.


Freeman, Harvey R. “Student Evaluations of College Instructors: Effects of Type of Course Taught, Instructor Gender and Gender Role, and Student Gender.” *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 86, no. 4, 1994, pp. 627–30.


Queen / Class Size for a Multilingual Mainstream


Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the editors of *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, the anonymous reviewers, and especially Norbert Elliot for their time and insights. A very special thank you to Anita Iannucci, statistician extraordinaire, and to my colleagues in the English Department, particularly Daniel M. Gross.

Bradley Queen is Associate Director of the Composition Program at the University of California, Irvine, one of ten public, research-intensive universities in the UC system. He also currently serves as chair of the University Committee on Preparatory Education, a systemwide body that evaluates entry gateways and college preparedness policies. He is currently at work on a project studying knowledge transfer strategies of multilingual students across a first-year composition sequence.
On Learning to Teach: Letter to a New TA

E. Shelley Reid

Dear Students,

Welcome to your pedagogy course! Your course might be like mine: three credits, one night per week for fourteen weeks, with a focus on preparing new teachers to teach college composition the following semester. Perhaps yours is a pre-semester workshop or a series of afternoon in-services; you may find yourself studying teaching just before or even well after you have begun to teach writing.

Regardless, you might be tempted to treat this class like just another school event in a long, familiar line of school events. And yet it’s not, not quite. The way you will learn in studying pedagogy—studying not just a new field, but one that is so personal, dynamic, and multifaceted—may differ significantly from how you learn in your other courses. Thus you may need new strategies in order to feel and be successful. The more you know about how students like you learn in a course like this, the better prepared you’ll be to set goals and succeed at them. To that end, I want to share six learning strategies that can help you see how people like you learn to teach writing better. I hope that you can use these concepts to increase both your confidence and your success as a teaching learner and perhaps even pass some of them on to your own students.¹

Strategy 1: Access prior knowledge

Although pedagogy instructors often design our courses as introductions, we recognize that you bring a lot of relevant prior knowledge to the table—and you need to figure out how to access as much of it as possible. While you may have just a few weeks of formal pedagogical study, you have been a successful student of reading and writing, and you have been going to school and thinking about teaching and learning, for decades. Despite any dark hours in which you may suffer from impostor syndrome (that nagging feeling that if people really knew how unprepared you are, they’d cart you

¹
off to the boondocks and find you a job scraping mud off moose hide), you
have already been preparing to teach writing.

You are already a writing teacher. You know that most people best learn
to write when they write something and receive feedback on it from a care-
ful reader. Thus, every time you have given thoughtful feedback to another
writer, you have been teaching. In this class, you will take steps to refine
your strategies for classroom teaching, but you are not a blank slate. You’re
also already a writing/teaching theorist. Perhaps you have not yet studied
composition theory or taken an education class. But every time you chose
one course over another and every time you found one writing assignment
more engaging than another, you were building a theory of learning and
writing. You know a lot about how you best learn; you may also have con-
sidered how your friends learn. While you might not have named these
theories, you practice them every week. You bring all this knowledge to
your pedagogy course—whether it’s on the tip of your tongue or lurking
beneath the surface of your mind like the hidden bulk of an iceberg—and
you should take some time to articulate what you know.

First, you will need to know about your knowledge for confidence. This
class, more than your other classes, may present you with a range of com-
pletely unfamiliar material. Reminding yourself of your own expertise may
prove crucial in order for you to combat imposter syndrome and stay moti-
vated as you encounter surprises and challenges.

Second, you will need to know about that knowledge for community.
The more you can remember that your classmates and colleagues are knowl-
edgeable theorists, too, the more you will be able to benefit. (This class is
not populated by clueless rookies!)

Third, you need to access your knowledge for consistency. You don’t
want to believe one thing as a learner and a writer but dogmatically teach
your students something else, or to adopt a practice that contradicts your
own principles. If you don’t believe it’s effective to craft an outline or write
three-point theses or consult a peer as you write, for instance, but you pro-
fess that good writing pedagogy means that all your students must do so,
you may be creating conflict for yourself as a teacher.

Finally, you need to know what you know for change, in order to adapt
as you learn. Even if everything you know about writing is correct and
functional, it may not all work in your future classrooms: in order to teach
people who are not like ourselves, all of us need to learn some strategies that
are different, even opposite, from ones that worked for us as learners. If you
do not know what you assume, prioritize, or desire as a writer, learner, or
teacher, you may find yourself caught by an unexpected behavior, like an
iceberg swept along by subsurface currents.
As you begin this course of study, then, you should identify what you already know about teaching and writing, share it with others, and explore how prior knowledge complements and contradicts new learning.\textsuperscript{2}

\textit{Strategy 2: Understand and adapt to conscious incompetence}

Learning theorists outline an overlapping, recursive set of four stages encountered—and often re-encountered—by most students. In an early stage of what is called \textit{unconscious incompetence}, learners of any subject (calculus, soccer, writing, bass guitar) do not know what they do not know. If you have ever watched informal groups of young children play soccer, you may have witnessed some blissful moments of unconscious incompetence: what they don’t know about player deployment strategies or the offsides rule isn’t worrying them at all.

In the next stage, \textit{conscious incompetence}, learners become acutely aware that they do not know how to do something well. As your pedagogy class evolves, for instance, you may discover that you are uncertain how best to respond to a student essay or plan a week’s worth of class activities about critical reading. In this stage, learners begin to recognize errors and make deliberate efforts to improve their performance. Yet they are often less happy and less confident, since nobody enjoys feeling incompetent.

Learners can cycle into a third stage, \textit{conscious competence}, wherein they can perform tasks well but only when they concentrate carefully. These students are much improved, yet they may sometimes feel exhausted or disheartened by the effort involved. As a new writing teacher, you will provide helpful comments on students’ essays, but to do so, you may need to reread your guidelines or even to go back to compare two B-minus documents to check for consistency. Eventually, learners can move into \textit{unconscious competence} with some tasks or sets of tasks: they can perform well without having to devote excessive attention to the matter at hand. Teachers who are familiar with a subject and a writing task often review and comment without much second-guessing.

If this cycle holds true for all learners—including your own writing students—why should you pay special attention to it in a pedagogy class? Because several factors can magnify the effects of conscious incompetence for teaching learners like you. First, the feeling can surprise you because in the rest of your classes, the things you’re incompetent at may be relatively few in comparison to all the knowledge you’ve accumulated. What’s one new theorist or primary text compared to the dozens you already know? In comparison, the conscious incompetence you may encounter in a pedagogy class can stick out like a very sore thumb.
To complicate matters, in learning to teach, you are likely to inhabit all four stages at once, relative to different aspects of teaching. Just as you start to feel comfortable with commenting on student writing, for example, you’ll read an article about multi-genre assignments that makes you realize you don’t fully comprehend genres as a concept. Frequently, in learning teaching, as soon as you understand the issues at one level, your view refocuses so that you can see new challenges and unknowns at the next level. So instead of progressing steadily toward competence as the workshop or semester goes along, you are—like many experienced teachers—likely to encounter new incompetencies each week.

Finally, as you prepare to teach classes of unknown students, the stakes may feel pretty high. After all, if you’re incompetent in interpreting the latest Swedish film, probably only you and your professor (or maybe a few trusted peers) will know. If you’re incompetent at designing a peer review assignment, you may fail much more publicly. Since you can feel exposed at the front of a classroom, learning to teach can feel very personal, even if you tell yourself that it’s just a job or just a class. Moreover, you may become worried about building your hoped-for career in this profession. These magnifying factors are inherent to being a new learner of a complicated, highly personal task—but that doesn’t make the incompetence feel any better.

At some point, therefore, you may need some additional coping strategies as a teaching learner. You can remind yourself that the incompetence feeling is a normal learning stage and one that will diminish over time. You can take time to review all the knowledge and competencies you do have that can buoy you up. When you do make progress, you should take time to celebrate those gains while you prepare to learn still more. You might even decide to ask directly for reassurance or specific guidance from an experienced teacher, program director, or mentor. Not everyone will expect (or notice) that you feel especially concerned about a concept, student encounter, or skill. When you finally reveal your conscious incompetence anxieties (and now you have a technical term to use for them!), you may discover that you’re doing better than you think or learn that there are some straightforward steps you could take to gain more clarity and competence.

The better you become at recognizing the signs that you are having a round of learning pains, understanding that they are inherent to the process of learning a new and intricate profession, and finding a strategy to alleviate them, the more you’ll gain from the opportunities in this course.3
Strategy 3: Integrate multiple learning approaches

Just as becoming physically fit requires more than one kind of endeavor (cardiovascular conditioning, weight training, flexibility exercises), learning to teach also requires a kind of cross-training. When a pedagogy course feels like a whirlwind tour through multiple topics or exercises, it can be overwhelming.

Yet you can also see the “If It's Tuesday This Must Be Belgium” aspect of a pedagogy course as a distinct contribution to your learning because of two key considerations. First, research shows that learning and practicing integrated, overlapping tasks in context—as jazz musicians, jet pilots, and basketball players do—provides better long-term learning than mastering all about X and then all about Y separately. In teaching, the tasks you perform are always interconnected, so it’s to your advantage to learn about assessing student writing, then work on designing an assignment, then think again (from a new, more informed perspective) about how to evaluate the student work from that assignment. Instead of mastering each one, you can gain an initial, more holistic understanding about how assigning and evaluating are linked in the practice of teaching.

Second, perhaps even more than other students, teaching-learners need to acquire knowledge through all three of the major modes of learning:

- **learning about**, or declarative knowledge that helps you understand key concepts;
- **learning how**, or procedural knowledge that helps you develop skills and abilities; and
- **learning through insight**, or reflective/metacognitive knowledge that helps you gain awareness of your own opportunities and motivations.

Table 1 helps show how each of these modes might play out in learning to be a teacher, a profession that requires you to know the *about* and the *how* of teaching, of writing, of individual student learning, and of classroom learning—and to reflect on your own writing and teaching metacognitively.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of learning</th>
<th>Field-specific knowledge</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Declarative knowledge about ...</strong></td>
<td>Composition as a field and an institution</td>
<td>Design a syllabus to meet field-wide learning goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing, reading, researching, revising</td>
<td></td>
<td>Explain concept of audience to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective practices for classroom learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Design a session integrating experiential learning about genres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Procedural knowledge of . . .</strong></td>
<td>Writing, reading, researching, revising strategies</td>
<td>Prioritize strengths and weaknesses in student drafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective pedagogical strategies for individual learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide revision-directed comments on student drafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective pedagogical practices for classroom learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Use follow-up questions to deepen students’ analysis during class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Metacognitive knowledge of . . .</strong></td>
<td>One’s own writing practices</td>
<td>Draw on one’s own struggles with revising to provide suggestions to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One’s own learning preferences</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflect on one’s enjoyment of collaborative learning, knowing that it will fit some learners better than others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One’s own teaching practices</td>
<td></td>
<td>Analyze a successful teaching moment: what factors contributed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the divisions noted on the chart, these approaches to learning often occur simultaneously: for instance, most recent research emphasizes that declarative knowledge must be blended with procedural knowledge, in all fields. Students who know about chemistry or US history also need to be able to solve how-to problems in that field. Indeed, many learning specialists argue that students strongly benefit from this more integrated learning, even if an integrated, problem-focused approach means that less material will be covered in those courses or that learning won’t be organized in tidy, predictable components.

Your pedagogy class will likewise help you blend some declarative knowledge about the subject matter with practice in some of the procedures that teachers need to know. A pedagogy course, like other introductory courses, can’t cover everything. Yet again, the gaps in this class may feel different to you. When a US history class only touches on the War of 1812 so that there’s more time to investigate the Civil War in depth, few students worry. When a pedagogy course skips over a topic, the loss can feel more dramatic because you may actually need to know—tomorrow!—more about assisting multilingual writers. It is difficult to trust that you will succeed without knowing that key information now. Since full coverage is impossible, metacognitive learning becomes crucial for teaching-learners. Metacognition supports your ability to transfer learning to a new situation and continue to learn there. In a pedagogy class in particular, nearly all of your practical experiences will need to be adapted to the next student, in the next semester, at the next school. Therefore, your metacognitive knowledge—the stories you tell yourself about teaching and being a teacher, how you accustom your neurons to solving teaching problems—will prepare you to continue learning the material your class doesn’t cover.

When you encounter a new topic, task, or approach in your pedagogy class, you might shrug and think “Tuesday: Belgium.” But you can also map out the process by connecting this learning approach to the integrated practices of your future teaching by linking any new approach to one or more types of learning (declarative, procedural, metacognitive), or by telling yourself a new story about what and how you are learning.¹

**Strategy 4: Learn from multiple sources and experiences**

Since one pedagogy course will not teach everything you need to know, you need to know how to learn about teaching from other sources. Certainly delving into the iceberg of your prior knowledge and looking for strategies that will transfer to new contexts can both help here.
If you have observed a mentor teacher recently, you have encountered another valuable source of pedagogical learning: your peers, both those in your cohort and those with more experience than you. You need to deliberately cultivate your ability to learn teaching explicitly from your peer teachers—by talking with them, reviewing their materials, observing as they teach, and asking critical questions. Few good teachers work as hermits, inventing their own assignment wheels and building their curricula with bricks shaped only by their own hands. Other teachers’ approaches won’t always be what you feel most comfortable with, and yet those methods may succeed with students as well as or better than your own. Of course, you will have to judge how to adapt others’ ideas to fit your own major principles or goals. You should also try someone else’s idea more than once before concluding that it doesn’t work for you.

In addition, you have an opportunity now to engage in a special kind of implicit pedagogical learning. You’re a practicing student, and every time a teacher makes a move—even now as you’re reading this letter—you can reflect on that moment to increase your understanding of how teaching and learning work. You should use this metacognitive double vision to peer behind the curtains of your own learning scenes: Why do you think your teacher just made that move? How did other students react? If you’re satisfied or frustrated as a learner, what factors have contributed to that experience? If you had been the teacher, what approach might you have taken to assist a student such as yourself?

Your goal is not to become the know-it-all who critiques all of her senior professors or sees his future students perfectly. Instead, your goal is to become a question-it-all, to use your dual position as a teacher and learner to better empathize with students and teachers who are navigating complex classroom currents. Any time when you find yourself in the position of a learner—you start a new Pilates class, switch to a different computer, add someone to your family—you can renew your double vision and become someone who sees teaching as teaching, who watches yourself and others learn rather than only letting it happen.

When you step outside your pedagogy class or workshop, try to look for ways to practice learning about teaching, directly by consulting with teaching peers to see what you can borrow from them, and indirectly by using your double vision to reflect on your own learning experiences.5

Strategy 5: Explore “managed uncertainty” and “failing forward”

It is neither true that good teaching cannot be studied nor that good teaching can be completely learned from books. Very good teachers prepare by
studying models and principles, and they continue to learn from their daily interactions with their students.

While it is just barely possible that a class session you design might go either 100% or 0% the way you plan it—you have your perfect rainbow class, or you encounter aliens who turn everyone into mushrooms—most teaching happens in the middle zone. From your own previous perspective, it may have seemed that decent classes without alien invaders usually proceeded in the 90–95% perfect zone. Yet many experienced teachers feel that we work in the 40–70% zone, delighted that some of a class session is going as we had hoped and then actively adapting in order to keep the rest of the class in an acceptable (and sometimes exciting) controlled spin so that learning can continue. One of my mentors once asked one of her nationally renowned colleagues about the best class he ever taught: he responded quietly and with only a little humorous exaggeration, “Well, I could tell you about a pretty good 10 minutes last spring. . . .”

During a pedagogy class, you will indeed learn some strategies to prepare you to handle many elements of teaching, and you will learn the reasons and principles behind such strategies. These principles will help you predict a fair amount of what will create a successful learning environment. You should try to predict what you can, just as sailors check the weather forecasts and tides: professionals don’t just wing it. But you will also need to practice a flexible mindset so you will be ready to adapt everything you learn to your own personal and educational style, to the learning goals of any class you teach, to the personality of any group of students overall, and to the vicissitudes of any particular day of teaching. In other school subjects, you may have been (and might still be) judged by your ability to draw correct conclusions and show that you’ve mastered a stable body of material. As a teaching learner, however, you should judge your increasing preparation more by how many variables you can identify in a dynamic situation and how many reasonable alternate paths you can imagine. Each time you mentally praise yourself for considering multiple possibilities rather than settling on a right answer, you build up your tolerance for productive uncertainty.

Since you will always learn and teach without being certain, you will always face failures as a pedagogy learner and as a teacher. Beyond your occasional bouts of conscious incompetence, you will—as I do—mess things up, or elements of your teaching will simply go awry on their own. Now, unless you hang out in a science lab or play a video game regularly, you may not have spent a lot of time failing and having that be a normal, accepted part of the way students learn and professionals perform. Yet teachers are like laboratory biologists and midnight gamers: we often fail because
we are fully engaged in a complex endeavor (a good thing!), not because we lack knowledge or commitment. Indeed, our potential for growth often depends on our willingness to take risks and fail. It’s better, of course, if we don’t fail utterly, which is one reason we work on managing uncertainty and predicting multiple opportunities. It’s best if we fail forward—that is, if we see any particular failure not as a final judgment of our capabilities or worth, but as an opportunity to try something again, differently. Even when you are uncomfortable with or frustrated by failure, research shows that you can learn to modify your reaction to it, to identify not just what went wrong but how you yourself can change in response by exploring your assumptions, attitudes, approaches, preparations, and/or goals. Much of your conscious incompetence will pass, eventually. Yet teaching is overall an uncertain enterprise, and you will be a better teaching learner when you manage your uncertainty by expecting, practicing, and even valuing it; by predicting what you can and adapting to the rest; and by using failures as opportunities for learning rather than signs that you should give up and turn back.

Strategy 6: Extend your new teacher timeline

The very existence of English 101 gives many students and professors the illusion that second-semester students should know all they need to know about college writing. Anyone familiar with the field or the actual course knows this is patently impossible: writing is far too complex an endeavor to be mastered via one class. Interestingly, though, some pedagogical education programs can similarly foster the illusion that once their TAs finish one course, they magically know all they need to know about teaching. After all, we quickly put you in charge of your own classrooms and tell you you’re going to be fine. That illusion can leave you caught in the middle: officially prepared, but truthfully still learning. As a TA interviewed recently put it, it can feel like he’s letting people down: “It’s kind of frustrating just not being perfect [yet].”

At some point, you do have to step into a classroom without knowing everything. On the other hand, when you step into the classroom for that first time, you may bring an excitement, an energy, and/or a freshness to the material that your students will find highly appealing, and those qualities will enhance the learning environment substantially. So when program leaders say that “you are ready to teach,” they are not lying. They have hired capable readers and writers with strong teaching potential, and they are helping you gain additional declarative, procedural, and meta-
cognitive learning that is sufficient to make you a competent teacher for their program.

You will still also be a teaching learner: not just the way all good teachers are lifetime learners, but an intensive still-at-the-beginning teaching learner. Researchers estimate that new teachers can spend from three to five years moving from being “senior learners” to “colleagues in training” to “junior colleagues.” During these early years—years, not months—almost all of teachers’ best work is just consciously competent: they have to think hard about their actions in order to feel successful. Some days they create class sessions that match precisely what they learned as core principles in their pedagogy classes, and on other days they improvise with whatever is in their book bags. Moreover, every time they try something new, the challenge can send them right back to conscious incompetence.

While you may transition smoothly into teaching your first classes (and everyone hopes that you do!), if your experience is uneven or involves setbacks, then you are probably experiencing a normal teaching learning curve, not having a personal catastrophe or letting your program down. Not only are other experienced teachers not aiming for the 95% accuracy zone, but you get to be a new teacher—the kind who asks questions, relies on his peer colleagues, worries about her time management, and fails at some key goals—for longer than your first semester.

Given this multi-year path, you might look at your pedagogy course as providing at least two kinds of learning resources. First, there is immediate learning, which is about preparation rather than mastery. You will be able to gain some in-depth competence in a few core areas of declarative and procedural knowledge and consider how to apply it more widely. For instance, the questions you learn to ask as you design a writing task—questions about students, learning goals, genres, institutions, and assessments—will recur as you design class sessions, inquire about multilingual learners, or even consider your policy about late work.

Second, there is delayed learning. Your initial course of study will also help you become aware of other questions, concepts, or strategies that will be important to you in the long run as a teaching learner, even if you cannot fully explore them during your first semester or two. Looking forward, you can acknowledge and prioritize for yourself what there is to be learned. What new technologies or genres might you want to help student writers to explore? How might you eventually want to create better opportunities to engage students in community projects or explore alternate approaches to feedback and assessment? If you’re making a five-year learning plan, you can dream big: what do you want on your to-learn list?
The more you tell yourself the true story about being a teacher on the first steps of an extended learning journey, the more you can enjoy each of the successes of your learning and teaching right now. This approach can help you prioritize your pedagogy learning to focus on a few concepts to learn deeply now and identify several more for later consideration.

Moreover, recognizing the extended timeline of teaching learning enables all five of the other strategies I’ve listed here. When you don’t have to be perfect by Friday, you can take time to investigate your own prior knowledge and integrate new knowledge into it so that the new ideas have a more stable foundation. You will have time to encounter conscious incompetence and to experiment with teaching strategies in an uncertain world. You can learn from your peers and your experiences as you piece together a dynamic, evolving understanding of how teaching works for you—rather than accepting a simple, pre-packaged view of it from a how-to manual. You will have time to learn to think like a teacher who can wield those tools and strategies across a wide variety of educational situations.

**Moving Forward as a Pedagogy Learner**

You may not need the strategies I have outlined here. When learning is going smoothly—and keep in mind that you are an expert learner or you wouldn’t have made it this far—students don’t need new ways to think about how to learn. But having names for these learning concepts might still help you. If you start to feel off-balance or overwhelmed as a teaching learner, you might stop and consider what factors are at work. It will always be possible that you’re experiencing normal school or life factors: too much work, not enough time. (It’s also possible that the class might be a bad class or you might be an unsuccessful pedagogy learner: any of these six learning strategies can be pushed too far, perhaps leaving learners with too much uncertainty or feeling only incompetent. But in a roomful of people thinking hard about teaching and learning, complete breakdowns like those are rare and can often be resolved.) If your standard coping strategies as a student don’t work, though, you may find it useful to remind yourself of some of the new ways of learning that are part of your pedagogy education.

Perhaps just as important, you may be able to help your own students when they struggle. Students at any level who have been accustomed to one kind of learning environment—perhaps one that focused on right answers or teacher directives more than your classes will, for instance—can stumble when they switch to new learning challenges. Your students might benefit from exploring their own prior knowledge or understanding that you don’t expect perfection from them in just a few weeks. Or perhaps you will
want to explore deep, problem-solving learning approaches with them and explain why you’re teaching that way.

I think that many experienced teachers would say we are still learning. Yet that’s not quite the same as the excitement (and frustration and occasionally moments of dread) that comes with the first rounds of learning to teach, with realizing the full range of creative opportunities you will have as you begin to interact with students in a new learning environment. Whether you are taking up classroom teaching just for the time being or as a lifelong vocation, I hope you can also take this opportunity to expand your understanding of your own learning processes—so that you can continue learning and helping others learn with balance, humor, and grace in whatever explorations lie ahead of you.

—Shelley

Notes

1. For arguments about how new teachers benefit from understanding general learning theories, see Parkay and Stanford (32–34); for more about how writing teachers benefit from questioning their assumptions about learning, see Stygall (40–41); for specific arguments about promoting “thinking like teachers” to new instructors, see Auten. Perkins argues more generally for all students to “play the hidden game” of understanding learning strategies (136–38).

2. For an introduction to the concepts of prior knowledge, negative transfer, and transfer generally, see Ambrose et al. (15–27) or Bransford et al. (235–38); for an overview of those concepts in composition studies, see Moore. For the idea of (pedagogy) students who have already developed “theories in use,” see Parker (413); for the idea of TAs as “senior learners,” see Sprague and Nyquist (295); for an analysis against viewing new English TAs as blank slates see Stenberg (63–66). For one exploration of ways that TAs sometimes teach against their own writing principles, see Dryer. The conversation about new (composition) TAs resisting (or critically inquiring about) pedagogical theories is extensive; Hesse and Welch represent two key voices here. For one take on the concept of teachers’ icebergs, see Malderez and Bodóczky (14). For general arguments about having teachers use reflective strategies to uncover their assumptions, see Bamberg, Brookfield, Dryer, Ebest, Reid “Teaching,” and Winslow. Arguments about the benefits of collaborative learning overall go back to Bruffee.

3. For a quick summary of learners’ competence stages, see Ambrose et al. (97–98) or Sprague and Nyquist (297–98). For one take on the pressure in graduate school to seem knowledgeable, see Recchio (255). For a definition of mastery in unstructured problems as ever-increasing attentiveness to more detailed challenges, see Bereiter and Scardamalia (esp. 79–82). For analysis of how the interpersonal and managerial dimensions of teaching can raise the stakes for new teachers, see Morgan (395, 399–400).
4. For a summary of research about the benefits of interleaved or back-and-forth study, see Brown Roediger, and McDaniel (46–66). A brief overview of declarative and procedural knowledge can be found in Ambrose et al. (18–20). To consider additional kinds of teacher knowledge (such as pedagogical content knowledge), see Shulman. For a summary of how metacognitive activity supports learning transfer, see Bransford et al. (67–68). The chart is adapted from Reid “What Is” (200). Discussions of problem-posing education go back notably to Freire; Bain provides one of many discussions of the recent “deep learning” research in his chapter “Messy Problems” (133–63). For analysis of the challenges of coverage in the composition pedagogy course, see Hardin (37–38) and Reid “Uncoverage.” For more on metacognition and reflective practice in pedagogy generally, see Schön as well as Hillocks (126–37); see Bamberg (151–52) or Broz (136–37) about new writing teachers specifically.

5. See Dobrin (23) on the institutional similarities between pedagogy education and first-year education. For explanations of how TAs should learn from equal or senior peers, see Martin and Paine or Weiser; for lists of questions that could help (new) teachers better notice their peers’ work in a (K–12) classroom, see Portner (50–55) or Boreen et al. (42–44, 61–67). For more on the benefits of reflecting on our autobiographies as learners, see Brookfield (49–51, 115). For an extended reflective example of student-to-teacher double vision (though with the assistance of mature hindsight), see Stenberg (77–91); for a description of a reflective teacher-narrative assignment, see VanderStaay.

6. The practicum course vs. theory course debate regarding the “TA training course” in English Departments has a long history; for one recent summary, see Dobrin—and note that most of the essayists in his collection resist any easy binary. Among scholars explaining that (learning) teaching is unpredictable, see Dannels (18–19), Belanger and Gruber (114), and Stenberg (148–49). For arguments that new teachers should measure their progress against clear and evolving criteria grounded in scholarship, see Rose and Finders. For arguments that constructivist, adaptive teachers who locate responsibility for change in themselves are most open to improvement and thus success, see Hillocks (e.g., 134–35). For a review of the research on the benefits of tolerating difficulty and failure in learning, see Brown Roediger, and McDaniel (90–98); consider also Dweck’s work on fixed mindset vs. growth mindset learners (6–9).

7. For recent data on the pace of learning of composition TAs and arguments about the need to extend pedagogical education beyond the seminar, see Estrem and Reid (474–76) and Reid, Estrem, and Belchier (61–62). For more on the “pedagogy of the extracurriculum” (Hesse and Sandy 124), see also Bamberg, Ward and Perry, and Weiser. Senior learners (etc.) comes from Sprague and Nyquist (295); the quotation from the TA comes from Estrem and Reid (475). For more on why new TAs might work on just a few skills at a time to gain confidence in core competencies before tackling additional challenges, see Sprague and Nyquist (298).
Works Cited


If It’s Tuesday It Must Be Belgium. Directed by Mel Stuart, performances by Suzanne Pleshette, Ian McShane, Vittorio De Sica, Wolper Pictures, 1969.


—, Heidi Estrem, and Marcia Belchier. “The Effects of Writing Pedagogy Education on Graduate Teaching Assistants’ Approaches to Teaching Composition.” Writing Program Administration, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 32–73.


Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to Barb Bird, Jason Palmeri, and Kate Ryan for their kind and insightful feedback on drafts of this article; to Heidi Estrem, for encouraging me in the earliest versions of it; to the supportive editors of WPA: Writing Program Administration; and to my pedagogy students, who keep showing me more and more about how to learn to teach teachers.

E. Shelley Reid is an associate professor of English and director of the Center for Teaching and Faculty Excellence at George Mason University, Virginia’s largest public research university. Her work on teacher preparation, mentoring, and writing education has appeared in College Composition and Communication, Composition Studies, Pedagogy, WPA: Writing Program Administration, and Writing Spaces.
Letter to a New TA: Affect Addendum

Elizabeth Saur and Jason Palmeri

As colleagues who have co-taught pedagogy seminars for new TAs in our composition program, we were very excited to encounter E. Shelley Reid’s “On Learning to Teach: Letter to a New TA,” which offers an accessible and practical synthesis of cognitive learning research for an audience of new writing instructors. Reading Reid’s “Letter” inspired us to write an “Addendum” that extends her cognitive perspective by turning the focus to the affective and emotional dimensions of teaching. Drawing on our own experiences and scholarly literature on emotion and affect, we structure this essay as a series of “maxims for teachers” (Berthoff) that can help us recognize and productively engage the emotions instructors feel in and around the classroom.

In this addendum, we turn to theories of emotion to highlight the individual ways teachers make sense of what they feel while we engage theories of affect to highlight the broader embodied, material, and cultural fields through which pedagogical emotions circulate. Yet, like Laura Micciche, we recognize that the distinction between emotion and affect is necessarily blurry, so you may “sometimes catch . . . [us] slipping among these terms simply because they are linked in their capacity to signify emotive functions, and they offer a more textured, because more varied, vocabulary” (15). Emotion is so messy and complex that scholars haven’t been able to fit it into neat categories; we find this messiness productive as it allows us to think and feel beyond common binaries in both teaching and in life.

Maxim 1: Teaching is messy, emotional work

Often when we take on a new professional challenge (such as teaching for the first time), we assume we should be objective and unemotional, but we must remember that “the personal and the professional are always interconnected, making the commonplace idea that emotion is solely ‘personal’ an untenable and insufficient claim because it fails to consider the way emo-
tation refuses to be contained in our ‘personal’ lives” (Jacobs and Micciche 6). Both in and out of the classroom, your life as a teacher is likely to be awash in complex, messy emotions: anxiety that students won’t respect you or won’t be engaged; rushes of joy when you see a student understand a complex idea and run with it; moments of exhaustion when you stare down a stack of papers; frustration when the students just don’t get it; laughter when they get it in a way you weren’t expecting; anger when a student says something offensive and hurtful; pride after a class session where conversation flows in a joyful and easy way.

We’ve been teaching for years, and we still find ourselves having deep moments of doubt when we worry that students hate us and we have let them down; we still get giddy when the magic happens and we learn together with our students in ways we couldn’t have predicted. In your first year, these emotional highs and lows can be particularly extreme and unnerving; some teachers try to manage their emotions by pretending they don’t exist, but that’s not productive in the long run. It’s better to admit that you’re human, to allow yourself to feel emotions deeply, and to remember that how you feel today may not be how you feel tomorrow. If teaching is emotional for you, it’s a sign that you care about your work deeply. That’s not a bad thing!

Maxim 2: “Good teachers” do not exist

When preparing to teach, we often think back to good teachers in our past whom we admire or we call back to teachers on the movie screen who are so enthusiastic that students stand on their desks and applaud. When you first begin teaching, it can be comforting to have a good teacher model to which you can aspire; however, we’d like to caution that the ideal of good teacher can be counterproductive. As Sharp-Hoskins and Robillard argue in their critique of the affective politics of the good/bad teacher binary, “persuasive economies of emotion . . . bifurcate good teachers from bad, good students from bad, and demand our allegiance with the good . . . We must narrate our stories as ‘good teachers’ or risk not just embarrassment but shame, abjection, identity itself” (305). Both of us have been—and in some ways still are—invested in being good teachers, but we’ve learned that striving for the ideal position of the good teacher can limit our willingness to take risks and to share our challenges honestly with peers and mentors. Whenever we’ve descended into a shame spiral of thinking ourselves to be bad teachers, we’ve found ourselves stuck—unable to address what pedagogical challenges we were having at the time.
In the end, we suggest that good teachers do not actually exist. It’s a myth that some magical personal teacher quality will inevitably cause students to learn or not. Once you move past the mythic quest for good teacher status, you can start focusing on the messiness of teaching and learning day-to-day. You come in with a plan for what you want to teach, you get interactive feedback from students through writing and conversation, you adjust your plan for next time based on each classroom interaction. Sometimes your plan works, sometimes it fails, sometimes you have no idea what even happened. What works for one class might not work for the next one. No teacher, no matter how experienced, has it all figured out; if we ever think we do, it’s probably time to retire.

When we first started teaching, we were tempted to focus only on sharing our good teacher stories of what worked for us, but we’ve come to realize that talking through moments of failure can be even more useful and (dare we say it?) fun. As queer theorist Jack Halberstam argues, “to live [and we would add, to teach] is to fail, to bungle, to disappoint; the queer art of failure involves the acceptance of the finite, the embrace of the absurd, the silly, and the hopelessly goofy” (186–87). Halberstam’s evocation of the goofiness of failure reminds us of a reflective activity we designed as co-teachers of our pedagogy practicum that devolved quickly into a raucous mess of off-task laughter and confusion. We couldn’t help but feel like bad teachers at the moment—worried about what our students and our colleagues out in the hall would think. Despite extensive reflection, we still can’t explain what happened or come up with a tidy solution to avoid it in the future. In the end, we think that this moment of failure may have been just what we all needed at the time—though it took us quite a while to come to that realization. So, our advice to you is to “revel in and cleave to all of [y]our own inevitable fantastic failures” (Halberstam 187).

Maxim 3: It’s not always about you

The art of teaching entails constantly reading and responding to the affective climate in the room. When the class looks like they are disengaged or about to fall asleep, maybe it’s time for you to stop talking and do something interactive. When a student seems near tears in a conference, maybe it’s time to temper revision suggestions with specific praise. Yet, as much as it can be helpful to attune yourself to students’ emotional reactions in the classroom, it’s also important to remember that students have lives beyond that space. Those unenthused students may simply have been pulling an all-nighter for another class; the student in tears in the conference may be struggling with another issue that has nothing to do with their paper. Near
midterms every semester, Jason always has a day in which he thinks he has failed as a teacher because the students all appear sleepy and annoyed to be there; in the past, he would make radical changes to his syllabus to try to save the sinking ship whenever he felt these affective reactions. Now, he remembers that midterm grogginess is real and he shouldn’t overreact to one or two so-called failed class sessions. Beth now keeps a box of tissues on her desk during conferences—not because she is constantly bringing her students to tears but because she has come to realize that they are constantly being affected by their lives outside the classroom. Often, the frustrations or disappointment they express about a particular assignment or a grade stem from other influences in their lives. Though it has been a learning process, she now knows not to take it personally.

As much as your pedagogy course will teach you useful ways to design and implement engaging learning activities, it’s important to remember that you are but one factor influencing the affective climate in the classroom. Susan McLeod illustrates this well by telling the story of a class in which the students were “a little too subdued, too passive” (20). She reflects that perhaps part of the problem is the room, in the bowels of one of the oldest buildings on campus, where the lighting is poor and it’s small enough that students can’t get into groups comfortably . . . the 9 a.m. hour might also be a problem; for college students, that is daybreak.

If you are a new teacher, chances are you’ll have a non-ideal room at a non-ideal time. Engaged learning definitely can happen at 8:00 a.m. (interactive, kinesthetic activities help!), but sometimes students will be exhausted, and you can’t make them go to bed earlier. Your room may be too small, too narrow, too angular, too inflexible, too hot, too cold, too olive green. Ultimately, you are only one node in a complex shifting network that produces the affect(s) circulating in your class.

Emotions are complex, messy, indeterminate; we can’t ever fully understand and control our own emotions, much less those of others. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio reminds us that “we do not need to be conscious of the inducer of an emotion and often are not, and we cannot control emotions willfully” (47). The maxim, “It’s not always about you” can be particularly helpful to remember when you hit a moment of emotional crisis with a student: when you feel you failed them, when you feel that they are actively trying to make your life miserable, when you can’t even . . . You’re human, remember they are too.
Maxim 4: Embodied personality matters

Because teachers are human, teachers have bodies and these bodies are differently positioned. Our embodied positionalities (including race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and age) strongly influence the emotional interactions we have with students (hooks; Johnson; Probyn; Restaino). Emotions are not simply generated through our interpersonal interactions with students but rather through complex, evolving histories that cause some emotions to “stick” (Ahmed) more to certain bodies than others. As Sara Ahmed argues, how we “feel might be dependent on past interpretations that are not necessarily made by us, but that come before us,” and these interpretations are influenced by structures of sexism, racism, colonialism, ableism, heteronormativity, and cisnormativity to name but a few factors (171).

We have witnessed these affective power structures at work in our own teaching lives and in the experiences of teachers with whom we work. For example, when Jason teaches feminist texts in class as a white queer man, he never gets evaluations that call him angry or biased, but Beth has taught similar texts in a similar way and has not only been called angry but also been accused of being too political and of having an agenda. On the other hand, Jason has experienced a normally talkative class falling silent when he teaches LGBTQ texts as an out queer person. As white teachers, we’ve both noticed that we don’t get perceived as biased or angry when we teach works by people of color that address racism, but teachers of color often encounter this kind of resistance.

Offering one way teachers can approach social justice issues when their embodied positionalities may lead students to perceive them as emotionally biased, Karen Kopelson argues that

the performance of neutrality may allow such teachers to work with and, in many cases, work against their own identity markers and, in that process, to work with and against student antagonism to identities and issues of difference more generally. (“Rhetoric on the Edge” 121)

In our experience, performing a neutral approach to rhetorical analysis can be a good way to diffuse potentially volatile political conversations in class and can help with any anxieties a teacher might feel about disclosing their own political opinions with their students. Turning class discussion back to neutral rhetorical analysis got Jason through teaching in Ohio in the tense 2004 election season; Jason has been taking a more activist pedagogical stance in the current political moment, but he still occasionally employs neutrality as a tactic in particularly difficult situations. Beth found that performing neutrality was a great way to adapt when moving from the
relatively more progressive teaching environment of the Cal State system to Miami University in Ohio—on the campus that produced Paul Ryan.

While the performance of neutrality can be useful in some contexts, students may still make assumptions about our politics and emotional states based on our embodied markers. Furthermore, there can be good pedagogical and political reasons to explicitly address how our own embodied positionalities influence our emotions in the classroom. As bell hooks persuasively argues, ignoring the body encourages us to think that we are listening to neutral, objective facts, facts that are not particular to who is sharing the information . . . We must return ourselves to a state of embodiment in order to deconstruct the way power has been traditionally orchestrated in the classroom, denying subjectivity to some groups and according it to others. (139)

When we choose to talk with students about how our embodied positionalities influence our own emotional reactions to classroom topics, we can invite them to also consider how their emotions have been constructed in part by their own embodied experiences and ideologies.

We don’t think there is a simple right or wrong answer for how to address the embodiment of emotion with students; teachers need to find strategies with which they are comfortable and, as Kopelson also acknowledges, such various rhetorical situations are “dependent on context, intention, and audience reception” and will thus call for different approaches (“Of Ambiguity and Erasure” 569). In recent years, we both have settled on acknowledging our “passionate attachments” (Royster) up front in class, but also emphasizing how we enjoy and value dialogue with those who think differently. We still sometimes pretend to be neutral on an issue when we’re not, and we still call out racist and sexist speech as harmful and wrong when the situation calls for it. Our advice is that you should choose an approach to addressing embodiment that feels comfortable for you and that you be open to letting that approach evolve. It’s helpful to seek advice from other teachers on how to address your embodiment, but keep in mind that what works for them might not work for you and vice versa.

Maxim 5: You are not alone, and talking with other teachers helps

In your pedagogy course, you’ll likely spend a lot of time talking about your experiences with your fellow teachers; once you leave that space, however, you rarely will be required to share your teaching experiences with others. As you get more comfortable with teaching, it can be tempting to just hole up and power through it without taking time to talk through the emotions you
still feel. It can seem like talking about emotions is a waste of time when you have yet another paper to grade and yet another seminar paper to write; but we contend that it is through emotion that knowledge is made and change is enacted (Damasio; Langer; Sedgwick; Tomkins; Worsham). Talking about our feelings is not a frivolous activity to squeeze in when we have free time; talking through emotions is a crucial kind of self-care necessary for sustaining an effective and critical teaching practice. bell hooks reminds us that “teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (15). Not only can engaging in dialogue about emotions be an effective form of self-care, but it can also be a key strategy for developing, enacting, and refining innovative and critical pedagogies.

It is through dialogue with other teachers that we can come to name, share, and reflectively act upon the emotions that permeate our teaching lives. When sharing emotional experiences with other teachers, it can be helpful to be explicit about what you hope to gain. Sometimes you may just want to vent frustration or share a joy and feel heard; sometimes you might want advice about how to work through a situation that troubles you or how to build on a success for next time; sometimes you might not have any idea of what you want, but you know that you are feeling all the feels and that talking will probably help somehow. When we think back to our most successful innovations as teachers, we remember long conversations with fellow instructors in which we felt all the feels and then worked together to think all the thoughts. These conversations with other teachers help us transform our fleeting emotions into new practices that can produce some good learning and some fantastic failures too. Then, when we enact these new pedagogical practices, we inevitably feel a messy mix of emotions—joy, anxiety, doubt, pride, despair, love. We wouldn’t have it any other way.

Works Cited


—. “Rhetoric on the Edge of Cunning; Or, the Performance of Neutrality (Re) Considered as a Composition Pedagogy for Student Resistance.” College Composition and Communication, vol. 55, no. 1, Sept. 2003, pp. 115–46.


McLeod, Susan H. Notes on the Heart: Affective Issues in the Writing Classroom. SIUP, 1996.


Restaino, Jessica. First Semester: Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground. SIUP, 2012.


Elizabeth Saur is a doctoral candidate in Composition and Rhetoric at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, a public research university with a strong focus on undergraduate liberal arts education. Her research focuses on teacher development, writing program administration, composition pedagogy, and affect theory. She is currently working on a person-based, cross-institutional study of the affective experiences of new graduate teaching assistants in composition.

Jason Palmeri is Associate Professor of English and Director of Composition at Miami University, a public research university with a strong focus on undergraduate liberal arts education. As Director of Composition, Palmeri teaches and mentors MA, MFA, and PhD-level teaching assistants in programs in Composition and Rhetoric; Literature; and Creative Writing. Palmeri is the author of Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy (SIUP, 2012) as well as numerous articles and book chapters about the theory, history, and practice of writing pedagogy.
Standard English and Colorblindness in Composition Studies: Rhetorical Constructions of Racial and Linguistic Neutrality

Bethany Davila

Abstract

This article examines instructors’ talk about standardness in anonymous student writing in order to identify discursive patterns that perpetuate colorblind ideologies. Specifically, this article explores explicit and implicit assertions that academic student essays and standard English should not or cannot reveal authorial identity, including race. Identifying colorblindness in talk about student texts highlights rhetorical constructions of racial and linguistic neutrality and illustrates the ways that the ideologies undergirding colorblindness and so-called standard English (ideologies of whiteness and standard language ideologies, respectively) are co-constitutive—especially concerning perceived neutrality. Finally, the article offers suggestions for disrupting the rhetorical patterns that promote colorblind ideologies in talk about written standardness.

I wish the problem of race had not intruded . . . but well, yeah, there it is.

—George, study participant

The title of this article might strike some readers as unlikely. How, they might ask, can there be colorblindness—the systematic and structural denial of the ongoing implications of race (Bonilla-Silva; Carr; Villanueva “Blind”)—in the field of composition studies when so many scholars study race? Indeed, it is true that many scholars do study race and do so through multiple approaches, such as rhetoric (Gilyard; Powell; Villanueva Bootstraps), language (Perryman-Clark; Richardson; Smitherman; Young), assessment (Inoue and Poe), and curricula (Kinloch; Smitherman and Villanueva). Colorblindness, though, does not require conscious intent on the part of the field for enactment and reproduction. Colorblindness is a product and producer of whiteness, the race-based ideology of neutrality and standardness that “ensur[es] existing privileges for white people in this country” (McIntyre 3) through “specific discursive and material processes
and circuits of desire and power” (McLaren 66). Whiteness is a historical and structural system of (sometimes unconscious) beliefs and practices that creates white dominance; one manifestation of whiteness is colorblindness.

In addition to denying the importance of race through colorblindness, whiteness works to protect constructs associated with the white race (though often presented as unaffiliated), including standard edited American English (SEAE), which ostensibly functions as E. D. Hirsch’s “trans-dialectal” grapholect that seemingly “belongs to no group or place in particular” (qtd. in Bizzell and Herzberg 60). Nicholas Behm and Keith Miller argue that SEAE “hides the coercive force of whiteness by seeming so ostensibly neutral, normal, and commonsensical as to deracialize whiteness while simultaneously highlighting and defining ‘others’ as abnormal and inferior” (131). Jane Hill similarly argues that standard language is created, in part, by associating linguistic standardness with privileged people, including—maybe even especially—white people (35). John Hartigan asserts that everything “white people, generally speaking, do and think” become norms, and any deviance is racialized and viewed negatively (496–97). According to Stephanie Wildman, “This normalization of privilege means that members of society are judged, and succeed or fail, measured against the characteristics that are held by those privileged” (14). SEAE, then, is a standard language variety that is associated with and defined by white people and that affords unearned racial privilege all while seeming like commonsense or a social norm.

To further explore the relationship between colorblindness and SEAE under the umbrella of whiteness, I examine instructors’ talk about student writing to identify and describe rhetorical patterns that allow composition instructors to avoid addressing race in conversations about SEAE and to perpetuate the perception that race isn’t important in our interactions with student writing. I then suggest changes we can make to work against colorblindness.

It is important to note that the language practices I describe in this article also allow instructors to avoid addressing other social identity categories, most notably socio-economic class. Because I am examining practices and products of whiteness, I will focus on constructions of colorblindness and racial neutrality. Furthermore, like Wildman, I see the value in examining one oppression at a time in order to avoid further silencing particular issues—in this case, racial privilege and structural racism.

**White Talk: The Language of Colorblindness**

The two main categories of white talk are either to avoid talking about race or to assert that race doesn’t matter. The first category—avoiding
talking about race—relies on coded language and silences. Bonilla-Silva and Forman describe the “indirect subtle and racially coded words” that allow college students to “avoid racist language and direct racial references” (70). Villanueva uses a rhetorical lens to interrogate the coded language of white talk and outlines strategies that allow for the denial of contemporary, institutional racism. For example, he describes the shift from addressing racial inequality to focusing on equality for all students as the rhetorical trope synecdoche (“Blind”). Mica Pollock focuses on the “predictable . . . silences” (14) around race, noting that in her study in a low-income public high school “adults . . . actively suppressed race labels when they were discussing inequitable patterns potentially implicating themselves” (9). She then argues that “the moments when we delete race . . . from our talk are perhaps the moments in which race matters most dangerously” (14). Krista Ratcliffe interrogates the possible consequences of silences around race, arguing that if we don’t talk about race, we might mistake our own racial ideologies as Truth (16). Similarly, Wildman notes that “by avoiding race . . . we default to the status quo that makes whiteness privileged” (77).

In addition to avoiding talking about race, other white talk strategies involve denying the relevance of race to the topic at hand. These strategies include claims of fairness (equal opportunity/access), blaming the victim (cultural deficiency), and discourses of liberalism (race shouldn’t be a factor; therefore, it isn’t a factor) (Bonilla-Silva and Forman). Moreover, Teun van Dijk argues that people are able to deny racism by focusing on intentions: racism coupled with good intentions is simply “accidental” racism, and intentional racism is only evidence of one bad seed (91). Catherine Prendergast further highlights the role of intentions in denying racism when she asserts that racism is legally defined “as necessarily intentional, effectively invalidating the notion of unequal outcomes as racism” (28). In other words, as long as there is perceived equal access or opportunity—as long as one can’t prove intentional racism—continued racial inequality isn’t legally racism. Similarly, Leslie Carr argues that the focus on equal access has made “legal equality” synonymous with colorblindness as laws passed during the Reconstruction period and continuing to the present state that “individuals [should] be given freedom from their race, not freedom in their race” (77; emphasis original).

**SEAE in Composition Studies: Acknowledging Power and Resisting Privilege**

In 1974, CCCC adopted the Students’ Rights to Their Own Language (SRTOL) resolution, which argues “the claim that any one dialect is unac-
ceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another,” calling such an act “immoral” (Committee 3). Collections such as Linguistic Diversity in the Classroom: From Intention to Practice (Smi-
therman and Villanueva) and the recently-published Students’ Right to Their Own Language: A Critical Sourcebook (Perryman-Clark et al.) offer suggestions for enacting this important policy. Staci M. Perryman-Clark, one of the editors of the SRTOL sourcebook, identifies the aim of her scholarship as “provid[ing] examples of how composition can affirm SRTOL [and] teach Standard English” (470), an agenda that she aligns with scholars such as Gilyard, Richardson, and Kinloch, among others. Vershawn Ashanti Young tackles this issue by calling on compositionists to recognize and allow for the code meshing that he argues is inherent in our language use, where different language varieties—“dialects, international languages, local idioms, chat-room lingo, and the rhetorical styles of various ethnic and cultural groups” (67)—are used together. The approach of providing students access to multiple languages or language varieties aligns with Horner et al.’s call for translingual composition instruction in which language differences are seen as resources. Paul Matsuda considers the issue of linguistic diversity and the role of SEAE through the lens of second-language writing and argues that composition instructors need to provide feedback on grammar and that WPAs should create clear policies regarding teaching and grading grammar (157–59). Presumably, Matsuda is referring to SEAE when he references “grammar.” All of these scholars, in one form or another, argue for teaching or allowing nonstandard language varieties in composition class-
rooms. However, they also “acknowledge the benefits associated with learning Standard English” (Perryman-Clark 470) given “the ongoing, domi-
nant political reality that posits and demands” SEAE (Horner et al. 305).

In this article, I focus my analysis and argument on SEAE as a site of standardness (in part because of the scholarly conversations to which I am responding). However, it is impossible to disentangle SEAE from either academic discourses or school-based genres. SEAE is a commonly expected convention of both academic discourses and student essay genres. Likewise, SEAE is a dialect that can enact many registers or genres, including academic discourses and student essay genres. As such, I include instructor talk about SEAE, academic writing, and student essays because SEAE is very likely part of instructors’ understanding of and expectation for these genres and registers.
Identifying White Talk and Uncovering Ideologies

To examine patterns of white talk in conversations about SEAE and to uncover underlying ideologies of privilege and neutrality, I analyzed IRB-approved interviews with composition instructors from two different Midwestern universities about their perceptions of anonymous student texts and the authors who may have written them. The implications of this work are most relevant to contexts in which instructors interact with anonymous student writing such as placement exams, portfolio assessment, and student writing awards. However, the rhetorical patterns I identify and examine can be found in more generalized conversations about student writing (for example, the metaphor of clarity, which I discuss later in this article).

Participants

I asked twelve composition instructors from two public Midwestern universities to read, respond to, and grade anonymous student essays. The participants had all taught at least ten sections of college writing. All twelve instructors were white; there were equal number males and females; and the instructors self-identified as coming from middle-class (ten instructors) or working-class (two instructors) backgrounds (see table 1).

Although I didn’t ask explicit questions about instructors’ backgrounds and experiences (other than to ask how long they had been teaching writing), scholarship on racial formation (Omi and Winant) and whiteness (Frankenberg) suggest participants’ backgrounds were very much part of the process of imagining identity—especially racial identity. Indeed, many instructors noted that professional experiences at other institutions and personal experiences with education informed their responses. However, the prevalence of white talk in these interviews and national contexts suggests that ideologies of privilege and neutrality are compelling, pervasive, and may eclipse local meaning making. Additionally, the rhetorical patterns that allow instructors to avoid talking about race may not be bound geographically as they align with categories discussed by scholars such as Villanueva, Bonilla-Silva and Forman, and van Dijk.

Student Papers

Before the interviews, I provided each instructor with a set of three anonymous student papers (chosen randomly from a total of nine essays) and asked them to mark places where the essays strayed from their expectations for college writing. Each paper (except one) was read by at least four different instructors.
Table 1
Instructor demographics (Self-reported gender, race, and SES)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Becca</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>MFA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>MFA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>MFA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghan</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>English Literature graduate student; has taught at multiple institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>MFA; works in university’s writing center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Has taught at multiple institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Has taught at multiple institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Composition studies graduate student; taught mostly at other institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>MFA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirley</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Has taught at multiple institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Composition studies graduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Composition studies graduate student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though not an object of study in this research project, the student essays were the springboard for discussion about expectations, standards,
and identity. Therefore, collecting and choosing these texts was an important aspect of the study design. The nine essays were written by incoming first-year students in response to a prompt that asked them to read an article and write an argument “for or against [the author’s] proposal using evidence from the article.” The prompt asked students to write “an essay in which [they] clearly articulate a position and support that position using evidence,” and it noted that students’ writing would be evaluated for focus, structure, and evidence/analysis.

I chose essays written by white, African American, and Hispanic students because these racial groups represent both privileged and historically marginalized positions in the academy, in part related to language use. Within each racial category, I chose essays from the first students who volunteered; I did not choose papers based on the content or language use other than to eliminate papers that explicitly disclosed aspects of the student author’s identity. After collecting the papers, I asked the WPA and the writing center director from one of the universities to confirm that the sample reflected writing they had commonly encountered in first-year composition courses.

When designing this study, I wasn’t interested in knowing if instructors could accurately guess student author identities or identify particular dialects of written English. Instead, I wanted to know two things: 1) which textual features were marked for identity for the instructors participating in this study and in what ways and 2) how do instructors talk about standardness and identity in relation to student writing—in this case, anonymous writing. With these goals in mind, I was comfortable limiting the racial categories of the actual student authors to the three groups mentioned above. However, by not including other racial groups, I may have unintentionally limited the range of identities instructors imagined. Worse yet, I could have contributed to the invisibility of certain racial groups on college campuses (such as Native Americans).

The Interviews

I began the interviews by asking the instructors to “briefly describe the student-authors you pictured when reading these papers.” I then asked them to walk me through their comments to one of the papers, prompting them to describe what they commented on and why. Finally, I asked the instructors to describe in more detail the student-authors they pictured as having written each paper with specific follow up questions about gender, class, race, prior educational experience, geographic background, etc. as needed.

Throughout the interview, I asked the instructors which features in the text
signaled the particular identity characteristics they described. The primary difference among interviews was whether or not it was necessary to ask specific follow up questions and which follow up questions were asked.

**Data Selection and Analysis**

In a previous analysis of this data, I coded the interviews for themes of identity and identitylessness, marked and unmarked language, and standardness. For example, responses to questions about how instructors pictured the students were coded for identity when instructors mentioned particular identity categories and for identitylessness when instructors indicated that they didn’t have a sense of certain identity categories. Likewise, when instructors identified features that signaled particular identity categories, the passage was coded as marked, and when instructors said there were no signals in the language, the passage was coded as unmarked.

Given the findings of the previous analysis (Davila) and the wealth of research on language and identity, I began this project with the assumption that language signals identity or that language is indexical. For the purposes of this article, *indexicality* refers to the natural and ideological process that links language (from whole languages to specific features) to identity characteristics.

In this analysis, I narrowed my data to interview excerpts that I had coded as unmarked or identityless. I then used discourse analysis to study “what is said [and] what is not said” (Hill 32), coded language, and rhetorical maneuvering in order to better understand the transcripts and how the instructors create perceptions of neutrality—either related to language or identity. Studying coded language and silence is necessary for examining ideologies of colorblindness and whiteness as they both actively work to create a silence around race. For instance, in this study, the terms *language, standards, correct,* and *clarity* (among others) signal SEAE; *inner-city* and *urban* often serve as codes for poor African American students; and one instructor uses the term *rural* to refer to poor white students.

**Ethics and Role of the Researcher**

Any research that involves studying coded language or “predictable . . . silences” (Pollock 14) runs a risk of misinterpretation. This risk was mitigated in part by my focus, which was not on instructors’ intentions but on the role of language in creating perceptions of language and/or identity not mattering (which may or may not align with instructors’ explicit beliefs). To address the biases I bring to my readings of the data and to ensure I was not misrepresenting instructors, I performed member checking of my analysis.
My race aligned with all of the instructors I interviewed. Based on scholarship on whiteness and previous personal experiences, I entered the interviews thinking it possible that white participants would be willing to speak with me about race because of “ingroup allegiances” (van Dijk 88). To some extent, I believe I was correct; I can’t imagine that if I were black, one of my participants would have admitted, “I guess it’s racist, but the worst writers here and elsewhere that I’ve had are black women” (Nadia). However, some participants would not talk about race with me, and this, too, served as useful data. As the opening quote of this article demonstrates, participants were not always sure how much race should matter to their perceptions of standardness and identity. Because I asked questions about student-author identities, many instructors stated that it felt as if I was asking them to stereotype. Indeed, I did ask them to call on their experiences as teachers and to note patterns in student writing to help them answer questions.

Because this study is not about the instructors and their intentions or about the accuracy of their perceptions of student identity, I have not included excerpts from the student essays or attempted to fully represent or contextualize all of my participants’ talk. I do not argue that the instructors I discuss in this article represent all composition instructors and the ways they talk about language and identity. The importance of this research rests on the prevalence of colorblindness and the continued privileging of SEAE in composition curricula. It is my hope that exploring the role of SEAE in allowing colorblind ideologies to persist in conversations about writing will offer inroads to challenging both constructs.

**Leveling the Playing Field: Erasing Identity in Interactions with Student Texts**

The majority of the instructors in this study (8 out of 12) position SEAE as widely accessible. Instructors cite prior schooling, reading, and home literacy practices as avenues through which students have access to SEAE. One instructor noted that some students have an “innate sense of language” (Paul), implying that access to SEAE can even be internal. The perception that SEAE is widely accessible adds to the desirability of this privileged dialect as it can presumably “overcome socialization” (Bizzell and Herzberg 61), erasing differences that could, in other contexts, result in discrimination. If everyone has equal access to SEAE, standardness is an individual accomplishment based on effort, and students are largely responsible for their own failures as well. Similarly, the perception of equal access and opportunity means that it is difficult to successfully claim or acknowledge
structural inequality related to unearned privilege. In what follows, I offer extended examples of how instructors shift attention from the structural to the individual as well as other strategies used to assert that social identities don’t matter to our interaction with student papers. In fact, as I illustrate in this article, the instructors in this study assert that academic student essays and SEAE don’t or shouldn’t reveal identity, or even, that student essays and SEAE erase identity.

Two instructors in this study, Daniel and Scott, repeatedly state that student writing is largely nonindexical—that is, the writing in student essays does not signal or reveal particular identities. In fact, they are outliers in their unwillingness to even guess about most aspects of student identities. As such, they are represented in this article more than the other participants. Drawing on their language as well as passages from other participants, I illustrate how student texts can be constituted as identityless.

Daniel and Scott (both of whom have MFAs and teach creative writing alongside first- and second-year writing) cite creative writing as a space where writing and identity intersect and contrast it with academic essays, which they state do not allow for the expression of student identity, except for very specific instances (e.g., incorporating anecdotal evidence). Scott says,

writers don’t feel many times like they can express . . . identity in the framework of a college essay . . . it’s more that you . . . conform with this outside structure and there isn’t much room for one’s personal identity in that equation.

This description of the college essay and students’ agency constructs identities as individual, self-contained, and deliberate. Each student has a “personal identity” that can be inserted into creative writing or that is constrained by the “structure” or “framework of a college essay.” The writer can choose—to some extent—whether or not to “express that identity.” In this quotation and throughout the interview, Scott does not acknowledge, nor seem to allow for, identity that is either attributed to writers by readers or interactionally created by writers, readers, and texts.

Daniel also describes the relationship between writing and identity as one of choice. Specifically, Daniel states that conventions of student essays related to SEAE—“diction and syntax and other non-narrative, non-anecdotal rhetorical strategies”—reveal only “academic preparation.” Daniel suggests that the conventions of the academic student essay discourage representations of identity so that this genre can function as a fair measure of ability, stating that the possibility for identity to be connected to student writing is “not part of [his] rubric for processing writing” and that
he couldn’t imagine how an instructor could get a sense of identity from diction and syntax alone. Furthermore, Daniel removes the importance of his own identity and subjectivity when he describes his grading process as mechanical; he states he has trained himself to respond to student papers “like a robot . . . feeding the, the language into that computer part of my mind.” He goes on to say: “to [grade] fairly, I’ve developed a mechanism by which I take a language [sic] from a student and shovel it in there and out pops a grade.” Daniel’s representation of the grading process asserts that identity (the author’s or his own) does not and should not—perhaps cannot—matter. The language is either nonindexical to begin with or becomes nonindexical because identity doesn’t matter. What matters are ideas, which he states are the most important aspect of student papers.

Here, social identity is put in opposition to ideas, which become a proxy for individual students. This metonym, or reduction of social identity to individuals, is a common strategy in colorblind rhetoric. Asserting that social identity doesn’t influence the grading or reading process contradicts evidence to the contrary—evidence from other analyses of this study (Davila) and evidence that attempts to describe and explain existing educational achievement gaps (e.g., Piché et al.; Inoue and Poe).

Another, more common way that instructors shift attention from language to individual ideas is through the metaphor of clarity, which suggests that writing—if transparent—can transport ideas and meaning from the author to an audience. The metaphor of clarity aligns with and reproduces the belief that so-called standard languages are superior to nonstandard languages, in part because they purportedly will not unduly impact the outcome of communication (Cameron 120). If language is clear, instructors are able to both understand and focus on students’ ideas; if language is unclear, it interferes with the transmittal of ideas from students to instructors. What is clear, though, aligns with white, middle class norms—it is one of the white ways of knowing, reasoning, and writing that scholars interested in whiteness studies have worked to catalogue. Ratcliffe specifically notes the trope write clearly as one that can mask “writerly and cultural attitudes and actions” (124).

All of the instructors in this study refer to clear writing or clarity at least once to signal their perception of writing as non/standard. In the example that follows, the metaphor of clarity puts sentence-level language features in service of ideas. In response to my question about what was striking in one of the papers, Shirley states that the student “had an idea . . . but he didn’t express it . . . did not express it very clearly.” She sums up her response by saying “not a lot of clarity here.” When I asked Shirley to explain what she meant by clarity, she said, “this one . . . had trouble with verb tenses. And
that’s a—to me, is a bad sign . . . that’s, that’s an inner city sign.” I asked whether the phrase inner city held race or class connotations for her, and she stated that she assumed a low-income African American student writer based on the “trouble with verb tenses.” In this clarification, Shirley turns to what could be a dialectal difference—the verb tenses—and positions it as cultural deficit. However, she does not acknowledge that the difference she identifies might be one of dialect. Instead, Shirley imagines an identity defined by deficit—in contrast to what is standard—or more specifically, she imagines an African American, low-income student from the inner city (an identity likely informed by her institution, which lists its student population as 26% African American).

While Shirley uses clarity to focus on what isn’t standard, Todd refers to clarity when talking about a student author he perceives as high achieving. He says, “I thought generally there was a clarity of thought and understanding of what needed to happen in the essay and what kind of moves the writer needed to make.” In both of these examples, the metaphor of clarity functions as coded language for standardness related to dialect or genre conventions. When Shirley notes that the paper “had trouble with verb tenses,” from the context of the full interview, it is clear that her expectation is that students should write in SEAE (both for this assignment and more broadly). Nonetheless, when talking about clear writing, Shirley does not name the dialect in which she expects this communication to take place. Coding the language in this way allows Shirley to avoid addressing the problematic position of asserting that only one dialect—and one associated with already privileged people—can communicate ideas effectively. Through the coded language of clarity, the instructors in this study are able to avoid addressing the relationship between language and identity and create a perception of fairness in that they, ideally, will focus on students’ ideas, not their language, which is (in part) what “Students’ Rights to Their Own Language” calls for.

More specifically, the SRTOL background calls for shifting attention from correctness—which the authors link to standardness—to content, naming “the essential functions of writing as expressing oneself, communicating information and attitudes, and discovering meaning through both logic and metaphor” (Committee 8). The background asserts, “all languages and all dialects are essentially the same . . . regardless of how varied the surface structure might be” (Committee 9). As such, the background implies that dialectal differences in writing, which are located at the surface or sentence level, are not related to meaning. Instead, meaning is located at the level of the text and is seemingly unrelated to standards, grammar, and dialect. In the process of asking writing instructors to look past dialectal
differences (at the sentence level), the background treats the social identities that are connected to dialects as unimportant.

This critique of SRTOL is not meant to question its overarching goal. Instead, I aim to show the prevalence of certain rhetorical patterns when talking about writing and identity that can inadvertently lead to the disassociation of identity and language. The assertion that instructors should focus on ideas, which are linked to individual students, can discourage an acknowledgment of structural inequality (related to SEAE) and allow for victim blaming. Note that I am not suggesting SRTOL encourages or perpetuates victim blaming.

In order for the metaphor of clarity to be linked with a specific language variety, that dialect must be seen as largely unaffiliated or not linked to any particular group. In the case of SEAE, this positioning takes part both through the perception of equal access described at the beginning of this section and through the insistence that SEAE does not signal identity. Although Daniel and Scott are unique in their insistence that the student essays are nonindexical, other instructors described academic student essays as ideally identityless. Three instructors even suggest that student essays actively work to erase identity. Becca states that this genre “kind of wanted to sort of wash that [identity] all out,” and Mindy says that academic writing “tries not to” reveal identity. In response to finding out that Paper H had been written by a black, middle-class female as opposed to the white, upper-class male author identity he had imagined, George replies,

Well, good. Okay. Then that proves the point . . . If you’re well trained as a writer, and, for, for an academic context, either A; it will correctly strip you of identity, right? That it will be your ideas, content of your character, etcetera, it will be your ideas and your engagement with those ideas that is the thing that the person notices, or B; you will, like all other well-trained people, look like a rich white guy.

The first part of George’s response denies the importance of identity and shifts focus from structural patterns of privilege to individuals and their ideas. Moreover, this passage demonstrates the portrayal of standard academic writing as doing more than masking identity: it erases (“strip[s]”) identity and makes authors identityless. By beginning his response with “well, good” and alluding to Martin Luther King, Jr. (“content of your character”), George implies that stripping authors of their identity is a laudable goal of academic writing: identity shouldn’t matter. Like Daniel, George suggests that removing identity allows readers to correctly focus on ideas. Moreover, the opposition between social identity (race, class, and gender, in this example) and individual identity (“your ideas, content of
your character”) does not allow for the two types of identity to influence and constitute one another. In other words, students’ ideas are separate from their racial, classed, and/or gendered identities.

However, the second half of the quotation directly contradicts and challenges a portrayal of academic writing as erasing social identity. At least in this instance, the writing was not stripped of identity; instead, George states that good academic writing signals a privileged identity—“all . . . well-trained” student-authors are likely to “look like a rich white guy.” Furthermore, during the interview, George stated that he imagined the author of Paper H as a very privileged, white, male student-author. Therefore, despite George’s explanation of the process of removing identity in order to focus on “ideas and . . . engagement with those ideas,” George did not perceive Paper H to be identityless or unmarked for identity. For George, the writing was marked as privileged. Even though George later describes the identity work in Paper H as one of masking certain identities, his first imagining of identity reveals an elision between normative social identities—in this case, the white race—and identitylessness.

The repeated expectation for identitylessness in what the instructors term as “good” college writing—noted throughout several interviews—implies a positioning of academic writing as nonindexical, which, as George acknowledges, may actually be indexical for unmarked white identities. The repeated insistence that academic student papers are nonindexical perpetuates a myth that student papers are never indexical and can mask indexicality when it does occur. For example, the belief that SEAE is widely accessible alongside the standard language ideology tenet that the standard is superior to other language varieties contributes to assumptions about students who do not write in SEAE. This indexicality through contrast performs the “double strategy of positive self-presentation on the one hand, and a strategy of expressing subtle, indirect or sometimes more blatant forms of negative other-presentation, on the other hand” that, according to van Dijk, undergirds white discourse about race (88–89). Yet, because indexicality is justified through ideology, SEAE is perceived as nonindexical and unaffiliated. That is, the positioning of SEAE as widely accessible contributes to both the perception that this dialect is not linked to any social group and the logic that blames nonstandard language users for not trying hard enough to achieve standardness (a type of indexicality). Finally, the positioning of SEAE as unaffiliated and nonindexical allows instructors to both maintain colorblindness and establish intentionality that protects them from any accusations of either contributing to systemic inequality or even personal racism.
Resisting Colorblindness

This study highlights the kinds of talk about standardness in student writing that allow for the avoidance of the role of race in interactions with anonymous student texts. Specifically, this article shows that constructions of SEAE as neutral, clear, widely accessible, and nonindexical privileges colorblind rhetoric in conversations about writing. As many scholars convincingly argue, ignoring race perpetuates the denial of racism and the perception that white racial frames are objective and true. Identifying white talk in conversations about student writing does more than highlight rhetorical constructions of racial neutrality, it also productively illustrates the ways that the ideologies undergirding colorblind rhetoric (whiteness) and SEAE (standard language ideology) are co-constitutive—especially concerning perceived neutrality. Whiteness studies’ scholarship has long noted the importance of perceived neutrality to whiteness and the privilege associated with white people. The same is true of standard language ideology, which affords SEAE privilege, in part, based on a presumption of linguistic neutrality. The findings from this study show that SEAE and the white race are connected not only in that they are perceived to be neutral but also in the ways they signal and constitute one another.

To address the first issue, the avoidance of race, I argue—like Villanueva—that because “rhetoric . . . is how ideologies are carried” it is also the way they can be exposed and resisted (Bootstraps 121). The perceptions of SEAE revealed in this study are ideological in nature and, in the case of perceived linguistic neutrality, rhetorical in construction; as such, the intentions of the individual instructors do not matter. Again, the instructors I interviewed may not believe that SEAE is linguistically neutral or that identity doesn’t matter; however, their discursive practices work to reproduce standard language ideology and colorblindness. Part of working against these discursive practices, then, is to resist them in our classrooms, programs, and institutions.

Following the lead of whiteness studies, the first way to challenge SEAE’s position in the neutral center is to name it. Given the prevalence of coded language and the shifting of focus from language to ideas, it is possible that SEAE is an unstated expectation—that instead of explicitly stating that students are expected to write in SEAE, assignment prompts, rubrics, student learning outcomes, and program-wide policies might only refer to grammar, English, or even language without specifying which grammar, which variety of English, or which language is expected in any given situation. While students might assume that they are expected to write in SEAE, not naming this dialect leaves SEAE unnamed and contributes to its
WPAs can review program materials to be sure SEAE is never left unnamed or as a coded assumption and can ask instructors teaching in their programs to be sure they are always explicit about which grammar(s) and dialect(s) they expect.

As part of resisting the perceived neutrality of SEAE, we can also resist the metaphor of clarity that positions SEAE as an ideally non-interfering container for ideas. A first step is to be honest with ourselves as administrators and instructors when the term *clear* is standing in for either SEAE as it did with Shirley or for a cultural logic, “a belief system or way of reasoning that is shared within a culture” (Ratcliffe 10), as might have been the case with Todd’s statement that the writer knew “what needed to happen . . . what kind of moves [he or she] needed to make.” Instead of allowing the terms *clear* or *clarity* to communicate hidden requirements and a sense that language is neutral, we can work to articulate our expectations more precisely. Not only have I tried to stop using the terms *clear* or *clarity* in my own classroom materials, I also point it out to the instructors who take my practicum courses and ask them to work at unpacking the expectations bound up in those terms; the fact that it is often very difficult to do so speaks to our field’s reliance on coded ways of communicating about cultural expectations.

A final way to challenge the perceived neutrality of SEAE is to reveal and disrupt the indexicality associated with whiteness and standard language ideologies. Of course, revealing and disrupting indexicality is difficult given its inherently ideological nature, which often renders it invisible. Nonetheless, paying attention to the ways that language signals identity is possible. In my own practices as a researcher, administrator, educator, and even as a parent, I work to disrupt the automatic connection between language and identity so that I notice when it is happening. I pay attention to language that stands out and think about the meaning that is ascribed to that difference, considering whether I am making assumptions about people based on particular language use. More importantly, I work to do the reverse: pay attention to the language that seems common or normal and identify the assumptions I make based on that categorization as well. This is work that we can involve our instructors in, walking them through activities that encourage a careful consideration of assumptions they might make about students based on language use. The purpose of this sustained attention to assumptions related to language is not to stop indexicality from happening; it is to uncover the related ideologies and to resist the damaging ones.

These acts of resistance, though small, challenge perceptions of SEAE as neutral and force a conversation about language and identity—particularly race—that works against colorblind rhetoric. Importantly, these
efforts align with Bonilla-Silva’s call for antiracists to “take[e] responsibility for [their] unwilling participation in [racist] practices and [begin] a new life committed to the goal of achieving real racial equality” (15).

Notes

1. This study (HUM00024659), was approved by the University of Michigan’s IRB (IRB0000246) on September 30, 2008.

2. One university is located in an urban setting and has approximately 29,000 students representing the following racial categories: 50% white, 26% African American, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2% Hispanic. The other university is located in a college town with 75% of the undergraduates (over 26,000 students) self-identifying as white and the remaining 25% listed on the university’s website as “African American, Hispanic American, Native American, or Asian American.”

3. In this article, I use the term Hispanic as a racial indicator because that is the language used by the student participants who self-identified as such.

4. These interview questions were related to research questions regarding the relationship between perceived standardness and perceived student-author identities. See Appendix A for full interview protocol.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Part I
1. How long have you taught?
2. Where else have you taught?
3. Please briefly describe the student-authors you pictured when reading these papers.

Part II
4. Pick one text and walk me through the notes you made to the paper. As you are talking, use as much detail as possible to explain what you marked and why you marked it.
5. Please also tell me how you would talk to the student who you imagine wrote this paper about what you marked.
6. From your experience, what does it look like when writing doesn’t meet your expectations?
7. How do you account for these instances?
8. In your experience, how common are these occurrences?

Part III* — Questions for each of the student papers
9. Are there particular details that are striking to you in this paper? Why?
10. In as much detail as possible, describe the student you pictured as having written this paper.
If not addressed by the response to Question 6:
11. How old do you think the student is?
12. What kind of education do you think this student had before coming here?
13. Where do you think the student grew up?
14. What political affiliation do you think the student has?
15. What race do you think this student is?
16. What socio-economic class do you think this student comes from?
17. What gender do you think the student is?

Part IV
18. Did you identify with anything in this paper?
19. Can you imagine writing on this topic?
20. Do you personally agree with the argument or stance in this paper?
21. Would you ever use language or phrases similar to this student?

Part V
22. Reveal gender, race, and class of student author
23. If it matches up with the instructor’s profile: Do you think this means that our writing reveals our identity? Or that our writing is connected to our identities?
24. If it doesn’t match up with the instructor’s profile: Do you think in other instances you could tell a writer’s identity from the text? Do you think there is a connection between writing and identity?

Part VI
25. How do you self identify in terms of race?
26. How do you self identify in terms of socio-economic class?
27. How do you self identify in terms of gender?

*For each of the questions in Part III, I asked, when necessary: What from the text and your prior teaching experiences make you think that?

Works Cited


Acknowledgments

Thank you to the reviewers of this piece, particularly Frankie Condon, whose feedback strengthened this article. I am also indebted to many friends and colleagues for reading drafts of this article and offering seemingly unlimited support and insight. Finally, I am especially thankful to the instructors who generously gave their time to participate in this study.

Bethany Davila is assistant professor of English in the Rhetoric and Writing program at the University of New Mexico, a public, highest research activity, Hispanic-Serving Institution. Her research focuses on the relationship between perceptions of written standardness and authorial identity and on integrating linguistic diversity into writing programs.
U-Turns, Pivots, and Gradual Arrivals: Navigating Midlife and Mid-Career in Academe’s Changing Landscape

Peggy O’Neill

Fifteen years after completing my PhD, I had a successful career in the writing department at Loyola where we had a major, minor, and interdisciplinary major; I had been promoted to full professor, published several books, articles and book chapters, and generally was doing well. I had been serving as the composition director at Loyola for over ten years. I liked my job and the work I did. I became the department chair, during a busy and challenging time, just as I approached fifty.

I was mid-career and midlife. Bored, unsettled, unmotivated. I enjoyed working with my undergrad students, but I was doing less of that as I got pulled into more administrative tasks. While sitting in meetings, reading scholarly journals, or attending conferences, I ping ponged between despair, anger, frustration, and boredom. How could I bear to survive fifteen more years until retirement, listening to the endless droning at meetings, completing the increasingly bureaucratic tasks required, or reading (and writing) what seemed like irrelevant articles?

Like most academics, I began searching for answers. I read academic advice columns, scanned books on creating a satisfying career post-tenure, read books on happiness, and read even more books on women at midlife. And I complained and whined with—or rather to—my friends and family. I kept reminding myself how lucky I was to have a great job and how much I had loved it. As unsettled as I felt, I kept trying to figure out why I felt this way and how to move beyond the funk.

What I discovered was reassuring in some ways. It wasn’t really me! It was normal, typical, to feel this way at midlife and mid-career. And, if I could just wait it out, chances are I would feel better. I was experiencing what researchers call the “U-curve”—a well-documented phenomenon as
Jonathon Rauch explained in a 2014 *Atlantic* article. In the 1990s, according to Rauch, university researchers such as David Blanchflower and Andrew Oswald studied the relationship between work and happiness. They analyzed international surveys of life satisfaction and found a recurrent pattern in countries around the world, the U-curve: “Whatever sets of data you looked at,” Blanchflower told Rauch,

you got the same things: life satisfaction would decline with age for the first couple of decades of adulthood, bottom out somewhere in the 40s or early 50s, and then, until the very last years, increase with age, often (though not always) reaching a higher level than in young adulthood.

The pattern, reports Rauch, came to be known as the Happiness U-curve.

According to Barbara Bradley Hagerty, a journalist who recently published a book on midlife (*Life Reimagined: The Science, Art, and Opportunity of Midlife*), while many people do reach their 40s, 50s, and 60s “blissfully happy in their jobs,” many of us experience, “if not a mid-career crisis, at least mid-career ennui.” According to Gallup pollsters, explains Hagerty, only one-third of Baby Boomers and Gen Xers are engaged by their work. Jim Harter, Gallup’s chief scientist for workplace management and well-being, told Hagerty that about half of Boomer and Gen X employees fall in a second category that Gallup characterizes as “not engaged.” As Harter puts it, “They show up; they get their paycheck and do the minimum required.” One in five, Hagerty reports from her research, are in the category Gallup calls “actively disengaged,” which Harter describes as “a pretty desperate state.”

In the midst of my own midlife ennui, then, I find that I am not alone. Clearly, some of my disengagement may be due to generic midlife and mid-career experiences, but I felt that something else could be at happening for those of us who work in the academy. Colleagues at my institution and beyond are feeling unsettled, disengaged, dissatisfied with upper administration, and concerned about higher education more generally. Beth Bouquet, also at mid-career and midlife, reflected on career as part of her plenary talk at the 2015 CWPA Conference. She noted that recent changes at her institution, and in higher ed more generally, left her feeling disconnected. Bouquet’s sense of disconnection is not unusual. Results from the 2015 *Inside Higher Ed* Survey of College and University Faculty Workplace Engagement, a study by Gallup and *Inside Higher Ed*, indicated that “Overall, 34 percent of faculty members surveyed are engaged in their job, 52 percent are not engaged, and 14 percent are actively disengaged” (Jaschik and Lederman 7).
As I reviewed the results of the Gallup survey and others such as our institution’s 2015 Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) survey results and thought about Bouquet’s talk, I found some comfort in the notion that I was not the only one feeling disengaged. But this response was quickly followed by feelings of despair: What hope is there if many of my colleagues are feeling this way? What is different now than in the past?

Currently, there seems to be more going on than typical middle-aged faculty members’ feelings of restlessness. Higher education itself is in the midst of an identity crisis sparked by external pressures linked to funding, costs, and economies. Tony Scott and Nancy Welch explain that funding cuts, added accountability mandates, erosion of tenure, increase in part-time faculty, and power moving away from faculty toward administration and governing boards have contributed “the shifting sands . . . beneath the feet of all academic workers” (5). Faculty are pushed to enact “new efficiency imperatives” and admonished “to make up for depleted budgets through entrepreneurial schemes, industry partnerships, and the repackaging of programs as revenue-generating streams” (5).

For those of us at mid-career, many of the changes—and even the conversations about them—are beyond what we experienced as college students and what most of us could have imagined when we started our careers. (As I have been revising this, for example, the faculty at Long Island University Brooklyn was preemptively locked out days before the start of classes with adjuncts and administrators hired to teach the classes. According to labor historians quoted in various news articles, this is the first time in American history that this has happened.)

Just as midlife, mid-career malaise is not specific to academics, the debates and changes happening in higher ed are not specifically targeted at those of us in Composition and Rhetoric. However, our experience can seem a little different from that experienced by peers in more traditional disciplines. As writing teachers and scholars, we are confronting the shifting sands of higher education within a field that is still trying to find firmer footing in the academy. Scott and Welch articulate how working in Composition and Rhetoric is different than in many other disciplines because we have always had to argue for “more resources, continually recalibrating to make do with less and pursuing a scholarly legitimacy that perpetually seems just over the next hill.” Now it seems we are not alone in these efforts with “composition having served as canary in the coalmine for a wide-scale restructuring of higher education as a whole” (5).

Welch and Scott’s analysis of the state of higher ed in general and in Composition and Rhetoric in particular, is, as a friend said, “apocalyptic,”
but it resonated with me, with my reading of the higher ed news and with
my experiences in my own institution and in the profession more generally.
While I found their analysis reassuring in some ways (much as I had found
Bouquet’s), I also found it pushing me further into the malaise. In our cur-
rent age of austerity, Scott and Welch and the contributors to the volume
advocate for us to become more aware of the political economies that are
at work in the current climate and suggest, among other options, “collect-
ive resistance” (13), “principled disengagement” (15), and even more fully
engaged-and-informed participation in the writing of the future of higher
ed and our field (16).

Principled disengagement, however, is still disengagement. Resistance,
collective or not, feels like a negative stance. The writing of the future
of higher ed and our field does seem like a more positive act. I had been
involved in many of these discussions and debates throughout my career,
and I could get more engaged, but my experience did not make me think
I would find more satisfaction or a renewed purpose pursuing that avenue.

Kerry Ann Rockquemore’s advice, though not specific to Composition
and Rhetoric, was more encouraging. In a series on academics negotiat-
ing mid-career, she recommends that to get unstuck, you should differenti-
ate between what is in your control and what isn’t, let go of negative emotions
connected to individuals (and I would add institutions), and clarify your
own definition of success. When I read her advice, before my sense of mid-
career ennui had taken root, it seemed helpful and not so difficult to follow
her weekly challenges and suggestions. But as I stalled and sputtered, the
advice didn’t get me moving forward.

I needed some productive ways to move through the feelings of disengage-
ment to set me up for that U-turn to happiness. Hagerty’s research offered
some hope. While not specific to academe, higher ed faculty, including com-
positionists, share many similarities with workers around the globe who find
themselves facing mid-career and midlife in rapidly changing industries and
work environments. As Hagerty explains, the “mid-career slump cuts across
industries and income levels,” with “college-educated employees report[ing]
greater unhappiness than do those who stopped at high school. Highly edu-
cated people,” according to researchers, “may have higher expectations and
may therefore find career disappointments more bitter.”

Lowering expectations, then, might help, but that seems like admit-
ting defeat. Hagerty, however, doesn’t suggest lowering expectations. To
deal with the slump, she notes—as did Rauch—that research shows “you
may be able to outwait your malaise” since most people seem to come out
of it without doing anything specific. I wasn’t sure that would necessarily
be the case, given the current climate of higher education in general and
at my particular institution. If you “want to thrive” instead of just getting through the ennui, Hagerty notes, a new purpose and a new challenge may be what you need. She reports that “a career shift can be good for cognition, well-being, and even longevity.” The shift doesn’t have to mean quitting a job or leaving one profession for something new. It might mean pivoting in your current organization—say taking on a new role or a different kind of position. You might stay in the same profession but try a new institution or organization. In any case, Hagerty says the experts urge us to be proactive and to take on new challenges or try something new—even if it fails—because it will be helpful in the long term.

What could these new challenges be for me? For us as compositionists? How can we resist the feeling of despair we may feel when we experience the reimagining of our institutions, our field, or the very notion of higher education?

As I look around at colleagues who have managed to successfully maneuver through the U-curve, I find that many seem to have followed the advice to pivot, whether consciously or not. Some have moved to different institutions, sometimes in new positions but always with new challenges. In Composition and Rhetoric, unlike in many disciplines, we have more flexibility in moving once we reach tenure. Some have moved into new positions within their own institution, such as taking on a position in the dean’s office or leading a center in teaching or research. As Composition and Rhetoric professionals, many of us have many years of administrative experience so making that move may be easier than for colleagues in other disciplines. A few have taken on more leadership roles in the professional organizations. Others have repositioned themselves in terms of their own scholarship, retooling in a different area within Composition and Rhetoric or collaborating in new ways or with new people. The luxury of tenure and promotion is that you can make these changes, and because our field is by nature inter/multidisciplinary, there are many opportunities to reconceive your scholarship. Some have looked outside of work to find more meaningful engagement or a healthier balance so work is less depleting (although not less engaging) by establishing practices such as yoga or meditation. One friend used the process recommended in the Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up to sort out her office and help her clarify her professional life.

To make these changes successfully, colleagues took time to reflect and prepare. Many tried several different strategies before landing in a good place. The idea of pivoting seems to undermine the effort involved in changing course. When I think of a pivot, I think of a basketball play: a quick turning, with one foot rooted to a spot. The pivot foot cannot move or slide, and if it does, a travelling violation occurs. The pivot can be used to redirect the ball or misdirect an opponent. The one making the pivot often
stays in place as the ball and play moves on. If I imagine myself pivoting, I see myself spinning back and forth, searching for somewhere to go or someone to pass to with defenders trying to block my way.

Maybe pivot isn’t the best metaphor for me... Laura Micciche’s metaphor of hypermiling offers an alternative way to think about getting unstuck. It emphasizes moving forward more deliberately, slowly, not a quick turning in place. For all of us who find ourselves midlife and midcareer in a fast-paced, shifting landscape, purposefully slowing down, giving serious attention “to the arts of productive stillness, resource preservation, and slowness—what is called ‘gradual arrival’ in the hypermiling movement” (74) can stop frantic spinning and keep us moving forward through the U-curve as we look for our next destination.

Works Cited


Peggy O’NeiLl is professor of writing and former composition director and department chair of the Writing Department at Loyola University Maryland, a private, comprehensive university in the Jesuit Catholic tradition. Her scholarship focuses on writing assessment theory and practice, writing pedagogy, and disciplinary concerns. She has authored or edited six books and numerous book chapters and journal articles.
Hearing the Bass Line: Giving Attention to Writing at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Shirley K Rose and Kirsten Benson

Shirley K Rose [SKR]: Kirsten, thank you again for taking time to talk with me about the writing programs at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. This interview is the seventh in a series WPA: Writing Program Administration has devoted to conversations about place in and the place of writing programs at the home institutions of the WPAs who serve as local hosts for the summer conference of the Council of Writing Program Administrators. I’m looking forward to this.

Kirsten Benson [KB]: Me too. It’s a great series that you do here.

SKR: I’m glad you think so. I enjoy it so much, and I’m glad to be able to add this. You were the interim director of the first-year writing program when it won a 2011–2012 CCCC Writing Program Certificate of Excellence Award. Could you talk about the signatures of the program that merited the award and what characteristics were particularly acknowledged by the award?

KB: Sure. At the time that we received that award, I was the director of the first-year writing program, although I’m back now directing the Writing Center. I was director of first-year composition for five years, and it was during that time that we put forward our proposal for the 4Cs award. I want to be sure to mention just from the start that our program itself was certainly not my sole creation. Always I like to give credit to the previous director of our program, Mary Jo Reiff, whom I’m sure you know.

SKR: Yes.

KB: She’s now at Kansas. She was the director of our writing program for about eight years. She and Jenn Fishman, who was also on our faculty at that time, and I started the changes that led to the program
that received that award. From my point of view, it is important to acknowledge all of the contributions that went into that award. And, of course, the teachers themselves, who are amazing.

The things that were noted in the letter we received from the 4Cs had to do with three parts of our program. One was the strong 2-semester first-year composition sequence that we have, another was the extensive training that we give to our GTAs, and the third was the program research we had conducted over time to check whether we were doing and how we needed to refine some of the curricular approaches that we were taking.

SKR: I would like to know a little bit of detail about each of these three because it’s not extraordinary to have a two-semester sequence or train TAs or even do program research, so what was it that made that work particularly praiseworthy?

KB: With the two-semester sequence, we spent a lot of time revising the curricular emphasis from our previous curriculum in which we had an English 101 course that was focused on argument, as many composition courses are, but a second semester course whose focus had been writing about literature, which had been traditional and popular for quite a few years in a lot of places. One of the biggest changes we made was to that Composition II course; we wanted to make it into a course that was more appropriate for all students in preparing them for the kinds of disciplinary research they do later in their college coursework. So rather than prepare everyone to do research solely through writing about literature, we included three different types of research in the second course. One is advanced secondary source research, research from sources that applies to so many different courses later in the college years. Another is archival research, which involves using primary materials from archives, like historians do, and developing the ability to draw conclusions directly from the analysis of those primary materials rather than relying on secondary, mediated sources. The third is qualitative research, which is more common in, say, social sciences disciplines, so that students would be able to conduct their own research using interviews, surveys, or observations and draw conclusions from those data to form answers to their research questions. This change was based on the idea of developing transferable skills to later courses and developing writing abilities that students need such as awareness of audience, genre, and discourse communities, etc. So, that was the big change that we made in our program.

In terms of program research, we conducted a variety of small-scale projects that tried to determine whether the curricular changes we
were making were successful. For example, after we changed our English 102 curriculum, we did a course-wide survey that asked about students’ understanding of the different types of research; we also gathered students’ papers and did some document analysis to see how well they were actually writing up these new kinds of research. Based on that, especially from the document analysis, we could see there really wasn’t a strong understanding of qualitative research, which was the newest type of research the students were doing. So we developed some teacher development workshops to help teachers refine their approaches to teaching qualitative research, since it was new to most of them too, and then followed up later with another round of student work collection. We could see changes showing up in the students’ work based on what the teachers were doing differently in the classroom. It was projects like that—looking at how well the students were actually doing—and a variety of transfer studies that Mary Jo and Jenn did that looked at the knowledge students were bringing with them from high school to first-year composition. It was an important part of our approach; we wanted to make sure we were doing what we said we were doing.

SKR: Thanks for going into that detail. It shows me how all these are so interconnected. The curriculum work and the work with the faculty were informing each other because of the research that you were able to do on specific aspects. That’s great. How is the first-year composition program at University of Tennessee, Knoxville, related to other writing programs at UT, particularly the writing center where you have served as director?

KB: We’ve always seen all of our writing efforts to be a collaborative venture. We’ve always worked closely together. The Writing Center, the mainstream first-year composition program, and our ESL writing program work together to serve, especially, first-year students. The Writing Center tries to serve students directly through one-on-one tutoring later in their college course work, too. But, again we’ve always seen all the writing programs as aiming towards the same goals. One of the nice things is that we meet together regularly. We have a Composition Committee where we all meet together a few times during the semester to talk about issues. For example, the training of GTAs is a good example of a way all our programs are connected. All of our first-year Master’s students, as part of their teacher training, sit in on English 101 in the fall and English 102 in the spring; they’re mentored by an experienced teacher, observe classes, do some paper grading, and learn the curriculum. At the same time, they also work five hours per week in the Writing Center, so the connection is there.
between both of these programs, and some of them work with ESL students if they have some background to start with in that area. The GTAs are getting a lot of mentoring by experienced teachers and also direct work with the students themselves, so that by the time they’re teaching their courses independently in the second year they’ve got this amazing amount of knowledge and again firsthand experience with the students. They also take a pedagogy class that’s taught by the first-year composition director and do research on first-year students during that class. So, again, there’s a connection of all of the writing programs working together not just to provide similar kinds of outcomes for students but also working together to help train teachers.

SKR: That sounds like a great example of the ways that there’s an interdependency among the programs for the preparation of the teachers. Having those MA students who are in the first year, with the time, the tutoring time, plus the in-class time—do they have a name for that position?

KB: Basically they’re graduate teaching assistants in their first year, so we call them—I don’t know if this is the right word exactly—but they’re mentees. In the Writing Center they’re tutors, first-year tutors.

SKR: That sounds like a great set up. I watched the “Writing at UT” video (writingcenter.utk.edu/) about the writing program there, and it mentioned that it is the origin of the Hodges Harbrace Handbook. Maybe I’m not putting it quite right to say it is the origin of the handbook, but that was a really great video and I was curious about when it was created and produced. Who did that, and what was its original purpose?

KB: Thanks, we definitely thought it came out really well. We had the idea to put that together when we were working on our application for the CCCC Certificate of Excellence Award. We thought it might be useful for that committee to see—not just to look at paper but also to see in a more interesting way—some of the things that we had done. It was kind of funny because one of my colleagues and I thought “Oh, we’ll just create a video,” and we didn’t know anything, it turns out, about how to produce a good video. We wrote a little script for it and we thought, “Ok, these are the sorts of things we want to put in,” and then we talked to the Creative Communications team in UT’s Office of Communications and Marketing and they kind of laughed at us and said, “Yeah, this is not how you create a video.” It was very fortunate that they were willing to contribute their expertise to help us to envision how to present things visually for others and also to have one of their videographers do all the filming and the editing. After
we decided on the different parts and the teachers that we wanted to highlight and the students, they put it all together, and they knew how to edit it so that we ended up with what you saw on our site. We probably need to update it because it is a bit outdated now, but we still think it still represents the big picture of what we do pretty well. We felt lucky to have that group’s expertise.

SKR: Creative Communications—are they a part of your university’s media relations office?

KB: Yes.

SKR: Did it cost your department or your program anything to have that team do that work?

KB: They came up with a number, a figure of what their actual costs would be, but then they said that they would do it for much less because it was part of our application for this national award. The university thought it was a good way to use their time. They basically donated I’d say four-fifths of what it cost. We had some money from an endowment for our Writing Center that we were able to use to pay for the portion that they said we should pay them. It cost thousands of dollars to put that video together, but again, the university basically underwrote the majority of that cost, which was great.

SKR: So, they told you “this is what this work is worth, based on the hours and the expertise and the production costs and all, this is an X thousand dollar video that we’re giving you. But we’re only going to ask for 20% of that from you because doing it is in line with the mission of our units—it’s what we exist to do”?

KB: Yeah. The idea was that the benefit—of course we didn’t know if we would receive the award—but the possible benefit to the university in terms of the public awareness of our program was in line with the university’s PR goals. We have this great program, we want people to know about it, and so we want to make it possible for others to see that, so they thought that was again part of the university’s overall mission, and therefore were willing to underwrite it. That may not be exactly the right way to phrase that . . .

SKR: Thanks for explaining that. I read that the Writing Center at UT was created in 1936. That’s pretty impressive longevity. How much do you know and can tell about its origins and the ways that it’s changed and developed over the years?

KB: There is a nice piece that was published in the Tennessee Alumnus magazine back in 1937 that describes the origins of what was called at that time the English Laboratory. It started in the winter of 1936, and it was for English department students who could come, voluntarily,
to a two-hour time period in which they would write whatever they might be working on in their courses, so reports, term papers, things like that; they would write for those two hours and get help from the faculty member directing it at that time. I’d have to look back to see if any numbers were mentioned about how many students actually took advantage of it at that time, but I do remember the piece saying that they considered it successful enough to continue it on into the following year.

So, that’s where the idea of providing a space and time for extra help for students to write got its start at UT, but after that there are some blank spots in the history. I’ve looked through various historical documents to try to see whether there was any reference after that, but I couldn’t find anything until the 1970s, when what was then called the Writing Lab came into existence—I don’t know exactly the year but sometime in the 70s. A similar idea, it seems, where there were a few open hours during the day. It was in a classroom, a space that was otherwise used for classes when the Writing Lab didn’t have its time. Students could just drop in for help. It was primarily students in first-year composition again at that time. Some teachers would refer students, too. That particular operation grew during the later 70s and the early 80s when the university had in place a system where teachers in any course could check a box on the grade sheet that indicated “English Deficiency” and that would mean the student had to go to the Writing Lab. It was pretty elaborate: the students had holds put on their registration so that they couldn’t register for courses unless they had shown up at the Writing Lab and started work on a structured set of assignments and exercises that were appropriate for their so-called deficiencies. They had to produce three papers as a way of clearing that “deficiency” from their record. I was involved with the Writing Center back in the later stages of that period when we would have to do amazing things, such as—this was during the time when IBM punch cards were used to send information into a central computer—we would have to gather the cards of these students and indicate which were the students whose registrations had to be held up because of their English deficiency. It was really bizarre.

SKR: That conjures up a great image with the punch cards.
KB: Fortunately, we were able to get rid of that and put into place a different approach in which teachers may assign a grade of “Incomplete due to Writing,” which sends the student to the Writing Center for additional help. But it’s no longer considered an English deficiency, and
it doesn’t have that same annoying registration hold that made it feel like writing prison as opposed to writing help.

Finally in 1996, when I first started directing the Writing Center, we were fortunate to receive a donation from a local family, the Stokelys, and they established an endowment for the Writing Center that was substantial enough that it included being able to create a wonderful, renovated space dedicated only to the Writing Center. It made the location more desirable and more pleasant. The last part of that was creating a couple of writing workshop courses that students can sign up for—one-credit electives—while they are in first-year composition courses, and they come each week and get feedback on their writing. That ended up being big, in terms of numbers—it led to a major expansion in terms of the number of students who visit and continue to visit over the four years of college. The Writing Center has grown tremendously through those kinds of changes.

SKR: In a lot of ways, I suppose it is a story that is true at a number of universities as far as how the writing center or writing lab has changed over the years in the definition of its role and the particular ways it does its work.

KB: I think so, I agree.

SKR: That’s fascinating. Let’s shift to some questions that are more about the university as a whole rather than just the writing programs but through the lens of the writing program. I’ve read a little bit of the history of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and I was surprised to learn that the university was originally chartered as Blount College in 1794, which is before Tennessee was even a state and Knoxville was still part of the so called Southwest Territory, so that makes it one of the oldest public institutions in the US. Would you say those very early origins are still evident in any way at the university or in the writing programs in particular?

KB: It’s a little hard to state exactly the history over time in terms of the writing programs. I think the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, does have a very interesting history. Blount College was really small. I don’t know exactly how many students, but it was probably something like one hundred. The first president was Samuel Carrick, and there is a residential dorm named after him today. When it was founded, it was declared non-sectarian, which was pretty interesting at the time because most colleges then were affiliated with some kind of religious organization. So, even though Carrick was a Presbyterian minister, there was deliberate choice to make it a non-sectarian college. There is also this mysterious number of five female students who
were enrolled back in the early years. This is before women regularly would be enrolled in colleges like this. UT now makes the claim that it is one of the first, if not the first, non-sectarian college in the US and also one of the first to enroll women, which I think is interesting and seems related to what the university is now, trying to appeal to and educate all students as part of its land grant status. That is an interesting thread that follows through all the years. Let’s see, what else about the original college? There is a particular building on campus on a site called The Hill; the original college was relocated to that spot, and now it’s an important part of the visual landscape of the campus.

SKR: UT was designated as a public land grant college by the Morrill Act in the late 19th Century. How does that land grant mission work to shape the writing program at UT? Do you see that in some way inflecting or shaping the writing program?

KB: At the time of the 1862 Morrill Act, it originally applied only to northern colleges. As I understand it, there was a special act of Congress in 1867 that allowed what had by that time become East Tennessee University to have land grant status. So, unlike the other state colleges at the time in the so-called Confederate states, this was certainly a big boost to the school. I believe it quickly tripled in enrollment. The whole idea of the land grant charter focused not just on traditional academic studies but also on agricultural, engineering, and at that time, military science, more practical studies. It led to a huge influx of enrollment here, and the university became known as the state’s flagship university around 1879, so between 1867 and 1879 there were huge increases in enrollment by students from all across Tennessee.

I think the land grant status shows up in a variety of ways in our writing program. Since the whole idea of a land grant university is to serve the citizens of the state, our writing program, especially our first-year writing program, has tried always to provide writing instruction that is appropriate for all of the students who come to the university. For example, the two-semester first-year composition sequence that I talked about earlier aims to provide all students with strong argument skills, strong research skills, and strong preparation for disciplinary and then later professional and practical writing. I think it is that idea—that the university’s mission is to prepare all students—we have tried to do that in creating our curriculum and also in creating different paths within our curriculum. For example, the vast majority of students take English 101 and 102, and we have a parallel sequence for students who are L2 writers, so they have slightly different types of assignments, and the instruction is appropriate for them as students.
who are learning English as their second or third or more language. There is also another parallel sequence of first-year writing courses designed for honors students. The idea is that we want to make sure we’re offering appropriate instruction to all students, and we’ve tried to create particular approaches for different types of students, realizing that people come with different needs and preparations. That shows up strongly in some of the things we’ve tried to do in the writing program, and I think that traces back to that idea, again, of the land grant university serving all.

SKR: My next question takes us in a different direction: UT is known for ties to the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and I recently learned that the Arboretum is on land that was purchased for the Manhattan Project. If participants in the 2017 CWPA Conference visited the Arboretum this summer, which I think is a realistic thing for them to do, what might be of special interest or significance to them? Are there other sites on campus that would be especially interesting or significant to WPAs?

KB: Here’s where I think that people who come to the conference are going to find there’s a huge number of interesting things in the area and places to visit. The Arboretum itself is a beautiful, beautiful piece of land. There are some historical materials, oral histories of the Scottish and Cherokee residents who originally lived on that land before the Manhattan Project came into existence. Now it is mostly a plant and wildlife refuge, and there are miles and miles of walking trails. Bird watchers, for example, would love it there. Anyone who is interested in local foliage—all the types of trees are labeled, the different types of foliage specific to the East Tennessee area. So I think that anyone who loves history and who loves the outdoors is going to love a place like that. The Arboretum itself is not very far from the Oak Ridge Department of Energy facilities, and people can take a public tour that goes to the Oak Ridge National Lab and see some of the places involved in the Manhattan Project. There’s Y12, too—there is a graphite reactor there and also now a supercollider, one of the largest particle accelerators in the world. It is an amazing facility. Again, there’s a public tour that goes out there, and I think it would be easy for any of the conference attendees to do that.

Oak Ridge is about a 25-minute drive from downtown Knoxville, where we’ll be located. There’s lots to do that’s even closer. There is the Museum of East Tennessee History, which WPAs would enjoy going to, and that’s just a few blocks from the conference hotel. A lot of local history. A lot of additional outdoor activities, too. Knoxville
has a great urban wilderness with several close-in parks. There is a place called Ijams Nature Center, and if you can’t get out to the Arboretum, you can go just a couple miles to Ijams. There’s hiking, a marble quarry, canoes and kayaks, and birdwatching, all of which I know a lot of WPAs like to do.

On-campus sites that WPAs would be interested in: We have an incredible library. It is very interesting looking—built in a ziggurat formation, it looks almost like a temple. It is beautiful inside. It’s just a great facility, so anyone who wants to can take a short free trolley ride over to the Hodges Library. There is a museum on campus, the McClung Museum, which has a lot of Civil War history. There is a nearby park dedicated to James Agee that I think a lot of folks may be interested in. All of this is a trolley ride or walkable from the conference hotel. One place I think people should go to if they get to campus—this is especially interesting for people who love public rhetoric—there is something called The Rock, and it literally is a huge rock in the middle of the campus, and students paint messages and images on it every day.

SKR: Every day?
KB: It is really a fun public rhetoric site that WPAs would be interested in.
SKR: That sounds like a must see. Thanks for going over all of those things because people are going to want to know.
SKR: Let’s move on to the last couple of questions. How would you describe the location of the writing program or programs within the institutional organization of UT as a whole? Is there anything about the physical location that reflects on the writing programs’ position within the university as an organization?

KB: Institutionally speaking, the writing program is connected to the College of Arts and Sciences and specifically to the English department, and that has worked well for us over time, especially since the time of John C. Hodges, who created the Harbrace Handbook through looking at student writing done here in our English courses. The legacy of his work and that Handbook has well supported our writing program. I know it is always a question, a debate in a lot of places, where do you get the best support? But, in this case I think it works well for us to have not only the history of the Hodges Harbrace Handbook but again the legacy of that support that helps our writing program and has supported it for sixty-odd years. Another thing that is good about the way we are structurally set up is the English graduate students who teach for us and also work in the Writing Center. We have the opportunity, because they are part of the department, to train them very
intensively, and that has so many benefits both for what we are trying
to do teaching-wise and especially for the students they work with.

I think in terms of the physical location, everything we have—the
English department, First-Year Composition Office, and the Writing
Center itself are pretty much right smack in the center of the campus.
The Writing Center, for example, is in what is called the Humanities
classroom building, on the top floor of that building. We have a big
space, which we’ve added to over time. One of the good things about
the location is that students are taking their classes and they can just
run down the hall or climb up a flight of stairs and be right at the
Writing Center, so it is really easy to get to. It is a building where there
is constant student activity, so that helps the visibility of the writing
program—it’s strengthened by being right there. We’re right across the
street from the Hodges Library, where the Writing Center also has a
satellite location with our ESL Writing Center and some after-hours
help. It’s great to be right in the heart of things. It is almost impossible
to be in either of those buildings without knowing there is something
to do with writing going on. I think that illustrates the good support
that we’ve had on the campus. I think that’s a real plus for us.

SKR: How does the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, reflect its geo-
graphic location? If I were to walk onto the UT campus, what would
I see that would tell me I’m in Knoxville? What geographical and
architectural features of the campus?

KB: In terms of the geographical location, the campus itself is nestled in
with some classic Knoxville features. On one side of the campus is
downtown Knoxville; that’s the east end where you can see, from just
about anywhere, the nearby downtown, so you’re connected to the
city in that way, just visually. On another side you have Fort Sanders,
an original residential area of Knoxville, which now is more students’
apartments and housing rather than regular, full-time Knoxville resi-
dents but still looks like the old Knoxville would have looked. The
North side of campus is bounded by that community. The South side
is the Tennessee River, which is part of what defines this area geo-
graphically. This area of the country is so pretty, with lots of lakes and
hills. We’re basically the foothills of the Smoky Mountains. You can’t
walk on campus without realizing you’re walking up or down some
hills! So, again, geographically, you’re connected to the surrounding
area just by that.

As far as the campus architecture, the variety on campus shows the
growth over time of this area, some of the diversity and experimenta-
ton on the campus constructing its identity over time. Some of the
older buildings on campus are the main College of Arts and Sciences Building, Ayres Hall, which is a Gothic Oxford/Cambridge-style building with a clock tower, and there are some other older Queen Anne-style frame houses dotted around the campus. But, you also see, I mentioned before, the Hodges Library, the main campus library, has the ziggurat, an extremely unique structure. To me it suggests an older, ancient temple of learning idea. Then there is much more modern stuff. There’s our Art and Architecture Building—a low-profile, concrete structure. So, you see a variety of architectural styles, but I think that is typical of Knoxville, too, which itself has grown so much over time, has become bigger, embraced new things, maybe experimented with some things that didn’t work and some that did. You see the different phases of the area also reflected in the campus buildings.

You also see some other typical features of the area, such as the use of marble. East Tennessee was known for its marble quarries, and you can see some beautiful marble in the Howard Baker Center for Public Policy and in the Library—the marble floors are just beautiful. These are connections to the local area that I think are pretty interesting.

SKR: Tell me about your metaphor for your writing program.
KB: I’ll turn to a musical composition here and think of the bass line that underlies so many musical compositions and performances. The idea I have here is that a lot of times it is that bass line that sets the tone, that grounds a musical composition, and in some ways writing too is one of those grounding types of activities or experiences. Especially in academia but also in so many other ways, writing is the thing that is both part of the creative process and also is the thing that allows ideas to take their concrete shape or form. The bass line that underlies so much of most musical compositions is a useful metaphor for thinking about writing and a writing program. I’ve used a particular phrase several times when I talk to people about what writing program administrators do: a lot of us, when we listen to music, we know the bass is there but we don’t really pay that much attention to it. Similarly, in universities, writing is always there, always a main activity through which students demonstrate their knowledge and create their knowledge, but it doesn’t get attended to as much as some other things. I call this being bass deaf, a term I adapted from my friend Curt Rode, where you don’t hear the thing that’s really keeping the piece together. As a writing program administrator, my job is to get people to hear the bass line, to attend to the writing. I think that works in a way to describe both writing and what we do as WPAs—to try to pay attention more to writing and eliminate that bass deafness.
SKR: I love that. I sing with an a capella chorus, so I know how important the bass line is. I have one more question: I wondered if you would be willing to talk a little bit about your history with the writing program, in particular the writing center. Why did you end up in this program? What is it about the program that makes it a good match for you?

KB: I think that a couple of interests of mine come together to make being a WPA make sense for me. I have always—I can remember thinking back to things like this when I was in high school even—been interested in the ways that institutions work, in the ways institutions do and sometimes do not do what they’re supposed to do or what they’re supposedly trying to do. It has been a kind of constant preoccupation for me. It is part of why instead of getting a doctoral degree in literature, I decided to shift gears into policy studies in higher education, that’s where my degree is. It was my interest in studying institutions and how their policies support their students that led me in that direction. And when I was in my master’s program, I worked in the Writing Center for the first time, and it was then that I saw the immediate and powerful benefit of one-to-one work on writing. Combining that belief in the power of talk to help people write and the power of that one-to-one connection, that was very, very strong, so that’s why I gravitated specifically to the Writing Center part of what I do, because I believe in emphasizing that work and trying to make it more known, better supported. Again, thinking about institutional policies, doing whatever I can to make sure that this work, which is so at the heart of how people learn and how people show what they’ve learned—I wanted to be able to do as much as I could to support that. I would say those are the things keep me in this work, and that really has never changed for me.

SKR: Thanks so much, Kirsten, for giving me your time today for this conversation. I’m looking forward to seeing you and visiting some of these places in Knoxville during the Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference this summer.
Policy Review

Common Core State Standards Initiative for Writing Program Administrators

Diane Kelly-Riley

This policy review provides an overview of the creation, launch, assessment, and reception of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) in the United States public school system. In terms of context, the review is situated within the broader background of school accountability and testing, with special attention to the connections and implications for postsecondary writing instruction. Put directly, the implementation of the CCSSI and associated assessments constitute a pivotal event in the history of US public education. Efforts culminating in 2009 mark the first time a majority of states adopted common standards for mathematics and English language arts across the entire elementary and secondary system.

Of particular interest to writing program administrators and writing studies scholars is the elevation of writing as its own content area in CCSSI English language arts (ELA). States that adopted the CCSSI for ELA have teachers teaching writing in all grade levels; students practice writing in all grade levels; and writing is emphasized in other content areas—history/social studies, science, and technical subjects—from grade six onward. The fact that the majority of American public school children across a significant number of states and US territories are now engaged in a system of public education that has elevated writing instruction to be one of the core areas is no small feat. Since the future of the CCSSI is unclear given the significant political fallout that has occurred over its brief existence, now is the time to take stock of the benefits and challenges of a national curriculum in a time of uncertainty.

In this review, I will provide context about the CCSSI for those working in the multiple array of writing program administration contexts so that we can continue to participate in these discussions that hold deep implications...
for those of us in postsecondary writing settings. I begin with the origin of the CCSSI and then describe the launch and assessment of the initiative. In concluding with the educational and political reaction to the initiative, I offer three opportunities for WPAs: professional networking with elementary and secondary colleagues; continued research and advocacy on career and college readiness; and assuming the role of public intellectual. As you read this review, keep these expansive opportunities in mind. The following policy review covers an area in which creative tension plays a role for all of us. If a policy review is to examine the origin and present state of a given policy, then the goals and frustrations involved in the CCSSI are best understood by WPAs who are, in turn, in excellent positions to meaningfully contribute to the ongoing discussions and decisions related to the costs and benefits associated with standardization and assessment of writing.

**Creation**

Many writing studies scholars saw promise in a cohesive set of standards for primary and secondary public education: common curricular objectives for mathematics and English language arts that students, teachers, administrators, and legislators could work toward. Lee Odell optimistically observed, “in 2010, writing assessment took a major step forward with the widespread acceptance of a common set of Common Core State Standards for writing” (271) and Applebee concurred that the CCSSI “[offer] a strong and well-intentioned vision of the knowledge and skills needed by a college- and career-ready high school graduate” (25). Susan McLeod first raised the issue of the CCSS in July 2009 to the listserv affiliated with the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA-L), and the conversations ranged from optimism about the standards to presciently anticipating problems with the perception of curricular standardization and problems with large-scale assessment. Multiple WPA-L participants encouraged WPA members to provide input about the CCSSI for ELA and to participate in any state-level activities soliciting feedback regarding the standards. In July and September 2009 after the draft of the CCSSI was released, there were nearly 25 exchanges on the WPA-L listserv on the topic.

The CCSSI were developed within a context that has deep tensions regarding the purposes of public education. In 2002, Diane Ravitch asserted that

American education [is] driven by two paradigms: the professional education paradigm, which . . . believes that the profession should be insulated from public pressure for accountability and . . . the poli-
cymaker paradigm, which insists that the public school system must be subject to the same incentives and sanctions based on its performance as are other large scale organizations. (21)

In 2012, Linda Adler-Kassner echoed these tensions and the ways they shape postsecondary writing instruction. She detailed two competing visions of education: one which views education as a mechanism to produce better citizenry and the other to produce better workers who can contribute to the national economy. Indeed, Arthur Applebee also observed another layer of tension noting the implications of a common “vision from kindergarten to grade 12 [embodied in the] CCSS documents are a palimpsest, with deeply embedded traces of our ongoing professional and political debates about the nature of effective curriculum and instruction in the English language arts” (25). The CCSSI were borne out of political and professional tensions, and their implementation coincided with the economic downturn of 2008.

According to Arthur Applebee, “the CCSS are shaped in great part by the history of what went before” (25). The federal mandate of No Child Left Behind in 2001, the 21st century version of Lyndon Johnson’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, required states to delineate and assess standards and “resulted in 50 different visions of what students should know and be able to do, accompanied by 50 different assessment systems” (26). The CCSSI gained purchase because they provided a common set of standards that satisfied the mandate of the federal government for assessable educational standards. Likewise, the standards were cast in economic terms to prepare students for career and college work in math and English language arts, and this economic framing certainly helped the effort gain public and political traction as the US entered the Great Recession following the economic collapse of 2008.

The CCSSI was led and created through the partnership of the state-level efforts coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), and Achieve, Inc. The CCSSI moved forward formally with the 2008 publication of the report, *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring US Students Receive a World-Class Education* co-authored by these organizations. Philanthropic organizations and non-profit agencies with strong legislative support have also played a large role in the evolution and promotion of these common standards, ushering in a new set of players in the accountability context. The positioning of the CCSSI as a state-led effort is key as the responsibility for articulating standards and leading educational reform shifted from the federal government to the states. The federal government became involved with the CCSSI by funding their assessment through
grants incentivized by the Race to the Top Initiatives in 2009 (White House and US Department of Education; see also Laine et al).

It is therefore important to differentiate the roles of state and federal government in the CCSSI: the states were responsible for the development and implementation of the standards, and the federal government incentivized the assessments of the standards. In situating the development of the standards at the state-level, CCSSI developers argued that local school chiefs and governors “recognized the value of consistent, real-world learning goals and launched this effort to ensure all students, regardless of where they live, are graduating high school prepared for college, career, and life,” and the standards were developed by building upon the existing standards in the states, experience of teachers, content experts, states, and leading thinkers, and feedback from the public emphasizing the collaborative, coalition-building nature of the project (CCSS, “Development Process”).

The overlapping timeline of state and federal projects related to the CCSSI is important to note. In 2007, forty-eight states and multiple US territories signed on as interested collaborators in the Common Core State Standards process convened by the NGA Center, CCSSO, and Achieve, Inc. After the 2008 publication of the Benchmark report, the development of the CCSSI for math and English language arts was underway. The NGA Center and the CCSSO developed the first iteration of the math and English language arts standards in 2009, and these organizations quickly sought feedback about the CCSSI. The final version was released in 2010. By the time of implementation in 2013–2014, forty-two (of the forty-eight original) states and seven US territories implemented the standards within their state elementary and secondary systems. The implementation of the CCSSI varied based on the timeline under which various states and territories authorized and adopted the standards.

In late July 2009, the Obama administration announced the Race to the Top incentives under which the assessments of the mathematics and English language arts standards were developed. Federal Race to the Top funds supported two consortia, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for the Assessment of the Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC). Later, ACT, Inc., separately developed an assessment for CCSSI purposes seeing that the federally funded assessments were going awry. The assessments of the CCSSI were first administered in 2014–2015. At the end of 2015, the federal government passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). This legislation affirmed the need for states to have academic standards to receive federal education funds, but forbid the federal government to influence or incentivize a state’s standards...
or anything related to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (See Section 8526A—Prohibition Against Federal Mandates, Direction, or Control, ESEA 1965 Amended and Enacted in December 2015, 429; US Department of Education). This policy move put the control of educational standards squarely back into each state’s purview and again made the decision of the assessment of the standards up to each state. The legislation explicitly forbids the federal government from dictating any kind of directions for the CCSSI, thus making the future of the CCSSI uncertain.

The context and scope of the curricular expansion of writing through CCSSI is astounding. In addition to the significant shifts in the CCSSI curriculum and assessment, there are also seismic changes in terms of the increasing numbers and diversity of students going through the system. According to Hussar and Bailey, enrollment in US elementary and secondary school equaled 55 million students in 2012, a 4 percent increase from 1999. Between Fall 2012 and Fall 2024, a further increase of 5 percent is expected. The projections indicate continued increases in enrollments in elementary and secondary schools. Likewise, postsecondary enrollments are projected to reach 23 million students by 2024, a 14 percent increase (Hussar and Bailey). Many of these students will pass through postsecondary, first-year writing and our associated programming—through online, dual enrollment, or face-to-face curricula. These students will take placement tests into our courses and will seek out writing centers or other instructional support to help them navigate the postsecondary writing curriculum. First-year writing is a common portal through which many students first encounter postsecondary study. Naturally, curricula and testing at the elementary and secondary levels will have spillover effects for postsecondary settings.

These changes are accompanied by costs of staggering proportions. As it serves millions of students, the US public education system is a multi-billion-dollar enterprise. Most of the funding for US education comes from local and state coffers, and a smaller percentage is distributed through the federal government. According to Cornman,

the 50 states and the District of Columbia collected $623.2 billion in revenues for public elementary and secondary education in [fiscal year] 2014, with 91% of the revenues coming from state and local governments. State and local governments funded $568.7 billion of elementary and secondary education, and the federal government contributed $54.5 billion, or 8.7 percent of all revenues. (2)
As a result, it made sense to locate the creation and implementation of CCSSI in local and state contexts because these officials have more decision-making power about the standards.

There are also dramatic changes occurring in demographic profiles of students enrolled in publicly funded education in the US adding to the changing landscape. These shifts are felt at the postsecondary level too. According to Hussar and Bailey,

> public school enrollments are projected to be to be higher in 2024 than in 2012 for Hispanics, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and students of Two or more races; lower for Whites and American Indians and about the same for Blacks. Public school enrollments are projected to be higher the South and West, and about the same in the Northeast and Midwest. (3)

Like the K–12 system, postsecondary student populations are increasingly more racially and ethnically diverse. In addition, the increase of students requires more teachers. Hussar and Bailey projected that there will be a decline in pupil/teacher ratios. More students graduate from high school, and more go on for postsecondary study. The annual number of new teachers hired is projected to be higher in 2024 than in 2012 in both public and private schools (9). There will be smaller class sizes with more inexperienced teachers. The drive to make standards more cohesive is understandable, given this rapidly changing and growing system.

Postsecondary institutions will also experience similar growth and change in demographic populations. According to Hussar and Bailey,

> Total enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions is expected to increase 14 percent between fall 2013 and fall 2024. Differential growth is expected by student characteristics such as age, sex, and attendance status (part-time or full-time). Enrollment is expected to increase in both public and private degree-granting postsecondary institutions. (23–24)

There were significant increases to postsecondary enrollments between 1999–2012. The number of students seeking associates degrees increased by 78 percent; the percentage of students awarded bachelor’s degrees increased by 49 percent. By 2024, the numbers of students seeking associates and bachelor’s degrees will level off and are projected to increase by only 14 percent and 10 percent respectively.

There are four major changes to the CCSSI from the standards-based reform efforts that preceded them. First, a majority of states adopted the standards into their elementary and secondary curricula in 2012–2013. This adoption signals a huge shift in which millions of students and thou-
sands of teachers are working toward the same goals. Second, the CCSSI ELA shifts away previous focus on reading and interpretation of literary text to reading informational and nonfiction texts. Shanahan observes that one of the biggest changes... [in] these new writing standards is the closer connection of writing and reading... and the focus... on opinion, which in the middle and high school grades morphs into formal argument, complete with anticipation of counterarguments and use of multiple sources of evidence. (np)

Third, writing is elevated to a unique and distinct skill worthy of overt instruction and evaluation whereas previous standards-based curricula emphasized reading and/or knowledge of grammar. Fourth, the CCSSI situates Reading and Writing instruction and assessment within disciplines from the 6th grade onward. In 2008 after the publication of the Benchmark report, 84 percent of the states agreed to use Anchor Standards for Career and College Readiness for writing. In other words, 84 percent of the US states agreed to promote writing across the entire K–12 curricula as well as situated within social science/history, science, and technical subjects. Eventually, for states that continue with the Common Core, students who matriculate into postsecondary study will have had overt, scaffolded writing instruction since kindergarten, and they will have been exposed to writing instruction as a tool for communication and learning across disciplines since 6th grade.

Consistent with the two competing aims of American education expressed by Ravitch and her followers, the CCSSI embraced the career and college-ready framework. The CCSSI ELA authors define career and college readiness as performance that demonstrates independence, builds strong content knowledge, responds to varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline, comprehends as well as critique, value evidence, uses technology and digital media strategically and capably; comes to understand other perspectives and cultures. (Headings, *English Language Arts* 7)

Under the Common Core State Standards, students are writing a great deal more; teachers are teaching more writing; and the CCSSI assessment evaluates student written performance.

The CCSSI articulate career and college ready performance targets—Anchor Standards—for each of the four strands of Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language toward performance defined as career and college ready. Each grade details specific performance targets for grades K–12 as well as. Likewise, reading and writing specific performance targets are also situated within other disciplinary areas beginning in
6th grade. These performance targets are identical to those of ELA-specific writing strand. For each grade level, ten standards are identified for each of the strands. Within the CCSSI ELA, the Anchor Standards are translated for each grade level into detailed performance expectations for each of the four stands for individual grades K–8 and combined for grades 9–10 and 11–12. Additionally, performance expectations are delineated for reading and writing for grades 6–12 and are situated across disciplines (history/social studies, science, and technical subjects). Again, performance expectations are specified for individual grade levels 6–8 and then are combined for grades 9–10 and 11–12. Table 1 provides an overview of the anchor standards for English Language Arts and Literacy within other disciplines.

As Table 1 illustrates, the Anchor Standards communicate broad expectations across the four strands and then further detail the “skills and understandings that all students must demonstrate” for various grade levels (English Language Arts 51). Each strand contains performance standards for specific sub-strand areas. Again, these terms are articulated for individual grades K–8 and combined for grades 9–10 and 11–12.

Within the CCSSI—again, this cannot be stressed enough—writing has been elevated to a distinct skill necessary for career and college success. Like reading, it has been positioned as a skill that requires deep knowledge and practice within English language arts but also requires application within and across multiple disciplinary areas. The CCSSI ELA developers adopted an integrated model of literacy that “refocuses educators’ attention on the importance of writing and the need to teach it effectively at every grade level. It also provides benchmarks for what students need to master at each step along the way” (Graham and Harris). In addition, “although the Standards are divided into Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language strands for conceptual clarity, the processes of communication are closely connected, as reflected throughout” (English Language Arts 4).

In addition to overt writing instruction, the CCSSI ELA also emphasize facility in digital settings as well as reading skills that emphasize both textual and visual analysis, thus preparing them to read multiple formats. Eventually, students may enter our postsecondary courses with a wider array of experience with literacy practices. This fundamentally changes previous English language arts frameworks as the CCSSI combines writing, reading, and speaking into one construct, and this will surely have implications for postsecondary composition classrooms and scholarship. With this integrated framework, the previously narrow constructs of English language arts defined by educational measurement specialists have been made obsolete (see also Elliot in On a Scale), and are replaced with more complex constructs of literacy. This integrated sense of construct articulation ties
Table 1
An overview of the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking and Listening</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Ideas and Details</strong></td>
<td><strong>Text Types and Purposes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Comprehension and Collaboration</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conventions of Standard English</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.  
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.  
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. | 1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.  
2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.  
3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. | 1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.  
2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.  
3. Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. | 1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.  
2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. |

Adapted from *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*. 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking and Listening</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Craft and Structure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Production and Distribution of Writing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</strong></td>
<td><strong>Knowledge of Language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Interpret words and phrases as they are</td>
<td>4. Produce clear and coherent writing in</td>
<td>4. Present information, findings, and</td>
<td>3. Apply knowledge of language to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>used in a text, including determining</td>
<td>which the development, organization, and</td>
<td>supporting evidence such that listeners</td>
<td>how language functions in different contexts,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technical, connotative, and figurative</td>
<td>style are appropriate to task, purpose, and</td>
<td>can follow the line of reasoning and the</td>
<td>to make effective choices for meaning or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meanings, and analyze how specific word</td>
<td>audience.</td>
<td>organization, development, and style are</td>
<td>style, and to comprehend more fully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choices shape meaning or tone.</td>
<td>5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed</td>
<td>appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</td>
<td>when reading or listening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Analyze the structure of texts, including</td>
<td>by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or</td>
<td>5. Make strategic use of digital media and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger</td>
<td>trying a new approach.</td>
<td>visual displays of data to express</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>portions of the text (e.g., a section,</td>
<td>6. Use technology, including the Internet,</td>
<td>information and enhance understanding of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each</td>
<td>to produce and publish writing and to</td>
<td>presentations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other and the whole.</td>
<td>interact and collaborate with others.</td>
<td>6. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Assess how point of view or purpose</td>
<td></td>
<td>and communicative tasks, demonstrating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shapes the content and style of a text.</td>
<td></td>
<td>command of formal English when indicated or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*. 
Table 1 (con’d)
An overview of the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for
English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking and Listening</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. |
8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. |
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take. |

| Research to Build and Present Knowledge |
7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation. |
8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism. |
9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. |

| Vocabulary Acquisition and Use |
4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate. |
5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. |
6. Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression. |
Table 1 (con’d)
An overview of the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking and Listening</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Range of Writing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Speaking and Listening</strong></td>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.</td>
<td>10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects,
into work within postsecondary composition that is also moving toward more integration with other content areas. Such language arts approaches are clear gains for education. In educational contexts, however, the road is paved with politicization.

**Launch**

While the CCSSI have been portrayed as standards created by and for the states, scholars have observed other dynamics driving the process—one in which philanthropic and non-profit agencies with strong legislative support partner with the state-level organizations to bring about specific educational reforms (see *Education Week, Spotlight: Writing Instruction*). Recall that the CCSSI gained traction after the 2008 publication of the *Benchmarking* report which coincided with the economic downturn in the US economy and the start of the Great Recession. Linda Adler-Kassner asserts that the CCSS were “drafted by a relatively small group of educators (largely administrators) and professionals, vetted with minimal input from professional organizations like NCTE or even MLA, the Standards went from draft to final version in about 14 months” (124).

Linda Adler-Kassner cautioned WPAs about emerging narratives and players in the landscape of accountability and the quickly changing terrain of elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education. She argues that there are two distinct narratives for public education—one that values education for the benefit of an educated citizenry and the other that sees the role of education to prepare workers to help the nation compete in the global economy. In political realms, there has been a great deal of anxiety that the US is losing economic ground, and this loss tends to be attributed to a weak educational system. Like Adler-Kassner, Hesse also claims that professional organizations were not substantively consulted during the development of the CCSS.

On the other hand, the CCSSI was a state-led effort, and it may have been difficult to track the distributed nature of feedback regarding the CCSS as there were multiple ways to give input. Individuals were invited to comment directly; the American Council on Education put together a response group comprised of selective NCTE and MLA members (Asao Inoue lists that panel in a WPA-L message on September 21, 2009) and individual campuses were asked for response depending upon the institution’s connection to Achieve., Inc. or other connections to the CCSS—usually beginning with the Provost’s Office and then that office searching out the appropriate English faculty member or administrator. CCSSI developers document their wide spread evidence of participation (CCSSI,
Kylene Beers, then president of NCTE, published an open letter in 2009 regarding NCTE’s actions about the CCSSI, and NCTE subsequently provided three sets of responses to the standards (NCTE, “Resources”). The State of Washington became the fiscal agent of one of the assessment instruments, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, and so there were significant numbers of faculty invited from my institution at the time, Washington State University, to provide feedback on the standards—both through state channels and also through national meetings held in Washington DC. The evolution of the CCSS tapped into the economic and literacy crisis narratives that resulted in a reset of roles of teachers and how they are or are not included in determining the content of the curriculum. While evidence points to engagement and review by NCTE, MLA, and other venues, the duration of review and degree to which counsel was accepted both remain contested.

The CCSSI built upon the patchwork of standards and assessments developed under No Child Left Behind and coincidentally came into place at the same time of the economic downturn. The marketplace lost approximately 5.7 million jobs, and the unemployment rate hovered at 9 percent. Hundreds of billions of dollars in investments evaporated, banks failed, and retirement funds declined. The term Great Recession (from December 2007 to June 2009) has come to be synonymous with systematic economic failure. Inception of CCSSI during the recession resulted in a winnowing of the core curricular areas. Lasisi Ajayi argues that the CCSS built upon the standards-based accountability movement of the 1990s when mandatory testing of student achievement was required in almost all states. These state-level achievement test mandates linked to the broader federal accountability initiative of No Child Left Behind. Linking standards-based tests to a common core of knowledge helped narrow what schools needed to teach to ensure that students were ready to participate in a globalized economy. Ajayi asserts

the standards-based tests were designed to test students’ learning of a common core of knowledge that all citizens were expected to acquire . . . The core argument of the accountability movement was that schools should teach students the knowledge and skills to become effective workers in an increasingly globalized economy. (2)

The shift to the CCSSI resulted in a more limited set of constructs to be taught and assessed. These constructs were selected based on their potential contribution to economic indicators. Jory Brass observes that the development of the CCSSI marked an important departure from the standards-based efforts of the 1990s which sought teacher and professional input
about the curricular content and assessment constructs. In the iteration of the CCSSI, the reform efforts were driven by overlapping networks of policy entrepreneurs (e.g., Student Achievement Partners), venture philanthropy (e.g., Gates Foundation, Pearson Foundation, GE Foundation), neoconservative think tanks (Fordham Foundation), corporate executives (e.g., Business Roundtable), and non-governmental trade organisations (sic) (Achieve, Inc., National Governors Association) in “partnership” or “consortia” with education publishers (e.g., Pearson Corporation, McGraw-Hill) and standardized testing companies (Education Testing Service, ACT, College Board). (126)

This shift in who decides what is taught in school, begun during a period of massive economic decline, made an explicit departure from traditional state and local control of public education and from educators taking central roles in determining the parameters of their profession. Instead, according to Brass, the advent of the CCSSI created a market developed and fostered by the private sector that can reform public education with tests, services, and products aligned with the standards. In this “state-led” reform, the free market has been positioned to reshape curriculum, teaching and assessment at the state and local levels through the provision of CCSS-based tests (PARCC and Smarter Balanced), pre-packaged materials developed by educational publishers, and educational technologies and games. Conversely, states, school districts, and teachers have been positioned here as “customers” of these tests, technologies, and services. (127)

Whether or not states adopt or subsequently drop the CCSSI is really now a moot point. Textbooks, professional development materials, tests and other educationally supportive materials have been revised to align with these standards since they have been so widely adopted.

These shifts in elementary and secondary education have implications for postsecondary settings. Joanne Addison argues “the Common Core State Standards are being positioned as the most well-funded and pervasive effort to date at ensuring accountability through standardization not just in our K–12 classrooms but increasingly in our college classrooms as well.” The evolution of career and college readiness standards links directly to perceptions about what is (or isn’t) taught in postsecondary settings.

In anticipation of the launch of the CCSSI, the Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project collaborated to author the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (see O’Neill et al.). This document
describes the rhetorical and twenty-first-century skills as well as habits of mind and experiences that are critical for college success. Based in current research in writing and writing pedagogy, the Framework was written and reviewed by two- and four-year college and high school writing faculty nationwide and is endorsed by the [major professional organizations].

The Frameworks couches college readiness in terms of eight habits of mind: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition.

The implementation of the CCSSI has narrowed the curriculum with its common focus on specific outcomes for career and college readiness. The adoption of these standards has also narrowed the development of textbook and instructional materials, and standardization of curricular materials decreases the needed amount of expertise in the instructional ranks. As Jacobson observes, the “implementation process privileges the goals and needs of accountability [mandates] rather than the teachers and students enacting the standards.” Jacobson fears that “the central focus on testing and accountability related to the adoption of these standards creates the need for an ecosystem of texts that bring the standards into practice.” These genres of implementation, including textbooks and assessment instruments, are institutional texts that work together to organize the activity of teachers and students. Jacobson wisely observes that the “standards supply a theory of writing and the kinds of writing to be evaluated, and the implementation materials focus on these valued forms, simplifying the standards to the most easily accessible components.”

As is too often the case with constraint accompanying standardization, the launch of the CCSSI has narrowed what should be taught and what will subsequently be assessed. This shift will have significant implications at the postsecondary level as pathways are identified through curricula. The need for broader disciplinary knowledge has been significantly reduced in the CCSSI. I will return to the implications of this narrowing in the section on reception.

Assessment

Before the CCSSI assessments were developed, testing developers were optimistic (Sweeney et al.). In 2010, Lazer and his colleagues observed the unprecedented opportunity [brought about by] improvements in methods and technology, possible agreement on a common set of standards, combined with a generous commitment of federal resources should allow [ETS, Pearson, and the College Board] to build assess-
ment systems that provide accountability data and instructionally actionable information . . . the opportunities will surely be wasted if we do not carefully consider the trade-offs inherent in any large-scale assessment design. (18)

The largest backlash to the CCSSI has come under the assessments. Common Core replaced the No Child Left Behind tests enacted under President George W. Bush which elevated high stakes testing and school accountability in ways not previously seen. NCLB “required states to test, disaggregate and report data on student performance, but allowed states to continue deciding on their own which standards and tests to use” (Bidwell). The NCLB efforts were problematic because so many schools did not meet adequate levels for performance in these high stakes assessments and faced serious financial consequences. Beach et al. assert that no research exists to demonstrate that “adopting standards will necessarily improve student achievement” (10).

The federal government funded the development of the assessments for the CCSSI. Two testing groups, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and Partnership for the Assessment of the Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), won federal Race to the Top grants to develop the assessments of the Common Core State Standards replacing the multitude of assessments developed for NCLB. The assessment of the CCSSI first occurred in 2014–2015. Each testing consortium received hundreds of millions of dollars to develop and implement the assessments of the CCSSI. PARCC received $185,862,832 from September 2010 to September 2015, and SBAC received $175,849,539 to develop the assessments for math and English language arts.
Table 2
Federal Funding for Development of CCSSI Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SBAC</th>
<th>PARCC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>14,480,127</td>
<td>5,323,922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal agent</td>
<td>2,038,345</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for governing states</td>
<td>3,405,419</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment, design, development</td>
<td>108,030,080</td>
<td>100,055,192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and evaluation</td>
<td>7,131,179</td>
<td>5,857,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional capacity and outreach</td>
<td>16,227,600</td>
<td>2,552,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>27,234,211</td>
<td>29,349,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education engagement</td>
<td>1,376,570</td>
<td>900,308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management</td>
<td></td>
<td>18,582,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutes</td>
<td>429,526</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical issues ~ policy work groups</td>
<td>231,075</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator leadership cadres</td>
<td>5,137,801</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formative assessment tools for K–12</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic assessments</td>
<td>10,000,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect costs + system design</td>
<td>1,369,772</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>175,849,539</td>
<td>185,862,832</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the Race to the Top assessment awards:
www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/awards.html

In addition to these RTT awards, each testing group received an additional $15.9 million from the remaining unallocated funds from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act. While these figures represent a fraction of the federal US Department of Education budget, the funds to develop the tests are no small drop in the bucket.

Both SBAC and PARCC employ automated essay scoring. For English language arts, there are several types of questions: constructed response tasks which are open ended or short answer questions; selected response (multiple choice, true and false, matching); technology-enhanced, and performance tasks that are more complicated and are delivered over a period of time. According to SBAC’s definition of technology-enhanced and performance-based questions, they “measure a student’s ability to demonstrate critical-thinking and problem-solving skills . . . [they require] students to apply their knowledge and skills to respond to complex real-world problems” (“Home” and “Setting Criteria”). The questions are scenario- or theme-based, and they include interactions and responses beyond traditional selected response or constructed response. The test items are predominantly computer scored. The SBAC exams were created by American Institutes for Research (AIR). PARCC’s tests were developed by Pearson and ETS. Additionally, ACT developed a CCSSI based test called ASPIRE.
as a lower cost alternative to SBAC or PARCC (see “About PARRC Inc.”, and “Independent Studies”).

The assessment of complex performance-based or technology-enhanced tasks has been challenging. Strauss (2016) reports that SBAC and PARCC items are computer-scored with Pearson and AIR contracted to do the scoring. According to these contracts, PARCC/Pearson intends to cross check only 10 percent of student exams by hand. AIR/SBAC intends to cross check 25 percent of the exams. States can pay extra to have their exams read by humans. SBAC and PARCC report psychometric information in terms of the ways in which the computer models match human raters. Both tests have lower reliability ratings for both human- and computer-scored topics. In the SBAC report on ELA items, there is low agreement with humans on computer-scored items (40 percent).

Not surprisingly, questions have been raised about the validity of scoring these exams by machine. Leonie Haimson asserts that there are too many unanswered questions about machine scoring of the common core exams, referencing Les Perelman’s numerous critiques of automated essay scoring, and calls into question that computers can read student work. Quoting Perelman, Haimson argues

the [studies conducted by PARCC and SBAC are] so flawed, in the nature of the essays analyzed and, particularly, the narrow range of scores, that it cannot be used to support any conclusion that Automated Essay Scoring is as reliable as human graders.

In their reporting, PARCC scores were very low—mostly 0s or 1s on a five-point scale: “Someone could obtain to close the same reliability simply by giving a 0 to the very short essays and flipping a coin for the rest.” Quoting Perelman, Haimson argues “As for the AIR study, it makes no particular claims as to the reliability of the computer scoring method, and omits the analysis necessary to assess this question.” Again, the developers PARCC and SBAC solicited a wide array of input from state-level assessment experts and content experts to set standards. Ultimately, while the framework of the CCSSI included a new, expansive framework of English language arts, the assessments had to be narrowly defined to achieve the technical specifications within standards set by the educational measurement community. In the areas of tension between the validity of construct representation and the reliability of raters, technical specifications of reliability won—and teachers and students lost.

The capabilities of automated scoring do not yet support a robust assessment of complex writing tasks. AIR and Pearson’s research primarily focuses on comparison of rating behaviors of machines and humans. They
have not yet attended to the newly iterated standards governing educational and psychological testing articulated through APA, AERA, and NCME’s *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* most recently revised in 2014. In the previous revision in 1999, the *Standards* asserted that validity defined as “the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretation of test scores entailed by the proposed uses of tests” (9) was paramount. The latest edition of the *Standards* elevates the consideration of fairness as a core principle:

use of test score interpretations for intended use(s) for individuals for all relevant subgroups. A test that is fair minimizes the construct-relevant variance associated with individual characteristics and testing contexts that otherwise would compromise the validity of scores for some individuals. (219)

Neither human-scored nor computer-scored SBAC or PARCC tests have moved to address the standards set forth by these professional organizations. Although Norbert Elliot, Andre A. Rupp, and David Williamson’s “Conceptual, Interpretative, and Integrative Frameworks: Assessment of English Language Arts-Writing in the Common Core State Standards Initiatives” provides excellent perspective on interpreting these scores within local contexts, such exposition is something that the test publishers have a very difficult time doing.

Furthermore, scores from SBAC and PARCC tests are used for multiple purposes beyond attainment of career and college readiness. Some states use the scores for placement out of remedial postsecondary courses, as graduation requirements, and as indictors of teacher performance. Many states have made agreements regarding placement into postsecondary writing courses based on the 11th grade ELA scores. Such arrangements allow students to bypass remedial coursework if they score at a certain level on the ELA test and guarantee that students can enter real college writing courses.

The SBAC scores are also used as a way to identify students who need targeted instruction. These students intend to pursue postsecondary study but haven’t demonstrated adequate levels of performance on the 11th grade ELA or math tests. For example, the State of Washington’s Bridge to College program mainstream students into postsecondary study. This program places remedial coursework in high school so that students can enter regular courses in college upon their graduation from high school.

Some states required performance at a certain level on the CCSSI assessment as a graduation requirement, but as the rollout of the CCSSI and its assessments occurred, these requirements were waived or performance on SAT or ACT tests became suitable alternatives. Teacher evaluations became
tied to the results of SBAC and PARCC tests. Given the complications with automated scoring of student essays, there has been a great deal of controversy here too. Haertel, in a study supported by ETS, reported that using student test scores as measure of teacher performance is very problematic, and he concludes “teacher [value added model] scores should emphatically not be included as a substantial factor with a fixed weight in consequential teacher personnel decisions. The information they provide is simply not good enough to use in that way” (emphasis in original, 23). Much of the problem with using student scores as an indicator for teacher performance is that there is a significant amount of bias “for some teachers and against others . . . [stemming] from the way our school system is organized” (24; emphasis original).

As noted above, economic constraint accompanied assessment every step of the way. SBAC and PARCC assessments presented financial challenges to states. The costs of the exams, for many, is higher than the tests previously administered for federal accountability purposes. In 2013, the SBAC test cost between $22.50 and $27.30, depending on which test was being used: the basic model or a complete testing system which included formative and interim performance tests. PARCC costs $29.50. According to Gewertz, this cost is “higher than what one-third of its 24 member states [previously paid for their state developed assessment].” The requirement to conduct the assessment of educational standards places a financial burden on public schools. The law mandates that the assessments must be done, taking away resources from instruction and professional development for teachers.

While there were political issues during the development and launch of the CCSSI, the problems literally exploded with the implementation of the assessments. The development of the standards had been rushed, and the purposes of the assessments had not been clearly agreed upon. While there was good consensus about the value of common standards for English language arts, there was less agreement about the ways in which to evaluate student work. The CCSSI assessments still remained high stakes tests to satisfy federal accountability mandates, and the fact that automated essay scoring was the primary vehicle to evaluate student work led to strong backlash. In April 2013, NCTE issued a position statement against using machine scoring to evaluate student written work, and a petition of professionals against machine scoring of student essays in high stakes environments currently has more than 4,300 signatures (“Professionals”). These documents cited research arguing serious limitations in automated essays scoring. Finally, the SBAC and PARCC ELA assessments have neglected to foster the possibilities within the integrated literacy framework of the
CCSSI. The constructs assessed are more narrowly defined because of the high-stakes nature of these tests and the employment of automatic essay scoring. Both require very concisely delineated constructs which do not support the expansive possibilities in the CCSSI. The changing demographics in US public elementary and secondary schools as well as the changing conceptions of standards for educational testing require tests to be considered through the lens of validity, reliability, and now fairness. Haertel’s preliminary research on the relationship between student test scores and teacher performance documented bias resulting from improper use of test scores in school systems. The same types of inquiries need to be done for student performance as well as similar dynamics are most likely at play for students based on race, gender, and social economic status. Given the recent rollout of the assessments, these areas have yet to be adequately investigated.

Reception

After the first implementation of the SBAC and PARCC assessments, there was significant political backlash against the CCSSI in many states (Ujifusa, Bannerjee, and Tomko; Ujifusa, Gwertz, and Decker). By 2015, the number of participating states dropped to forty-three using the ELA standards and forty-two using the Math standards. Gewertz traces the eroding support for the CCSSI. Currently, it’s not clear the extent to which CCSSI-based curricula were implemented and simply renamed or were implemented and entirely revised. Some people misread the CCSSI as a federal takeover of public education, and others fear that the CCSSI puts public education in the hands of private non-profits, testing companies, and textbook publishers. In 2015, many states rebranded their state level assessments, but most likely, they are simply renamed Smarter Balanced Assessments or PARCC. This is the case in my home state of Idaho in which the Smarter Balanced Assessment has been renamed from the Idaho Core Standards to the Idaho Standards Achievement Test. Additionally, the US Congress reauthorized the ESSA in late 2015 forbidding the federal government to do anything related to the Common Core (see Office of the Press Secretary, “Fact Sheet”). Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015 which allowed states to design their own accountability systems and opened up the assessments to more than just math and reading. There is a general backing away from anything labeled Common Core.

The educational landscape continues to change. Education Week tracked the results of the CCSSI assessments in 2014–2015 and found that many states had lower proficiency rates than their previous federal accountability tests. Again, the tests used in 2013–2014 varied from state to state,
but those used by PARCC or SBAC trended lower performance wise. As scores were released this fall and were lower than anticipated, states revised the plans they had for score usage. In Idaho, the State Board of Education approved a waiver that rescinds the requirement that students earn a certain score to qualify for graduation (Stone). In Ohio, just more than a third of students met the standards on the PARCC exams (O’Donnell), and in New Jersey, most students performed below grade level in English and math (Clark). Overall, the performance has been mixed (see Hegarty; Oshrin; Rey; Singer). Gewertz reports that many states continue to drift away from the use of SBAC or PARCC assessments and, in an Education Week survey of PARCC or SBAC, states “only 21 states still plan to use shared tests designed for the common core.” More states are opting to use SAT or ACT college entrance exams to meet the changing landscape of assessment. According to Gewertz, “six states and the District of Columbia will administer PARCC in 2015–2016; 14 will use Smarter Balanced.” Given the December 2015 ESSA authorization, states are within their purview to make this choice.

The future of the Common Core State Standards and their assessments is not clear, but the initiative will have lasting effects on writing instruction. Even if many participating states change their membership status as Common Core adopters, the curricula implemented by the common core has not been replaced by something new. Writing has a new place in American education, and the changes in K–12 contexts will spillover to postsecondary settings. The segmenting, streamlining, narrowing based on particular career and college ready points capitalizes on the fractured nature of educational systems. The more things are compartmentalized and fragmented, the more they can be put in service of pushing students through or redefining what it is students need to be able to do in college.

That trajectory continues to place the disciplines of Composition/Rhetoric and English Studies in the sights of conversations to contract or constrict what needs to be known or taught. Most likely for faculty and instructors at research institutions, this dynamic will be felt less by them since research and disciplinary innovation are part of their mandate, but colleagues at two-year or four-year regional institutions will begin to feel the pressure of what can and should be taught. Colleagues of mine at two-year colleges in Idaho are already expressing concern that their doctoral work in literary studies is perceived to have decreased value over their ability to teach multiple sections of composition. The guided pathway includes composition courses and not literary study or creative inquiry.

Writing program administrators need to actively participate in these unfolding conversations. WPAs and composition/writing studies schol-
ars have multiple opportunities to continue the work set in motion by the CCSSI. These opportunities fall in three areas: professional networking with elementary and primary colleagues; continued research and advocacy on career and college readiness for writing; and assuming the role of public intellectual on these issues. The development of the CCSSI shifted the central role of professional organizations as the primary group to determine curricular content and definitions; now, businesses, non-profits, the public, and legislative entities are much more interested and have taken more active roles in participating in the definitions of our disciplinary areas. The professional organizations are key in terms of the national conversations about our disciplines but equally important are collaborations within states. For example, my WPA counterparts and I in Idaho have created Idaho ENACT (Educators Networking about College—Composition Transitions), a project that brings together high school English teachers and first-year writing faculty from two- and four-year public, postsecondary institutions to develop instructional materials based on emerging research related to the role of prior learning and transfer theories and their implementation in both settings. This group has created an active network model established to sustain the collaborative work of the ENACT participants and to mitigate the challenges presented by our state’s rugged geographic terrain as well as its depressed economy. Sustained professional conversations are vital.

Our scholarship needs to continue to investigate how well common standards work for students and teachers and to document the issues that arise when we teach and assess them. We need to flex our scholarly expertise in these areas to help define what works and what doesn’t, and there are multiple contexts this could be explored given the meta-disciplinary status of writing. Much needs to be done within our own postsecondary writing program administrator fields to look at the ways documents like the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing or the WPA Outcomes Statement work and define the constructs we work with. These scholarly projects can inform the work of common standards at elementary and secondary levels and vice versa. There are many journals related to the teaching of English situated in elementary, secondary, and international contexts, and there are scholarly inquiries related to fields like reading which overlap with writing studies and offer important directions for us. We need to be reading and publishing in those journals.

Finally, we need to heed Duane Roen’s directive to take up the mantle of the public intellectual around issues related to writing. Writing exists in the public and political sphere, and as writers and as writing faculty or administrators, we should be actively shaping these perceptions. There may be ways that you can provide expertise to local school districts about teacher prepa-
ration in assigning writing within the disciplines (take a cohort of your colleagues to make such a partnership); weigh in on state-level decisions seeking public input about how to assess educational standards; or write up and distribute a document about key points to consider in the CCSSI decision making. Write letters to the editors. Get together informally with high school and college teachers of writing to talk about professional issues. WPAs need to be more proactive about seeking out these conversations in ways that align with their work.

The main constant in the US’s educational landscape will be change. More than ever, we need to work intentionally to be part of a coalition that ensures that writing is taught and assessed and teachers are prepared with the most complex and robust frameworks. Given our expertise, we need to actively shape the future of writing for students and teachers.

Works Cited


—. “Should You Trust a Computer to Grade Your Child’s Writing on Common Core Tests?” Washington Post, 5 May 2016.


Diane Kelly-Riley is Associate Professor of English and Associate Dean for Research at the University of Idaho. She is editor of The Journal of Writing Assessment. Her work focuses on writing assessment theory and practice, validity, fairness, and race, and has appeared in Assessing Writing, International Journal of ePortfolio, and several edited collections.
Announcement

The 2017 Georgia International Conference on Information Literacy to be held September 15-16 at the Coastal Georgia Center in Savannah, Georgia

The Georgia International Conference on Information Literacy aims to share new research and best methods related to information and media literacy practice. This two day conference features different workshops, webinars, round table discussions, and presentations on various topics related to how we share, receive, and communicate information. The Georgia International Conference on Information Literacy offers an opportunity to network with peers, as well as, provides information for literacy professionals and others who have an expertise in this field to discuss the practical application of the best practices for developing information literacy skills in K-12 students, postsecondary students, and lifelong learners.

We are inviting university, school and public librarians as well as school teachers and faculty in any discipline. The conference is also open to international scholars and practitioners, students preparing for careers in K-20 teaching, media, or library positions, and anyone who has an interest or passion for information and media literacy.

The conference is proud to announce that the Keynote Speaker this year will be Cheryl E. Ball. Cheryl Ball is the Director of the Digital Publishing Institute for the University Libraries at West Virginia University, and co-principal investigator on a $1m Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant to build an open-source academic publishing platform for print and multimedia scholarship, called Vega.

Registration is now open for the conference and early bird registration discounts are available until August, 25th, 2017. A late registration fee will be implemented after this date. There will also be student registration discounts and single day registration options.

Exhibitor, sponsorship, and advertising opportunities are also available. Exhibitors and sponsors are able to promote their product or business to a diverse group of academic and professional educators who work in the media, library science, and other information and communication fields. Exhibitors and sponsors are entitled to free registration and reduced registration for additional conference attendees. The exhibitor deadline is September 1, 2017.
For more information on the 2017 Georgia International Conference on Information Literacy and instructions on how to register, please visit our conference website at:

academics.georgiasouthern.edu/ce/conferences/infolit/.

For questions regarding exhibitors or sponsorships, registration assistance, or any additional information, please contact Conference Specialist, Leah Edwards, at (912) 478-1821. You may also email infolit@georgiasouthern.edu for information inquiries. For conference updates and news, be sure to follow us on facebook at https://www.facebook.com/GACOIL2017/.

The Georgia International Conference on Information Literacy is jointly hosted by Georgia Southern University and departments including the Division of Continuing Education, Zach S. Henderson Library, College of Business Administration, College of Education, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, and the Department of Writing and Linguistics.
Master’s-Level Study in Rhetoric and Composition at NC State

NC State’s Master of Arts in English offers a concentration in Rhetoric and Composition that provides focused study of writing and literacies, the teaching of writing, and the role of persuasive language in academic disciplines, professional and civic life, and culture at large. The concentration offers a flexible curriculum, a nationally recognized faculty, and an award-winning GTA program.

Our MA program is situated in a vibrant intellectual community that also includes an MS degree in Technical Communication, an interdisciplinary Graduate Certificate in Digital Humanities, and an interdisciplinary PhD in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media. Collaboration among these programs yields a rich mix of faculty and student interests and expertise. MA Rhet/Comp students gain a firm theoretical foundation in both composition and rhetoric and also have opportunities to study such areas of interest as

- Composition research and pedagogy
- Writing and new media
- Experimental and multimodal composing
- Writing across the curriculum
- Rhetorical history and criticism
- Sociolinguistics
- Professional writing
- Scientific and technical communication
- Writing program administration

Faculty in Writing and Rhetoric
- Chris Anson
- Helen Burgess
- Michael Carter
- Huiling Ding
- Casie Fedukovich
- Susan Katz
- Hans Kellner
- Ann Penrose
- Stacey Pigg
- David Rieder
- Jason Swarts
- Douglas Walls

Learn more at http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/graduate/ma/rhetcomp/

NC State. Think and do.
Congratulations to These Award Winners & WPA Scholars!

Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future by Asao Inoue
Best Book Award, CCCC (2017)

The WPA Outcomes Statement—A Decade Later
Edited by Nicholas N. Behm, Gregory R. Glau, Deborah H. Holdstein, Duane Roen, and Edward M. White
Best Book Award, Council of Writing Program Administrators (July, 2015)

GenAdmin: Theorizing WPA Identities in the Twenty-First Century by Colin Charlton, Jonikka Charlton, Tarez Samra Graban, Kathleen J. Ryan, & Amy Ferdinandt Stolley
Best Book Award, Council of Writing Program Administrators (July, 2014)

Mics, Cameras, Symbolic Action: Audio-Visual Rhetoric for Writing Teachers by Bump Halbritter
Distinguished Book Award, Computers and Composition (May, 2014)

New Releases

The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing: Scholarship and Applications edited by Nicholas N. Behm, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, and Duane Roen

Labored: The State(ment) and Future of Work in Composition edited by Randall McClure, Dayna V. Goldstein, and Michael A. Pemberton


www.parlorpress.com