

WPA Travelogue 2018: The Nor Cal–Nevada Regional Affiliate Hosts the CWPA Summer Conference in Sacramento

Shirley Rose, Angela Clark-Oates, and Catherine Gabor

Part 1: Connecting the Region

Shirley Rose (SR): This is the eighth travelogue in a series featuring the writing programs that are led by people who are serving as local hosts for the summer conference. First of all, thanks for your work on the conference in Sacramento, California this upcoming summer, and thanks for talking with me



today. I always like having two different schools to talk to. I imagine the University of San Francisco and California State University Sacramento are very different as institutions in terms of their origins, and their histories, and their historical missions. But, in exploring information about each, I also was struck by similarities. I'm looking forward to the three of us talking together.

Cathy Gabor (CG): What's funny is my very first job straight out of grad school as an assistant professor was at Sac State.

SR: So you really know the differences and similarities then.

CG: Absolutely.

SR: For this first part of our conversation, let's focus on your work as local hosts for the 2018 Council of Writing Program Administrators' 2018 Summer Conference in Sacramento. I think readers will be interested to know a little bit what you have done to prepare for the conference and why you have taken on this work. I'm imagining that you're really busy with preparations for the conference since it is in your place, Angela. Is it actually happening on the California State University Sacramento campus?

Angela Clark-Oates (AC-O): It's not happening on campus because we applied as a regional affiliate, so we researched hotels and accommodations and places we thought would spotlight the region so that it wasn't just focused on Sac State. We, ultimately, chose a hotel and a conference center located downtown. Unfortunately, it's not close to Sacramento State because there aren't very many hotels around campus, and so just in terms of getting around, it would have been more difficult to get people on campus and off campus.

SR: There are so many logistics to consider in planning a conference! What are some ways you are managing the work of planning and preparations for the conference in addition to your usual WPA work?

AC-O: I'm teaching an internship course dedicated to the conference, so it is cross-listed for a graduate and undergraduate, which is just wonderful so far.

SR: That sounds like a really wonderful idea.

AC-O: We're spending the first eight weeks in class because I just thought it was important for them to have some foundational knowledge about the organization and academic conferences. Last week the guiding question was "What is an academic conference?" I believe that only one of them has been to an academic conference before.



SR: This is a great way for them to learn the importance of conferences to scholarly work.

AC-O: Many of the graduate students are new to our graduate program and the undergraduates are all seniors majoring in English. This week we are studying the history of the Council of Writing

Program Administrators, which for the undergraduate was practically their first introduction to our field. We started that conversation last night, and then to understand the relationship between the mission of our organization and the conference itself we are going to meet with five local site chairs. They are going to Skype in on a panel, which will be wonderful. In the coming weeks, we're also going to explore Sacramento as a destination city—Sacramento isn't usually seen as *the* destination city of California. So, I think it will be unique for them to see their city through different eyes and for a different reason. Then we're going to study 4C's as a case study, thinking about how we might create a framework for equitable conference planning. They seem really engaged and enthusiastic about learning the history but then also using that history to help plan the conference.

SR: Starting with the WPA organization's history is a great approach. I'm interested in a little bit of history of the Northern California-Nevada affiliate of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, what are its major activities, and why did the group decide they wanted to host the summer conference?

AC-O: The affiliate is committed to providing professional development opportunities for all the faculty and writing administrators in this area, and they do that by asking one university to host a Northern California affiliate meeting one time per semester. Sacramento State was the host for the fall 2017 meeting. What those meetings look like is that all the business that needs to be taken care of in relation to the affiliate happens in the morning, and so you can imagine the one we hosted at Sacramento State, we focused solely on the CWPA summer conference and the things we

really wanted to achieve and the things we wanted to spotlight about the area and our affiliate. And, then in the afternoon, there is usually a professional development seminar highlighting what the host campus is doing in their writing program. We've been doing a lot of work here at Sac State around value rubrics in written communication and the teaching of writing in the disciplines. We designed a pilot project last year with faculty in different disciplines. We shared that work with the affiliate group and generated a conversation in and around the important work that WPAs do outside their departments to collaborate with groups across campus. The Nor Cal-Nevada Affiliate conference that is being hosted in the spring is actually being hosted down in Monterey at CSU Monterey Bay. Last spring the affiliate piggybacked on Crossroads Conference that was being hosted by University of Nevada Reno. I think typically the one in the spring, again this is based on my very limited experience of being here, is usually at the same time that a conference is going on.

SR: That seems like a really good idea ... meeting concurrently with some other group. Cathy, can you tell us about the history of the Northern Cal-Nevada Affiliate?

CG: Sure. I met Freddy Wiant, who was the former Rhetoric Department chair at USF, at the CWPA, the national conference, a couple summers in a row. I was the WPA at San Jose State at the time. And, we talked one summer and said, you know, we went to an information session about affiliates and the Philadelphia CWPA was hosted by an affiliate and it just was on both of our minds. We talked about trying to start one in Northern California. Finally, after talking about it two summers in a row, we got our act together in 2010 and started it up. We just divvied up the counties of the Bay Area and beyond and made call lists and just cold called the WPAs around the Bay and around Northern California—we know a lot of them—and said, “Hey, we’re going to try this. Do you want to come?” People came to our first meeting and we started sharing our experience. So many of us were just lone rhet-compers in our institutions so it was just talking to our people at first. And then we started to get organized and provide professional development at every meeting and we even began to invite each other to speak at our different campuses outside of the regional meeting as a way to support our colleagues and bring some outside voices into our campuses. The more we did that and felt the benefits of that, we

started talking about taking it bigger and thought about ways we could really continue the professional development bent of our affiliate on a much larger scale and we decided to go ahead and apply to host. Another motivation is that the CWPA conference really hadn't been west of the Rockies in a decade.

SR: What are some of the places the Nor Cal-Nevada affiliate has met since it was started?

CG: Bill Macauley at University of Nevada Reno loves hosting conferences, so Nevada has been a place we've gone a few times. One year, Santa Clara University was having a kind of half day conference on multilingual writing, and we met in the morning and did our business and then we all attended a conference in the afternoon. They had brought in some outside speakers, and it was another overlap area, of course, with writing programs. So, I think the link between our professional development and standing conferences has really pushed us a little bit outside our narrow band of WPA thinking. And then this conference theme "What don't we try this" flows right from it. We can't take credit for that, that was Dominic, but it really matches our affiliate.

SR: What do you want conference attendees to know about your region when they come to the conference and when they leave. You mentioned how the theme of the conference resonates with your affiliate. What else?

AC-O: You know, Shirley, I've been thinking about the question you asked me about the metaphor for my writing program. I think that reflecting on that question leads me to answer this question about what the affiliate hopes the attendees will leave Northern California understanding. The thing about Sacramento is that it sits right on the confluence of two major rivers—the Sacramento River and the American River. This region bridges the huge Sierra mountain range with the Pacific Ocean as well. It is a connecting point because so much of our history is not just tied to the



river—Sacramento got its start on the river—but also with the building of the Central Pacific Railroad. And so, I think that this is important to understand what is unique to Northern California, too, how diverse the region is geographically. It is a place of connection, and I think we can relate that to the work that WPAs do—particularly to what Cathy talked about WPAs in the regional affiliate trying to push ourselves outside our narrow area of expertise or interest to see writing program administration in all its different facets.

SR: Your point about Sacramento—and the entire Northern California-Nevada region—being a place of connections, and likening that to writing programs is very striking, Angela. Thank you!

Part 2: Connecting Jesuit Heritage and 21st Century Technologies at the University of San Francisco

Shirley Rose (SR): Cathy, let's talk about the writing program at University of San Francisco where you are WPA. I did a little browsing on your department website. One of the things that struck me is the motto of the Department of Rhetoric and Language: *eloquentia perfecta* —“excellence in writing and teaching.” There is so much that immediately evoked the Jesuit college context there at USF. But if I didn't know it was at USF, what in your writing program's curriculum and other aspects of the program would signal its institutional location?

Cathy Gabor (CG): I have been at USF for five and a half years, so I can speak to the very recent history of the department. I know some of the institutional history, but I don't know it as someone who has lived through it. In the last five years, our department has done a lot of identity formation and growth, so I think the last five years are pretty significantly different from before I joined the faculty. Most recently we have highlighted *eloquentia perfecta* as a touchstone concept. It has historically been part of Jesuit rhetoric and Jesuit institutions, but it has been a dormant idea in our particular department. I really want to give credit to Cinthia Gannet from Fairfield University, another Jesuit institution, who came to do a multi-day workshop for our faculty helping think through the title of our department, which is specifically Rhetoric and Language.



Just to give a few logistics before I get back to *eloquentia perfecta* as a driving concept: our department is structured so that we house all of the required composition courses in the university (as well as some non-required electives), all of the required public speaking classes for the university as well as all of the

courses that typically go under the rubric of ESL. Here at USF, we use the term AEM—Academic English for Multi-Lingual students. So we were interested in how we could better integrate those three strands, particularly writing and speaking, particularly oral and written rhetoric, and Cinthia helped start us on a journey of delving into the idea of *eloquentia perfecta*. One of the things that many of our faculty do is introduce the term to our students who are initially put off by the idea of *eloquentia perfecta* because they assume it means, “Ugh, I have to be the perfect writer and the perfect speaker in this class.” And when we unpack the term with the students, we help them see that this notion of perfecting is really conceived of as a notion of completing. I know that is fraught term in writing studies as well, but the students really see it as trying one’s best, not achieving perfect eloquence. Embedded in there is Quintilian’s concept of using rhetoric for the good and using the study of rhetoric as a way to identify one’s values and work towards being that good person speaking well or writing well. That has really been instrumental in helping us better integrate, both philosophically and logistically, our writing classes and our speaking classes.

The USF Writing Program nicely fits actually with the theme of the CWPA conference, which is “What if we tried this?” That idea. That question. We have begun piloting integrated classes. As I’m sure you know if you’ve ever served on a general education task force, there are still many hurdles we have to get over to make this all work within the larger system, but we’ve begun piloting writing and speaking courses rather than separate writing courses and speaking courses. So those are some of the things that are energizing our writing program and our department right now that really do connect to that Jesuit idea of *eloquentia perfecta*. At the last CWPA conference in Knoxville, I presented with two part-time faculty

members on what we have been doing in terms of integrating those two strands of our curriculum. We titled it “The Full Rhetoric,” so that’s another phrase that we’re using to try to think about how we can integrate written, spoken, digital, non-verbal rhetoric.

SR: “The Full Rhetoric”—I like that. You said Cinthia Gannet came for a three day workshop? What was the purpose and what was the workshop about?

CG: The purpose was a response to a program review. Several outside reviewers had come to help us with our program review and we’d done internal reflection as well. And one of the main recommendations from the outside reviewers was for us to think more intentionally about integrating what seems like three mini departments within one. Their view from outside was there is so much potential here for cross-pollination. So, given that recommendation, our department applied for a Jesuit pedagogy grant, which is just a small grant—\$5,000—but it is meant to explore ways that explicitly Jesuit ideas can inform pedagogy. We were awarded that grant. We did a number of small workshops, but the big event was to invite Cinthia Gannet who has been doing a lot of scholarship on Jesuit rhetoric and the concept of *eloquentia perfecta* as well as integrating it into Fairfield University’s First Year Writing Program. We wanted to bring her to campus to do a couple of different things. She did do a public talk on her scholarship, which was about the history of Jesuit rhetoric and it was something that people from our department as well as other departments at USF came and attended. That was followed up with workshops that were much more specific to the faculty in our department. In those workshops, she talked through the nitty gritty: Here is what we do in the first week of our writing classes when we have our students first explore the concept of *eloquentia perfecta*. Here are the kinds of faculty development things we did over this many years to get our full and part time faculty prepared to do this. It was very much a hands on, how to workshop. She was kind enough to repeat that logistical workshop to accommodate all the various schedules. In addition to that, we had several informal meals with her where anyone from our department or another department, could just come and chat with her or ask what led her to this area of scholarship or whatever we wanted to ask her. There were three tiers to her visit: the very formal scholarly talk, the how to do this kind of pedagogy and professional

development workshops, and the very informal conversations. That two and half days of having her on campus, I would say, reset our department curriculum committee agenda. And since she came to campus, we on the curriculum committee have been adapting some of the things she did at Fairfield. We're different sized institutions and our writing programs have had different histories, so we're doing things a little differently. But looking at her ideas and some of the scholarship that she has been reading could help us really reshape our curriculum in a meaningful way.

SR: That sounds like a very useful and productive process. You mentioned a program review that came out of an accreditation visit. How did that affect your writing program?

CG: I had just joined the department. The outside reviewers came to campus I believe in October and I had joined the USF faculty at the end of August. There were four outside reviewers: one from composition and rhetoric, and one specifically from oral communication and communication studies, and two who had background in applied linguistics. And, that team of four did a series of interviews with people and reviewed departmental documents and generated a report that came to our department but also was part of the larger university [Western Associations of Schools and Colleges] report. We weren't the only department undergoing this program review, as with WASC, lots of department were doing it.

SR: I think that's typical of an accreditation group—they will ask about the systematic periodic review processes for academic programs. They encourage universities to set things up so that there are regular reviews. So you were going through this as a department?

CG: Right. Alongside many other departments and programs who were all preparing sections of the larger WASC report.

SR: Thank you for delving into that. Let's talk about the broader university as a context for your writing program. On the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences webpage page, there was a statement about USF having a vision of being a "Premier Jesuit Catholic urban university with a global perspective to educate leaders who will fashion a more human and just world." I also

looked at the About the University page and I found some interesting information about place, seeing the university as a platform for the city and the city as a lab for the university, so I was hoping you would talk a little about whether and how your curriculum reflects San Francisco.



CG: Sure, I think both our university and our writing program definitely have a great synergy with the city of San Francisco, and I guess I would even say the spirit of San Francisco. This is the first Jesuit institution I've worked at, and I've been here, as I've said, for five and half years. So, I'm learning more and more about the history of the Jesuit project and like any history, it has its pros and cons, its highlights and its shameful moments. But, I do think that the fact that USF is in San Francisco is as important to its identity as being Jesuit.

SR: That's what I want to hear about.

CG: The motto that you'll hear all over campus and see on mugs and syllabi, etc. is "Change the world from here." And that notion informs a lot of our curriculum. The writing program is undergoing a lot of change as I said and we are trying to recalibrate its focus on this idea of *eloquentia perfecta*. At this moment, there are a lot of things going on at once, and the goal, the hope, the trajectory is to end up with a writing program that feels like it's got a sufficient amount of cross sectional cohesion and a unified mission while still allowing for our diverse faculty to teach to their strengths. I think any writing program would say that's the balance they're trying to seek.

SR: Yes. I like the way you've stated that.

CG: But, I would say, this writing program is really moving from some very prescriptive ideas about what must be in syllabi or what textbook must be used to a project where we really try to unify the classes around

ideas rather than prescribed assignments. So, the idea of having students use rhetorical assignments, spoken or written, to discover the link between rhetoric and social justice is a key component of the curriculum revision. Many syllabi even have assignments that are entitled, “Change the World From Here.” Many, many of our first year writing classes have assignments where students are asked to research some issue of local concern. Again, this isn’t unique to USF but it has been a feature of our writing program under what I’ll call our old model as well as the emerging model, and that remains really important to the vast majority of our faculty.

The university itself is located in a fairly affluent neighborhood within the city of San Francisco, which can lead our students to—particularly our students who live on campus—to feel like they’re in a bubble. And one of the things that our classes as well as lots of other classes across the curriculum do is push students outside of the



university boundary into the city to gather research and to use a lot of local publications as data for their informative speeches or policy proposals or whatever they may be producing for our classes. While many of our students are not from San Francisco, many of them are from California and they do come to our classes with certain things feeling like the norm, certain things that are normal in California don’t necessarily feel like the norm for students across the United States. Now, in particular, and I don’t want to turn this into a political discussion, but California has been maybe moving a little more leftward as lots of the nation has been moving a little more rightward. So, I’ll just give a couple of examples. We have had a statewide ban on plastic for several years now, so the students’ attitude about, let’s say, environmentalism doesn’t feel like, “Oh, this is a new strange thing I’m going to begin thinking about or looking into.” It sort of feels like a given. Of course, you wouldn’t have bags that would harm the environment—that’s the baseline. How can we think of bettering the environment from there? Does that make sense?

SR: Yes it does.

CG: I could give you a litany of social justice legislation from the state of California that has been part of the norm, and you may know that history, but I'm thinking about things that might not be so overtly political but the bag ban is just the perfect example. So, I think that coming to San Francisco, which is a city that has very progressive city laws located in a state that has fairly progressive state laws, puts our students in a position to be thinking, be pushing their thinking even further than maybe some of their counterparts at other Jesuit universities who aren't in that same kind of local environment. In terms of the "Change the world from here" motto and the linking of the local and the global, USF has several living and learning communities that integrate that. The crown jewel in our department is the Martin Baro Program named for an El Salvadorian activist. These students live in the same dorm and take the extended class...I know you know that model.

SR: Yes—a cohort enrollment living/learning community model.

CG: And the focus is on social justice in San Francisco, and naturally the projects and the themes of that class change every year or every other year. They've done all kinds of different things. Most often they are addressing the problem of homelessness in San Francisco, which is a perennial problem here. It's a huge concern, I would say, for all San Franciscans. It is not a theoretical issue for our students. It is a daily encounter for our students. That living and learning community is limited to first year students. They earn not only their writing credit, but also their speaking credit as well as several other general education credits. And from there, there are two sophomore/junior living and learning communities that often take the Martin Baro alumni. One has a focus on social justice in the United States and that course often integrates a spring break service trip to Appalachia. For example, one year the Spring Break trip focused on dental health in poor, rural communities. The other living and learning community a lot of students graduate into is "social justice around the world," and the last few years that course has culminated with a Maymester trip to Cambodia. This year the group will travel to Northern Ireland. Those are a couple of examples of how we try to build upon this idea that you can use rhetoric to have a positive change locally, nationally, and globally.

SR: Are there other things you would want to tell our readers about the writing program? Things you think we should know? If someone were to visit your campus, what would they see or would be going on that would represent the identity of the university? Is there something about the architecture? Something about its physical location within the city?

CG: One is the architecture of the university. The iconic building you can see from many locations in San Francisco is the St. Ignatius Church. Not only is it the largest Jesuit church on this side of the Mississippi, it's on a hill, so it is literally elevated and visible from a lot of different neighborhoods. When the original USF campus was burned in the 1906 earthquake, the Jesuit priests wrote to Rome and asked for funds to rebuild, which they were given. Then, they asked for additional funds to build, and the letter refers to a "small chapel on campus." Rome gave the money, and they built the largest Jesuit church this side of the Mississippi, so the "small chapel" is quite grand. If you were in many neighborhoods in the city and just needed to know "which way would I go to get back to campus?" you can often see that church. It was built between 1910 and 1914 and is very grand and gothic and traditional.

The most recent building on campus, which is just across the quad from the church, is our new Science Center, which is completely sleek and has all kinds of graduated ramps built into it to promote accessibility. The windows are operated through a climate sensor, so if it becomes too warm in the room, rather than kicking on an air conditioning system, the computer that runs the building first opens the windows and attempts to bring the room to optimal temperature through the outside air. It is often foggy in our part of San Francisco and the outside air can cool a room. Then, after a certain amount of time if that is not achieved, it will close the windows and go to the artificial air system. So, it is the clearly new, sleek, ultra modern, operated by technology, which is a huge part of our region's identity, and tries to maximize sustainability. Those two buildings across our quad represent both our Jesuit heritage and our San Francisco identity, if you will.

SR: That's a great image. Do you have a picture of what you were just describing? Something that would help us see that juxtaposition of those

two buildings across the quad? What is your metaphor for your writing program?

CG: I think the best metaphor for the Writing Program ties in with the image of campus I just described: old meets new. The centuries-old Jesuit philosophy of *eloquentia perfecta* is embodied in our Writing Program's vision, but it is enacted in very 21st century ways: in our smart classrooms, in our relationships to the city of San Francisco, which is considered our nation's technology hub. As I am saying this, I am envisioning something like a statue of a Jesuit philosopher holding a laptop.

Part 3: Writing the Urban Forest at Sacramento State University

Shirley Rose (SR): Angela, if people wanted to visit your campus and your writing program at Sacramento State University, is that possible to do while they're in Sacramento? If they wanted to visit your writing program in person, is that complicated?



Angela Clark (AC): It's not complicated. Public transportation is pretty easy to use to navigate Sacramento, so it wouldn't be hard to organize that and get people on campus if they were interested, but we also don't have much happening in our program in the summer. Our writing center is not open during the summer, and we offer only a few courses. I would love for people to come to campus, though, and, originally, as we planned the conference, we thought we were going to be hosting one of the events in the alumni center on campus. But when some of the members of the affiliate came to Sac State for our first meeting and toured the campus and the alumni center, we decided against because of the logistics like trying to charter a bus to take as many people as they wanted to campus. We just chose not to do that ultimately. Getting people to campus using public transportation would be easy to do, though, as the hotel we are staying at isn't that far from campus.

SR: If someone is who is in Sacramento for the conference visited your campus, what would they see? When I looked up the writing program at Sacramento State, the first thing I came to is a flow chart for placement.

AC-O: Sure.

SR: Is that right?

AC-O: It's funny, Shirley. When I first arrived at Sac State, I did not have an administrative position but I saw very quickly that the website was pretty out of date and didn't really provide a lot of information. This has been a project that has slowly come to fruition, but I'm actually in the process of updating it. I know the Writing Program faculty before me had been working to get a new website updated, but it didn't happen before they left their positions. I designed the website with one of our IT specialists back in December. I had another meeting yesterday to think about what kind of content we want, particularly on the homepage—to think about the purpose of the website and our audience—to ask, what do people want to know? And, so, I'm also working with advisors and with my program staff to come up with some content and frequently asked questions and coordinator profiles. So, what you see right now is basically just a placeholder. Because we haven't had a writing program website, I had the office staff actually take down the old webpage because I thought it was better not to have one. So, again, what you're seeing there is just very minimal, and we're in the process of updating that one.

SR: That's great to know, and I will look forward to seeing what you come up with since you're doing it from scratch. I'm asking because it really struck me, gosh, this placement flow chart is kind of stark as an introduction to the program! Let's talk a little bit about the program. How do you see your writing program reflecting its institutional and geographical location within Sac State, and then the location of Sac State within the CSU system, and within the region and the state of California?

AC-O: I want to start off by saying that I think the writing program has been historically and continues to be a place where conversation about writing across campus occurs. So, the faculty that are a part of the program, the tenure-track faculty sit on institutional committees that are

always making policy and recommendations and drafting outcomes that all focus on who we want our students to be as writers when they graduate from Sac State. And, I would say that the outcomes of our first-year writing and even our Comp 2 outcomes have influenced the larger institutional outcomes for one of our general education requirements for writing and communication. I've taken those outcomes that we've drafted for our course, our course specific outcomes, on the road, for lack of a better phrase, and we use them to dialogue about larger institutional rubrics that we want to use to help faculty as they design writing assignments and as they think about what their role is in supporting a student who arrives to campus from a community college or as a freshman and moves through their degree program toward graduation. Who do we want them to be as communicators in the larger world, right? Not just their professions and not just for requirements, but how are they going to navigate their way in the world using reading and writing? So, I think that the writing program has had a lot of influence on that institutional conversation, and I think the writing program faculty by and large are invited to the table pretty often when the institution, Sac State as a university, is having a conversation about that.

SR: It sounds like you have had success in making the writing program's work visible in the institution.

AC-O: I'll also tell you that one of the things that I've tried to work on is building relationships not just on campus, but also with high schools, thinking about where the student is before they come to us. So, for example, the larger California State System has a program called Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum that was designed many years ago to support the work of high school teachers in and around reading and writing. I've gotten involved in that and worked with teachers and administrators across different districts to also help them understand the expectations for their students when they arrive on college campuses. Again, focused on reading and writing. I know I've said this too many times, but I'm fairly new in this position at Sac State. This is my second year as the Writing Program coordinator, so in my limited experience on campus and within the CSU system, I think the curriculum—the first-year writing curriculum and even our Comp 2 curriculum—has been influenced by a social justice framework, and I think that's really important

when you think about our student population, the diversity of our campus, and our fairly less diverse writing program faculty. This framework was in place before I got here. It was evident in my initial conversations with graduate students and writing program faculty, and I think I am building on it as the current writing program coordinator. But, I think it is reflective of this region because Sacramento is considered one of the most integrated and highly diverse cities in the country. And that's something we wanted to promote when we put in our application to host the CWPA conference—that's what's really unique about Sacramento. Maybe it is not as diverse as say, Chicago or New York City or even LA, but it is more culturally integrated. I think that's reflective of our students and our faculty's commitment to meet our students where they are and to understand they are coming from culturally, linguistically, socioeconomically diverse places all around this region. Also, this is reflective of both the students living in the city of Sacramento and those growing up in the suburbs *and* the students from rural areas. So, I think that our faculty and the curriculum they design for their students and the writing assignments are reflective of them being committed to that diversity, honoring that diversity and thinking about writing not just an assignment to get to the next thing. Not writing as preparation for more schooling, but writing as preparation for life.



SR: Tell me more about the kinds of students who attend Sac State. How would you distinguish it from, say, students at other CSU schools? What's the Sac State identity? I was at San Diego State for six years, so I know a little bit about the CSU system. Talk a little bit about Sac State's identity within the CSU system.

AC-O: I won't profess to know a lot yet about the wider CSU system, but I do think what is unique about Sac State is its commitment to the region. Maybe that doesn't really differentiate it from any of the other CSUs, but I think Sac State serves a large region. We have students who go to school at Sac State because it's convenient, its location works for them. But, I also

know that a lot of the students that graduate go back into this very community to build their lives outside of school. And, to me that seems very unique. And I know that our new president has really shown a commitment to honoring, to partnering with the community, for valuing the fact that most of our alumni still stay in this region and are contributing to the private sector and the public and government sectors. I think that's unique about Sac State. Again, I think it is interesting because I was hired with a new president and a new president, as you know, always puts their mark on the identity of the university. The sense I get about what it was like before I got here, and maybe this doesn't answer your question, is that there wasn't a lot of commitment to a Sac State identity from the faculty and maybe not from the students. But, I know one of the commitments I've seen from our new president is to really generate this pride of being a Sac State student, to be "made at Sac State," choosing this university and then choosing to stay in this region and choosing to impact the community in and around Sac State. In some ways I wonder if that won't ultimately lead to kind of a larger identity that moves beyond the region and then influences students to travel here to have that experience. I'm not sure we have that yet. I don't know if I'm saying that just because, again I'm fairly new to the community and to Sac State, or if I'm seeing these cultural shifts in the faculty with the new president and the new provost. I might ask in your experience in academia have you seen that happen? You know, those kind of major identity shifts of universities. It felt like it happened at Arizona State when I was there.

SR: Yes, I would say that's happened actually pretty quickly at ASU. It was underway when I got here in 2009, but it is very well established now. Within the span of 15 years it's gone from a solid regional, state university to a Research 1, very highly ranked, peer institution of Stanford in some respects. Yes, that kind of transformation you describe happens.

AC-O: Sac State is fairly small, too—about 30,000 students.

SR: You said you have some students from rural areas. That makes sense—it is an agricultural region. When you talked about the region in our conversation with Cathy Gabor, that was really striking me, too, because it is not just the city of Sacramento you're drawing from. You're drawing from a larger geographical region—again comparing it to a place like Cal

State LA, which draws from one area of metropolitan Los Angeles, from a region within a city rather than a city within a region. Could you talk a little bit about the mix of the urban and the rural among your student body?

AC-O: Definitely. I think it goes back to what I was talking about a little bit earlier about the writing program faculty, who I feel like I can speak about their commitment to social justice with confidence. You know when I hear faculty talk about *the* Sac State student, and maybe this gets at the question you asked me just a second ago, you know I think that there is this idea that the Sac State student is the first-generation student, the one who maybe has been historically marginalized by institutions of higher learning. I think there is a lot of pride in the faculty that they're working with these students, they are supporting how the student is able to navigate college access. Higher education has addressed and continues to address the issue of getting students to a place they haven't historically been—opening access—but not always how to support students once they arrive at our institutions. I would say that faculty must design curriculum that addresses the sometimes ideological differences between students who have grown up in the more urban areas of Sacramento and the Sacramento metroplex versus those that are driving more than 40 minutes one way to get to campus from rural areas.

SR: What are some of the differences?

AC-O: There are some rural communities between Chico and Sacramento, and I'm sure the folks at Chico State experience some of this as well. We have students that are driving in from the Bay Area as well. That provides a really rich environment for discussing ideas and having conversations about how to respond through writing to what's happening in the larger world. It gives our students this



really unique perspective as long as you can cultivate an environment where students are open enough to listen to different experiences. Maybe one of the challenges of being in such a diverse classroom is making sure, not that everyone has a voice, but that everyone feels comfortable voicing their experience and sharing their story and then having that validated even if it somehow contradicts the experience of another student. We also have a commitment because of the geographical diversity of our students coming from many different parts of the region. We have an equal opportunity program, we have a migrant student program, and again, I think those mechanisms are in place to better support those students who maybe didn't have access to the same types of secondary education in their rural communities as those who attended a high school in the Sac Metroplex. That ties back to the work I was talking about with ERWC then, when we're thinking about that high school to college transition and meeting high school teachers and trying to engage in conversations, those students, or those teachers and administrators also have unique needs that are different than the high school teachers in the Sacramento area.

SR: I'm recalling a conversation we had a while back. You were talking about the decision that was made about CSU schools not having any remedial courses, and how the CSU schools now have a fund they can draw on for grants to prepare for that change. Could we go back to the issue of what it's like to be in a university system? What features do you see in your writing program that are characteristic of being a university in a larger university system?

AC-O: Sure. I think one of the benefits of being part of a larger system is that when you are trying to implement more progressive assessment models or progressive pedagogies, you have other colleagues at other universities to draw on for their expertise and experiences. And, then, collectively, it also creates a way to respond to the centralized system with a unified voice. We have something in the CSU systems called the English Council. I think they're always looking to bring in the comp directors and the other administrative coordinators in a writing program to have a unified front, which is great because that means that most of the time that response to the centralized portion of the larger CSU is based on composition and rhetoric research. In some ways I think that change is easier when it is a collective rather than one person or one campus. I've felt

this way at Sac State sometimes when I'm in a meeting and I'm citing research and I'm only one person versus many. I know when the former WPA at Sac State, Amy Heckathorn, was redesigning the assessment model, moving our writing program away from a remediation model, she actually reached out and worked with other campuses that already had a directed self-placement model happening and had research collected. So I think that is also a benefit, just being able to pull from the experiences of other writing programs.



I think that mark is really apparent in our writing program. Last year, I did a lot of outreach and some professional development opportunities around directed-self placement. I think it was only the second full year that directed self-placement had been implemented and many of our faculty in the writing program had been around

10, 15, 20 years where they knew something much different, so I think it was important to give them opportunities to really think about and engage with scholars and researchers and other teachers who worked in an environment that privileges directed self-placement and student agency and self-efficacy. I reached out to other campuses and put together a panel for our faculty, which was really important because as many differences as each of the campuses have, there are also many similarities. So, I think that the stories and research being shared by faculty and scholars at Fresno State, San Francisco State, or San Jose State resonates with our faculty. It's important that the research and experiences being shared with our faculty occurred at other CSU campuses. It mattered to our faculty. So, again, I think that's really beneficial.

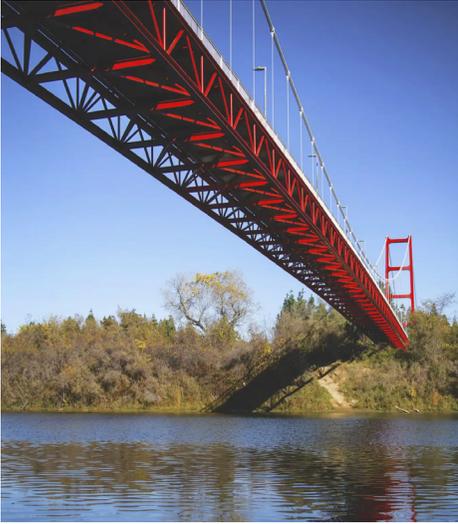
SR: That's very helpful. I want to shift a little bit and talk about the physical campus. I did a bit of reading about the history of Sacramento State on the website. There is a page that shows a photograph of the campus that says, "From an austere landscape, the Sac State campus has developed into a lush urban forest." And it talks about this 300-acre tract that was purchased by the State of California for building Sacramento

State College. But the history, the little historical vignette, begins at 1947, and in higher education terms that is not old. This is not an old university. It's less than 100 years old. Tell me something about what campus looks like that reflects that relative youth or that middle aged-ness.

AC-O: I would say definitely the architecture. You know when I've been on other campuses—I did my undergraduate at the University of Texas. I did my PhD at Arizona State University. I think there was a commitment architecturally to design a campus that maybe was reflective of the environment in which that campus exists. And although the architecture doesn't necessarily reflect the region and although it is a relatively short period of time when you think about other universities, I'll tell you that the lushness they talk about and all the trees on this campus are reflective of the region. I don't know if you know that Sacramento is considered the city of trees. On our state capitol we have a native tree from every county in the state of California. We are actually going to do a scavenger hunt as one of the activities for the conference. So I would say that the Sac State campus is very reflective of that. In the fall, it is magical. It is every color you can possibly imagine. All different kinds of trees. There is an open arboretum space when you enter campus, and the actual campus is kind of tucked up away from the downtown area and it situated between major freeways and the American River, but I would say it is really nestled in its own space. This reflects back to how I answered the question about why the affiliate made the decision to host the conference downtown instead of on our campus.

The close proximity to the river also creates a lot of access to biking and walking and we have this pretty phenomenal bridge—the Guy West Bridge—that is called the mini Golden Gate that crosses the river from campus, so there is a lot of pride taken in the natural beauty of our campus but also a commitment to sustainability because obviously when you live in a region that has experienced so much drought but you're on a campus that has so many trees, you have to be innovative in how you approach that and preserve that. I think it is something unique to the campus. Something that many of the students and the faculty and the staff talk about.

SR: It's interesting that you're mentioning the drought, and I'd like to know more about how you all have experienced that. What's been the



impact on the university? How does that show up in your writing program?

AC-O: Oh, interesting. I'm not sure I can speak to where that is showing up in the curriculum or with the faculty. When I arrived, we experienced two years of pretty solid rain and the snow up in the Sierras was pretty large, and so I think if there had been this sense of dread that had been pervasive across campus, and I'm sure there was, when I arrived, there was this shift away from that to lessening

of anxiety, lessening of restrictions with water across the entire city. I came in at a time where we started to see some of those major shifts. I do know our campus houses the Capitol Public Radio station. Last year, when we were getting a lot of rain and a lot of snow, that was a large focus of one of the local shows—*Insight with Beth Ruyak*. I saw and experienced the conversation more outside of the university when I first arrived through conversations with community members and, again, following the conversation on public radio.

I will tell you what was going on when I got here in the summer, in August of 2015, were sustainability projects. I had mentioned they were trying to use much more sustainable practices, and so outside of our Calaveras Hall, where the writing program is housed and the English department, they were doing a lot of construction in and around these trees, building these areas that when it did rain there was foliage and plants there that would capture and hold the water longer. I saw that happening physically across the campus as well. There is a fountain in front of our library, and I'm not sure I've ever seen it turned on. I'm sure that that has something to do with it. I know I keep mentioning that Sac State has a relatively new president, and he is doing a lot of construction across the campus. Again, I think that is reflective of this identity shift that he is trying to influence on the campus. He is expanding the Union for the students; he's building a new

bio science center. So, I think we're going to start seeing the landscape of Sac State impacted by his vision.

SR: That metaphor of the landscape is an interesting one for describing an institution. The description of the university's physical development as creating a "lush urban forest" in some ways, it seems from what you have said about the institution, also describes a kind of cultural lushness and complexity.

AC-O: I want to mention that Sac State has a Masters in rhetoric and composition. Again, I think that's great in terms of this university and the region that it serves and who has access to those kinds of programs in and around this area as well. The faculty that were here before I got here spent a lot of time over the last 20 years building that program.

SR: That's important to know, if the MA program serves the region, particularly if it serves as a conduit, a pipeline, that prepares writing teachers for area community colleges or area high school teachers are relying on that program to develop their credentials.



I'd also like you to be thinking about ... I always ask the people I interview for the travelogues about their metaphor for their writing program. What metaphor that's maybe indigenous kind of thing for your place, the geography of your place? My example is always the ocotillo, which is not a cactus but a succulent and how it looks like scary sticks if it doesn't get any water, but it is alive. But, then when it does get water, it has there thousands of amazing little flowers on it. And how I see my writing program as being like that—if it gets some resources, if it gets some water, it is beautiful, but it survives without it.



About the Contributors



Shirley K Rose is professor and director of writing programs in the Department of English at Arizona State University. She is a past president of the Council of Writing Program Administrators and is director of the WPA Consultant-Evaluator Service. She regularly teaches graduate courses in writing program administration and has published articles on writing pedagogy and on issues in archival research and practice. With Irwin Weiser, she has edited four collections on the intellectual work of writing program administration, including *The WPA as Researcher*, *The Writing Program Administrator as Theorist*, *Going Public: What Writing Programs Learn from Engagement*, and *The Internationalization of US Writing Programs*.



Angela Clark-Oates is assistant professor of composition and rhetoric and writing programs coordinator in the English department at California State University, Sacramento. Her research interests include multimodal literacy, feminist theory and critical pedagogies, and writing program administration. Her scholarship has been published in the journals *Communication Design Quarterly* and *The Journal of Writing Assessment*. She has also published in the anthologies *The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing: Scholarship and Applications*, *A Fresh Approach to the Common Core State Standards in Research and Writing*, *Working with Faculty Writers*, and the *Rhetorics of Names and Naming*.



Catherine Gabor is associate professor of rhetoric and language and director of the composition program at University of San Francisco (USF). She has been a faculty fellow in the California Campus Compact–Carnegie Foundation Service Learning for Political Engagement Program, and she recently won the Teaching with Technology Innovation Award at USF. Her professional interests are community-based learning, digital authorship, and the scholarship of administration. Her work appears in the *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, the *Journal of Basic Writing*, *Reflections: Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy*, and in several edited collections. In her spare time, she enjoys trail running and creating crossword puzzles.

Photo Credits

Part I

1. Sacramento Skyline 069-3-9997, courtesy of Visit Sacramento
2. Arboretum, courtesy of Sacramento State University
3. Main Campus, courtesy of Sacramento State University

Part II

All photos courtesy of the University of San Francisco

Part III

1. Fall Beauty, courtesy of Sacramento State University
2. Calaveras Hall: Department of English, courtesy of Sacramento State University
3. Spring Bloom in the Kadema Hall Courtyard, courtesy of Sacramento State University
4. Fall Beauty: College of Arts and Letters in Mariposa Hall, courtesy of Sacramento State University
5. Guy West Bridge, courtesy of Sacramento State University
6. The Mural “La Cultura” Painted on Lassen Hall by Ed Rivera, courtesy of Sacramento State University