

Aspen and Honeysuckle: How Faculty Development for Teaching Writing Grows (Interview with Jessie Moore and Chris Anson)

Shirley K Rose

Shirley Rose [SR]: Chris and Jessie, thank you so much for taking time to talk with me about hosting the upcoming CWPA Summer Conference in Raleigh, North Carolina, on behalf of the Carolinas WPA regional affiliate organization and your respective home institutions, North Carolina State University and Elon University. This interview is the sixth in a series *WPA: Writing Program Administration* has devoted to conversations about the 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 appreciate this chance to learn more about the Carolinas WPA and about the writing programs at your universities. I was surprised to learn that the Carolinas WPA, a regional affiliate of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, has two meetings a year. What happens at these meetings that makes WPAs from all over North and South Carolina willing, able, and eager to spend time together?

Chris Anson [CA]: Well, I know, Jessie is maybe a little more involved in the Carolinas WPA Affiliate than I am. I've done a couple of things for the group, but not very recently. But, I'll just tell you a little bit about one of the meetings. Jessie, it still takes place at Wildacres, right?

Jessie Moore [JM]: Yes, it does.

CA: Wildacres is a retreat center in a place called Little Switzerland, North Carolina, and it's up in the Blue Ridge Mountains. It's pretty isolated, with a whole bunch of switchbacks on the way there. The setting is stunning. Absolutely beautiful. The retreat center has commu-

nal dining in a beautiful dining hall area, and accommodations are somewhere between a dorm and a hotel. There is very limited access to technology. There is a phone booth because the cell phone connection can be a little bit dodgy at times. And the Internet, unless they've changed it, is of the sort that when they run out of bandwidth, they've run out. It is isolated. The whole idea is that you'll spend time with people there. There are some meeting rooms. There is a really comfortable lodge with a huge fireplace and overstuffed chairs.

The Wildacres retreat center was used many years ago by UNC Charlotte as a retreat to support their writing across the curriculum efforts. That use eventually fizzled out, but then the site was picked up by the Carolinas WPA, as the site where the once-a-year meetings should take place. Jessie, would we consider that the main meeting?

JM: Not necessarily the main meeting, but the September meeting.

CA: The September meeting, right. So, that's one of the contexts where WPAs get together. We've had people from other states, who were not part of the Carolinas, join. It's a great place to have meetings and presentations. There is a bigger venue that's like a little auditorium. And it's also a great place for people just to mingle. There are always activities in the evening.

SR: Are you saying that you have a sense that the setting itself for that September meeting is part of the draw of the Carolina WPA meetings?

JM: Absolutely.

CA: It's part of the draw, but it's also part of what happens. The setting and the sort of mini-conference are really closely connected because the setting allows for the kind of talk and sharing that happens at any conference but especially because you're all together. You're in a beautiful setting. It's designed to be a retreat center where there is nowhere else to go. You have to drive down the mountain to get anywhere near civilization, so you're there with all the other people just sharing and communing. It's a really special place.

SR: Jessie, could you talk a little bit about some of the specific activities or thematic emphases— either a recent one or the one that is coming up—so I can get an idea of what kind of things happen?

JM: The board explicitly tries to make the September meeting at Wildacres very retreat-oriented; so one year, I think it was probably two or three years ago, we invited Dave Blakesley to come up from Clemson in South Carolina and offer strategies for publishing about writing program research. We organized the day so that after his opening keynote, people had time to write; they had time to get feedback; they had time to meet one-on-one with Dave—time to work together,

time to work individually, time to get feedback from someone who has expertise. And there was downtime as well—time to really enjoy the hiking trails, to socialize with other WPAs. There is a canteen onsite, so we always bring food and wine and beer and sodas so that folks can just mingle and enjoy each other's company. But the canteen is also a space where the conversations continue into the evening.

John Warner was our guest last year, and the focus topic was looking at some of the working conditions within our field and working together to think about how at our own institutions we could make small changes or work towards larger changes. We had one a couple years ago that was on grants and finding and applying for grant opportunities. We had one on assessment. But, again, all of these are set up with the idea that there is time to learn some new strategies, time to put them into practice, time to get feedback, and then downtime to rejuvenate as well.

SR: Those sound like great programs. They are filling a need thematically, but also they offer a chance to spend time with other people who have the same issues and can also help you not just problem solve but maybe be part of your solution. That sounds great. Tell me what typically happens at the other meeting that you have each year?

JM: The Meeting in the Middle is held each February except for the occasional times when snow interrupts the plans, and we have to postpone until May. It is usually held in February as the chronological meeting in the middle between the September retreats but also the geographic meeting in the middle between North Carolina and South Carolina. We meet at the UNC Charlotte Center City Building, which is a great space. It always seems a little underutilized, but it's got really nice and flexible classroom spaces. It has a library outpost, and then it always has things like art exhibits as well. It's a space where what we do is a bit more focused. We are only together for a day. Typically, in the morning we will have a presentation—whether it is on a new advancement in the field, a new issue that has come up, or something that there is local expertise on to share. Then in the afternoon, we do one of two things: Some years we have poster sessions where people can share research in progress and get feedback on it. Some years we have discussion leaders where people come with questions that they're working through and share how they've approached those questions or challenges or opportunities so far and then open up and facilitate discussion in small groups about those topics. So, it is still very much centered on community. For both of these events, we try to elicit expertise or draw on expertise from within the Carolinas. The Meet-

ing in the Middle serves a couple purposes. It is the touch point in the middle of the year; it is the middle of the academic year, bringing us together as a group but also trying to help us work through issues we're facing. And, it is a space where it's a little easier to bring graduate students and even undergraduates. Graduate students also come to the September conference at Wildacres, but because Meeting in the Middle is so short, it is just a day, it is easier for undergraduates for instance to attend.

SR: I'm fascinated with the ways you're describing that these spaces contribute to the substance. They structure what you're doing, and they also contribute to the content and the substance of the meetings.

CA: Although we cover South and North Carolina, North Carolina has a large, many-campus state system. So even though we're all doing somewhat different things across our campuses, we're all part of the same system, and therefore we're sometimes talking about issues that are coming from the system office, which is in Chapel Hill. Seventeen campuses are organized under the UNC System, not including many community colleges that are also state supported. So I think people crave the opportunity to get together with other UNC System colleagues and talk. But, then we also have so many other universities such as Elon and Duke and others that also participate.

JM: When the organization started, Meg Morgan and Marsha Lee-Baker started it as a gathering of members of the UNC System, but at the point that the affiliate submitted its proposal for affiliate status, Elon had signed on as an initial member outside of the system, and there were a lot of shared interests and challenges and opportunities even beyond the state system.

SR: There have been and currently are numerous CWPA affiliate organizations. Some are regional, like the Carolinas WPA, and some have been organized around similarities of institutional type. I know for a while there was a discussion of an affiliate for Jesuit schools. How does the Carolinas WPA reflect the geographical region that you are all from? What makes it the Carolinas WPA?

JM: I think part of it is drawing from the systems, but we're very attentive to the regional expertise and trying to build that local network. A couple board members were working last week on trying to fill in some blanks on a regional directory of WPAs in North Carolina and South Carolina, and one of the things that we're feeling is that certainly the WPAs who are in state systems really need that support structure of being able to touch base with other WPAs in the system and see what's happening, how they are applying different policies, how they're being

impacted by different state policies but then also recognizing that there is expertise within the region that we can draw on when we have questions, when we need an outside consultant, those kinds of things, so trying to look to the expertise that is developing within the two Carolinas and tap that and showcase it and really celebrate it.

SR: That makes a lot of sense.

CA: I think there was a strong orientation, as Jessie pointed out, toward North Carolina, and then I don't know why we didn't look to Virginia, but my sense is there are other things going on in that area. We didn't want to go too far geographically.

JM: With our Meeting in the Middle, part of the reason we meet in Charlotte is that it is a location that pretty much anywhere you are in North Carolina or South Carolina, it is not more than a four-hour drive. While the September meeting has been at Wildacres for several years, the organization experimented with alternating between Wildacres and a coastal location in South Carolina, and the South Carolina options were a little too expensive and a little too restrictive, so we've ended up coming back consistently to Wildacres.

SR: The 2016 CWPA summer conference theme, *Engaging Multiple Perspectives in and about Writing Program Administration*, seems very well suited to a conference that is hosted by two different universities and a regional affiliate WPA organization. How does that conference theme reflect values and aspirations of your home institutions and of the Carolinas WPAs?

JM: I think for me speaking in terms of Elon, and also I think in terms of Carolinas WPA the multiple perspectives resonates because in Carolinas WPA, we've worked to be sure that we're inclusive of all types of writing programs. We certainly have first-year writing programs represented and writing centers and writing across the curriculum or writing in the disciplines, but then we also have things like writing majors and writing minors. So, serving as a reminder that those are additional types of writing program administrations that can be represented in our conversations as WPAs. They may not have all of the same questions and same challenges, but they do have some carry over, some overlap. Inclusivity has been important to Carolinas WPA and also reflective of Elon's writing programs. The folks that have the longest history in the Elon writing programs have moved across the different programs in the institution. They've picked up multiple perspectives along the way, but then those multiple perspectives have also informed how they've mentored junior WPAs at the institution.

- SR: That seems really important, Jessie. It does seem important, how you're characterizing the people at Elon as having had leadership roles in different writing programs, different parts of the program, so that they know what the issues are, and there is some shared disciplinary expertise.
- JM: Absolutely. Just as a couple quick examples. Tim Peebles was hired here to work on WAC and the writing center, and he's since moved into upper level administration, but he certainly still draws on that WAC and writing center experience and worked with others here to start our professional writing and rhetoric concentration. My colleague Paula Rosinski was the first-year writing program coordinator when I came, and she rotated into the writing center and, most recently, she's been identified as the Writing Across the University director.
- SR: Chris, what would you add about the Carolinas WPA and your own institution, North Carolina State University, reflecting the values expressed in the conference theme?
- CA: I was going to echo what Jessie said about the CWPA and the universities in the region because they are so different. We have big flagships, we have mid-size universities, private universities. We have small liberal arts colleges like Davidson. We have a number of HBCUs, some of them state supported like NCA&T, others private like Bennett College, which is a small women's college in Greensboro. Mid-size regional campuses are almost like flagships. They've grown so much, like UNC Charlotte. So I think there is a great range of writing programs represented in all these different campuses. And of course, the ones in South Carolina, such as Clemson. We don't have as much community college involvement as any of us would like. We have a huge community college system here with a range of focuses. I would say just briefly about that theme that the NC State writing program tries to mirror the emphasis on writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines. It's always looking outward at other contexts. The actual pedagogy or the nature of the curriculum in the first-year writing program is WAC-oriented, and the program that I direct works with faculty across the whole university on both writing and oral communication. Our College of Humanities and Social Sciences is more likely to be reflective about writing, yet we have other colleges where there is a strong emphasis on preparing students for the kinds of work that they'll be doing. So there is a diverse set of interests in the way writing should work. It goes with that theme effectively.
- SR: My next few questions are specific to each of your institutions, so I'm going to start with Jessie, and Chris, if you don't mind my focusing

on Jessie, maybe chip in with a question of your own for her or any comment that you want to make, but we'll have the focus on Elon and then move to NC State.

Jessie, in my research about Elon, I found that Elon was named one of the nation's top three universities for community service in President Bush's inaugural higher education service honor roll. How are Elon's writing programs engaged in meeting the university's commitment to community service?

JM: That's a great question. The levels of involvement have varied in different years, but a couple things that have been consistent: Our professional writing and rhetoric concentration in the English major and our professional writing studies minor both routinely include service learning courses. Those are actually designated courses that fulfill an experiential learning requirement for students, but students in those courses end up partnering with local agencies and doing writing projects in collaboration with those agencies. They've done things like research for a conservators' center that's near campus, figuring out what was bringing people back, what kinds of things would inspire people to make donations, doing research on what sort of things people would be willing to buy in a gift shop, those types of things, and then making recommendations, and even creating some books about the conservators' center for the organization to sell in their gift store. That's just one example, but we have a lot of those types of course-based partnerships with community partners that contribute to that service hour count but also bring it back to the learning outcomes that are associated with the classes as well. The other example I have is that the writing center is very committed to offering its services to the local community, and that can take the form of community members coming in with resumes or other documents that they were hoping to get feedback on. Writing Center consultants also visit local elementary schools to offer writing workshop-type programs in the schools, both the one that is literally a block away from the university and ones that are in other parts of the larger Alamance-Burlington area.

SR: That leads me into the next question—at least I'm seeing a connection. How do Elon University and its writing programs reflect the regional location? I'm asking a question about place.

JM: It took me a while to think about how I wanted to answer that question because on one hand if you walk on to Elon's campus, it is an officially recognized botanical garden. It's a gorgeous campus, but that beauty itself does not necessarily set it apart from our peer and aspirant institutions. It's what we do with our spaces that helps anchor us

in North Carolina and some of the community projects that we do through service learning. But then we also as a campus have made a commitment to trying to break down the town-gown division, so we have for instance a downtown space that we use for some K-12 education programs and volunteer opportunities at the library and other things like that. We're trying to bridge beyond our campus into spaces that are town spaces that town members want to become thriving areas. We're thinking about what needs we can address in those spaces. We also have a service-learning center called the Kernodle Center for Service Learning. Students take responsibility for being volunteer leads with different organizations within the community. I'm not going to remember all of the sites, but Boys and Girls Club is one. So, these students figure out, in collaboration with the community partner, what the volunteer needs are there and then work to get volunteers from campus to the organization programs. There's a lot of attention to not just going out and doing what we think is needed but working in collaboration with our community partners to figure out what their needs are and to negotiate which of those needs we can meet and to admit which ones we can't necessarily meet at this time but that we can keep in mind as we are moving forward with other courses and other programs.

The other thing that I was thinking about is a more physical thing and also a cultural thing. You would know that you're at Elon because there are colonnades on lots of the buildings, so it's a very Elon look. You could sit someone down on several different parts of campus and they would know that it was part of Elon.

SR: There's an architectural motif that is repeated in all of the buildings?

JM: Yes. Lots of red brick, lots of red brick pathways in addition to the red brick in the buildings. And then there are colonnades connecting a lot of the buildings and neighborhoods. My office, for instance, is in the Academic Pavilion neighborhood, and there are, let's see, six pavilions and an anchor building where you could walk from building to building to building under the colonnades and never have to go outside the colonnades.

SR: What's the reason for that? Is that an attempt to invoke a particular feel or identity for the school?

JM: Part of it is. The campus had a fire in 1923, and it destroyed all of the campus except, if I remember correctly, one building, and so the buildings that have been constructed since then really emulate that surviving building and carry that architectural look across campus. But then there is also the practical reason that, in the summer it gets

really hot, so the colonnades that connect the buildings offer some shade if you're walking from building to building. When we have rain, they can also offer some cover if you're walking among the buildings.

SR: Elon was founded, I read, as a Christian college in the late 19th century. Do you see any of those origins still evident?

JM: We do a bit. The Christian Church that was the founding organization later became part of the United Church of Christ, and we ended our formal affiliation with the United Church of Christ, I think, about three or four years ago, but we in our mission still talk about embracing the founders' vision of an academic community that transforms mind, body, and spirit and encourages freedom of thought and liberty of conscious. We have become more inclusive and encompassing in how we see that nurtured spirit but—the mind, body, and spirit—we haven't lost that spirit piece. Now it's supported through things like a multi-faith center that hosts both multi-faith and inter-faith events. We also have some non-denominational activities that focus on spirituality and wellness and well-being, so that piece is still evident. And then one way that I think is a little surprising to new faculty is we still have an invocation at the start of each faculty meeting, and if you go to formal gatherings in the evening on campus, there is often an invocation at the start of those as well. It's become much more multi-faith in its representation, but there's still a tradition on our campus.

SR: My next question is about you. You're currently the Associate Director for the Center for Engaged Learning. Having worked with you at Purdue during your PhD program and having seen your work as a mentor for new teachers of writing, I'm not surprised that you're now providing leadership for that center. What was the path that led you to that role?

JM: When I was in my second year here, I temporarily filled in as the writing program administrator for the first-year writing program, and within the next year that became a permanent position in as much as any of our positions are permanent. I held that role for about five years, and one of the things that I enjoyed in that role was that, in addition to handling a lot of the traditional administrative tasks that we think of in writing programs, I had a lot of flexibility over how I approached faculty development, and I had a fair amount of buy-in for faculty development. So, I wanted in that space to push the envelope a little bit and invite my colleagues, many of whom are trained in literature or trained in creative writing or other areas, to engage in some of the programmatic research and assessment research as a way to help them learn more about the field and about how to teach first-year writ-

ing. We had two research projects that worked pretty well in terms of both meeting the goal of engaging colleagues in the work of the writing program but also helping develop local data that could address questions about why we do things the way we do or why we would recommend certain practices for the writing program. That experience led to discussions about what would a larger research project look like that built on that idea of collaborative research, and eventually—with Tim Peeples and Peter Felten—we came up with the concept of the Elon Research Seminar on Writing Transfer, considering the question of transfer, which of course we also invited Chris to be a fellow seminar leader for. That work then gave me experience working with multi-institutional teams and providing leadership on scholarship of teaching and learning projects that moved beyond a single institution. Because of the success of that experience, we wanted as an institution to pursue additional research on high-impact pedagogies and engaged learning. Knowing that we are well known for students' opportunities to participate in high-impact pedagogies, we wanted to contribute more to research about them, and so that opened up an opportunity for me to step into the leadership role at the Center for Engaged Learning where that's my primary responsibility—facilitating, guiding, and providing leadership for these multi-institutional research projects.

SR: I see how that is very connected to your work with the Carolinas WPAs, too, with the cross-institutional networking involved.

JM: Absolutely.

SR: One last question for you, Jessie. I have a metaphor for the program I direct, which is the writing program here at Arizona State University, and that metaphor is the ocotillo. I don't know if you've ever seen one, but it grows very tall. It is a plant that is native to the desert Southwest, and it can survive on very little water. When it has to do that, it is straggly and dead looking. It just looks like sticks. But, when it gets water, it has thousands of tiny leaves on each branch and bright red flowers at the tips. It's stunning. I think of my writing program as the same. We can get by, we can survive on really minimal resources, though we will appear to be dead, and we will be scary looking. However, when we get the resources we need, we can be stunning and can do amazing things. Do you have a metaphor for the Center for Engaged Learning, which you direct?

JM: I tend to think of it like a grove of aspen trees, and it is not so much just what you see on the surface with the cluster of aspen together but what's happening underneath where you've got the roots creating

a rhizomatic structure. Our center is hosting its fifth research seminar this summer; we've got several clusters of aspen groves scattered around and about where we are fostering strong connections around their topics, but then we are also the root system connecting each of those, so you can't really tell where one ends and one begins. It is both our research programs and the way that they are linked but also the network of people who are involved and how they become linked.

SR: That's a very nice metaphor.

JM: Thank you, I like yours.

SR: Thank you, Jessie. I'm going to move to questions for Chris. If you think of more you want to say, jump in. If you think of questions you have for Chris or comments you want to make on his responses, please feel free to do that.

Chris, most academics are aware of the significance of the Research Triangle that is made up of the University of North Carolina, Duke University, and North Carolina State University and the influence and outcomes that that collaboration, which started in the 1950s has had. How has NC State's participation in the Research Triangle influenced its culture of writing and writing instruction?

CA: In the middle of that triangle of universities is what's called the Research Triangle Park, and that consists of 170 mostly research and development companies that are heavily involved in research in all sorts of high tech areas. There is an EPA facility there. The location was, as you pointed out, set up very wisely, given what's happened to other industries in the state, such as tobacco and furniture making. I think that's had a big influence because many students want to stay in the state. In turn, the state wants students who are educated here to stay here and then put all their new knowledge to work bettering the state. I think we're considered a very high-powered research area, and that works well in tandem with the goals and mission of NC State University—all the universities for that matter—but especially NC State because it's got such strong ties as a land grant to the state itself, with major agricultural programs and high-tech majors. We've seen a lot of collaboration, not only among the universities, but especially between the universities and private businesses and corporations and research and development companies in the area that are engaged in nanotechnology and pharmaceuticals and other kinds of research. The other thing I might mention is that North Carolina State created a second campus that's very close to the main campus. It's less than a mile and was supposed to be connected with a monorail that has yet to be built. It's called the Centennial Campus, and it's a col-

laboration between NC State University, the state of North Carolina, and private industries. The industries have been putting up money to build research facilities on this land. Alongside those and mixed into them are NC State University buildings. So graduate students will go and work with people in these industries, and the industry people will work with faculty. The whole idea is to get collaboration going between these obviously very educated, skilled researchers on the campus and these very educated and skilled researchers in industry, which makes the level of PhDs in the Triangle among the highest in the US. It's a very smart area because so many people have advanced degrees in order to work in these industries.

SR: Yes. I can see that.

CA: I think NC State is in a good position to work alongside people who are innovating and developing new ideas and products. Because the state likes students to go work elsewhere in the state, I think we at NC State become feeders to those industries. When we talk to the people in area companies, they tell us over and over again that even more than content knowledge, they want three things: They want good writing skills, they want good oral communication skills, and they want good skills in teamwork because everybody works in teams. In a lot of ways, that drives the university's focus on communication. They find it so important that we have to hear that message, and I think people in other departments and other colleges hear it as well, so that has made our lives a little bit easier. In my life as a WAC director, it's not hard for me to convince faculty elsewhere of the importance of these abilities because everybody that they're connected to is saying they want them.

SR: I'm going to say back what I think I'm hearing from you. You're saying that because there are these companies—the Research Triangle Park and the Centennial Campus, which is like an incubator for these companies—the geographical location reflects how closely connected these groups are with the university as we might usually think of it, that is as just faculty and students—faculty and students doing research. Those close connections mean that the faculty are very aware of what the work place is really requiring.

CA: Yes, it's what the students in those majors are going to be doing if they want to work in these industries. You know, not all of them want to go away, far away. There are others who are not sure if they are going to go to grad school or do other things. There is a strong emphasis on the relationship between the research that goes on, particularly in

the Triangle, and what we're doing with the students. As I said, that comes back to influence us in terms of the emphasis on writing.

SR: You anticipated this question a little bit, but I'm going to go ahead and ask it because I want to see what more you might have to say. NC State is a land grant institution. Do you think the original values that contributed to the establishment of the land grant colleges and universities in the 19th century are evident in the way the campus Writing and Speaking Program has and is developing in the 21st century? I think there is maybe a missing middle in there about whether the land grant mission is still central to NC State and how your program may embody that.

CA: I think the first part of that is yes, especially in the agricultural areas and maybe in the College of Textiles, which is highly ranked, and this has been a major area for the development of the textiles industry. But now it's all extraordinarily high tech. You know, it's textiles chemistry. It's not weaving and looms and all that. It's NASA space suits, bacteria-free socks.

SR: Invisibility cloaks [laughter].

CA: All that kind of stuff. It's very high tech. So I think it's morphed a lot. It's developed and changed over the years. But I think there is still a strong emphasis, at NC State maybe more than the other UNC campuses, on the relationship between what we're doing and what the state's needs are, particularly felt in the area of agricultural research, textiles, engineering, and some other areas. The thing that you should know about the UNC System is that the system office doesn't like duplication of effort. So if you look at UNC Chapel Hill, our sister campus, you'll see that they have a law school. We don't. They have a medical school. We have a highly-ranked vet school. We do engineering. They don't. We're a special university, and they're a special university. That's true for our Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media PhD, which is just a few years old. When we created that, we could not create a typical rhet-comp program. It had to be something that did not exist elsewhere. Because we're a high tech institution, we thought the digital media component would serve those interests well, and it has. I think those values are still there; they've just developed along new lines.

SR: That makes a lot of sense related to writing programs. If WPA summer conference attendees were to visit the campus of North Carolina State University, which from the map looks like it is just a few miles from the conference hotel, maybe even walking distance, what would you recommend that they see, other than your office or offices related

to Writing Programs? What would you recommend that they see that would help them understand the ways in which the university and its writing programs are culturally located?

CA: I think they should go to the Centennial Campus and look at the new library there, the Hunt Library. It was built for that part of the campus, and it's perhaps the most futuristic library in the world. It's stunning. Little kids get bused in from the schools just to see it. Architecturally, it's striking, and then once you're inside, it's compelling. Completely robotically controlled, so—and I don't know if I like this that much—you never have to be in a stack. The stacks are all there, and they go up several stories, and you can watch books being retrieved by robotic mechanisms.

JM: It's a little hard to browse the stacks.

CA: They have a browsing system on the computer that shows what else is contiguous. I'm not sure if that satisfies my need to walk around and pull books off the shelf, but it's a really amazing building, and it's worth visiting.

SR: How far away from the hotel is that?

CA: I'd say it is a couple of miles, not walking distance, but it's not too far.

JM: There is a good bus system.

SR: I want to ask this question that is about you. We've known each other since 1984, and that's most of my academic career, but we got to know each other a little better during the years that we were going through the presidential rotation for WPA, which of course involves conference planning. How has planning a WPA summer conference as a local host been different from planning for a conference as a WPA president?

CA: For me, the big difference is that I'm not working on the content of the program. Susan [Miller-Cochran] as CWPA President is in charge of putting together the conference itself. So this represents a real change for me because as president, I was not worrying about the local arrangements. And that's what Jessie and I are now working on. It's really a pleasure in a lot of ways to think about people's experiences beyond what will happen in the hallways and rooms of the conference. What else is around? What is in Raleigh? What can we do to highlight what is here and available? And that's been really fun to work on with the help, of course, of many other people, including Jessie who has been our lead person.

SR: That's part of what I want to be bringing out in this travelogue. What do you want people who come for the conference to have an experience of so that they understand place?

JM: If I can jump in really quick on that, one of the things that Chris has been taking the lead on with graduate students at NC State is the Saturday social. They came up with the idea of having a North Carolina barbeque competition of sorts, so folks can see and taste the difference between eastern style and western style North Carolina barbeque.

SR: That sounds great. I have one last question for you, Chris. What is your metaphor for your writing program?

CA: To continue with the plant metaphors, I think I would have to say the honeysuckle, and I'll tell you why. First of all, I think, because I direct a writing across the curriculum program or writing and speaking across the curriculum program, I'm always hopeful that what we do kind of creeps into and entwines different programs and curriculums here. So that's one thing—honeysuckle creeps around and gets into places. The second thing is, it's interesting because it kind of grows vertically as well as horizontally, and we're finding ourselves moving not just across the curriculum but into its upper reaches. Increasingly, there are calls for more attention to graduate education; the honeysuckle goes up as well as out, and that's a suitable metaphor for how we're looking into the highest levels of the major and maybe graduate education. Originally I was thinking of kudzu, but that tends to smother what it covers and choke it out. The honeysuckle has tendrils that move in, but they don't take over. They don't dominate what they're moving into, and that's very important for us because we don't want to smother what people do. We want to provide them with some support and then let it grow from there—adorn it but also put down a few roots. Honeysuckle smells sweet. I hope that we leave something behind that is attractive. I think that if you really wanted to extend the metaphor, it also attracts things like hummingbirds and bees, and those become propagators. Hummingbirds help propagate more honeysuckles, so the whole environment of them leads to the spread of the ideas about writing and speaking.

SR: That's great.

CA: And also for the first-year writing program because that's also a writing across the curriculum-oriented program.

SR: Do you have other things you want to say?

JM: It's been a fun opportunity to collaborate with another institution and with the Carolinas WPA so that we can take advantage of regional expertise. On the website, we're going to be adding pages on things to do not only in Raleigh but in the Carolinas, and that kind of addition would be harder to do without that state expertise.

- CA: Maybe also, just to add to that the notion of diversity topographically, that if people wanted to do more here, if they go west, they're going to be in the Blue Ridge and from there into the Smokies. If they go east, they can be down in Wilmington, where there are some barrier islands, or they can go to the Outer Banks. If they like golf, they can go to Pinehurst. There is a lot of diversity topographically for vacations in the area.
- SR: One last question that I know WPA journal readers and summer conference attendees have: In this past March (2016), the North Carolina state legislature passed House Bill 2 rescinding all local LGBT-inclusive nondiscrimination policies throughout the state. By the time this interview is published, the law may have been struck down; but at this time, what are your plans for providing information about the situation and supporting any activist work in which conference attendees might want to participate?
- JM: We plan to invite local LGBTQIA groups to share materials and resources at an exhibit table, we'll host the Workshop dinner at a restaurant that is on the Safe Bathrooms list, and we'll facilitate an opportunity for civic action for participants seeking a way to engage more extensively in supporting the local and disciplinary LGBTQIA community. We're following the lawsuits and corporate responses carefully so that we can continue to adjust our plans as we move forward; we hope CWPA members will join us in North Carolina to participate in the existing conference traditions and also to join us in civic action in support of our LGBTQIA colleagues and friends.
- SR: Thank you to both of you for all you are doing to thoughtfully address this issue as the situation evolves and to keep CWPA members informed about plans for action at the conference as they develop over the next few months. And thanks for talking with me about writing programs at your institutions and about the Carolinas WPA.
- JM: Thank you.
- CA: Thank you.