

*Plenary*

## **Intersections of Privilege and Access: Writing Programs, Disciplinary Knowledge, and the Shape of a Field**

Joanne Baird Giordano and Holly Hassel

The issues we are interested in addressing in this plenary are focused on educational access, retention, and success of students, and the role that that writing programs—particularly first-year writing—play in what we see as the core work of our field. Briefly, we want to discuss our backgrounds to provide a context for our perspectives on privilege and access in higher education and in writing programs. We first met and worked together at the University of Wisconsin–Marathon County, an open-admissions, two-year campus in central Wisconsin. It was part of a larger institution (the University of Wisconsin Colleges) that was comprised of 13 small, two-year campuses and an online program spread across the state with a shared curriculum, academic departments, governance structure, and administration.

Our two-year institution was the third largest in the state in terms of student enrollment but received a disproportionately small percentage of state funding in comparison to other institutions, and the four-year comprehensives received less funding in comparison to the flagship university. Most of our two-year campuses served communities with low degree attainment rates. For the entire time that we worked in Wisconsin, our institution operated under financial constraints that shaped the teaching and learning environment for students and instructors in our writing program and limited the academic support that campuses provided. For example, there was no public funding for basic skills courses and tutoring, so tuition revenue from our developmental reading, writing, and ESL courses had to pay for themselves while also funding writing centers. Some of our campuses were unable to fund writing centers at all or provide peer tutoring guided by professionals with disciplinary expertise. All of our statewide academic departments together shared a single part-time administrative assis-

tant. We were used to making do with very few resources and completing tasks for ourselves that might be assigned to an administrative staff member at an institution with more resources. Despite these challenges, we were able to work with colleagues in our department to build a writing program that received national awards for program excellence from CCCC and the Two-Year College English Association.

Over the last decade, our already under-resourced institution faced a series of austerity measures that resulted in its demise. With the election of Governor Scott Walker and a state-level agenda constricting and consolidating higher education, a series of legislative efforts resulted in reductions to benefits and salary for public employees, stripped public unions of their legal recognition, and weakened tenure and shared governance. The Board of Regents introduced policies that permitted discontinuance of programs and faculty layoffs with largely economic rather than educational considerations. The University of Wisconsin System received a \$250 million budget reduction in public funding (about 11% of the state system budget—significant but far less than the recently announced 41% cut to the University of Alaska System;—see Axelrod; Durhams; Johnson). These budget cuts were accompanied by years of tuition freezes, which meant that tuition-dependent two-year colleges were left with few options for making up the lost funding. For four-year institutions, the cuts resulted in a reduction in services, but they were still left with more resources than our instructors and students had before the cuts. The open-access campuses experienced a dramatic loss of already minimal services and staff positions—for example, reduced advising, elimination of in-person financial aid support, and cuts to curriculum that made it difficult for many students to complete general education requirements without taking online or distance education courses.

Subsequently, our campuses were left without a pathway toward a sustainable future. In 2017, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* published the announcement before employees were notified that our statewide two-year institution would be dissolved and its campuses merged with adjacent four-year campuses (Herzog). Our institution's accreditation was resigned in July 2018 ("Public Discourse"). The four-year receiving institutions had higher admissions criteria, which meant that their writing programs weren't designed to support open-access education. They weren't prepared to put in place the placement, curriculum, instructional, and faculty mentoring practices required for creating sustainable writing programs to support students on campuses with no admissions standards—and some of the faculty were not interested in doing that kind of writing program development work. State system officials, the Board of Regents, the public, and some college

administrators neither acknowledged nor fully understood the teaching and learning that needs to take place at an open-admissions institution to provide students with equitable access to higher education.

As our institution was rapidly dismantled, we each made choices to seek new opportunities that would allow us to continue our work as teacher-scholars. Joanne now teaches at Salt Lake Community College and has stepped away from years of program administration work to return to full-time teaching. Holly teaches at North Dakota State University where she is transitioning to WPA responsibilities. Our new positions and previous experiences in Wisconsin have framed our perspectives on the topics of austerity (which Nancy Welch and Tony Scott addressed at the 2017 CWPA conference); on two-year college writing programs (as Carolyn Calhoun-Dillahunt spoke about at the 2011 conference); and about inequities and hierarchies in higher education that often distribute public resources unevenly in ways that disadvantage students who need the most support to succeed in college.

In this talk, we will examine issues of inclusion in writing programs by exploring access to higher education and postsecondary literacy instruction for students whose life experiences, social resources, and cultural capital have limited their opportunities for learning before they ever enroll in a college writing course. We will provide an overview of the diverse students who enroll in higher education and the varying types of writing programs that serve those students. We will explain some of the assumptions we make when approaching disciplinary questions in the field surrounding social justice and access to higher education, situating our discussion in the diverse needs of college writers. We will then provide an overview of reform movements and new directions that are reshaping writing programs at open-access two-year colleges and less selective universities in ways that can reduce inequities but that also have the potential both to limit access to higher education and to move decisions about curriculum and instruction away from members of our profession. We conclude with a discussion of issues and questions that we might address as a discipline to create equitable access to higher education for students whose lives, literacy experiences, and pathways through college are often fundamentally different from those of students who meet selective admissions standards.

In other words, we invite you to imagine what it means to design writing programs and classrooms that are not built on the mythical norm of college students—for example, that they are 18, that they are white, that they live on campus, that they have few extra-academic responsibilities, that they have consistent access to food and a warm place to live. We ask you to think about who students are across all sites of college writing. We

invite you to consider how to engage in writing program change work to support social justice not in the abstract but through work that creates more equitable learning environments for the students in your programs and in your classrooms.

### WHO ARE STUDENTS AND WHAT IS FIRST-YEAR WRITING?

Before we establish the foundations for our assumptions about what college is for and how writing programs can support a mission of college access, it's important to understand the demographic realities of what Elaine Maimon has called the "new majority" of college students today. The "typical," but mythical, college student begins postsecondary education right after high school, attends a research university, relocates for college and spends the first year in on-campus housing, and goes to school full time. This norm might still exist at some types of institutions, but the realities of who today's college students are is quite different for most of us. Recent higher education research from the Pew Research Center, Higher Learning Advocates (HLA), and the federal government illustrates the diversity of college undergraduates in the United States in the last two decades:

- The share of students who are in poverty has increased (Fry and Cilluffo).
- The proportion of college students who are students of color has increased throughout higher education (Fry and Cilluffo).
- Just over half (55%) of students are financially independent, but a greater percentage of self-supporting students live in poverty ("National Survey Results").
- Fewer students attend two-year colleges than 20 years ago, but the students who do attend two-year schools are more likely to be low-income and to be students of color (Fry and Cilluffo).
- Greater numbers of veterans and students of color attend for-profit institutions (Fry and Cilluffo).
- Only 13% of first-year students live on campus ("National Survey Results").
- Most students (58%) work while going to school: of these, 40% work more than 30 hours a week, and about 25% work full time ("National Survey Results").
- About one in three college students (34%) are the first in their family to attend a higher education institution ("National Survey Results").
- About a quarter of students (26%) are parents ("National Survey Results").

- Two in five students (40%) are older than 25 (“National Survey Results”).
- Almost two in five students (39%) attend part-time (“National Survey Results”).
- Only about one-third of students at public institutions finish a bachelor’s degree in four years (National Center for Education Statistics).

Given the diverse range of experiences and material conditions of today’s new majority of college students, we invite you to reflect on your own assumptions about student writers and what first-year writing is. For example, when we say *first-year writing*, we don’t necessarily mean one semester or even two semesters of courses. This may differ from some of the prevailing models at flagship, highly selective, or private liberal arts universities where many well-prepared students come with AP or dual enrollment credits, test out of a writing requirement, or enroll in interdisciplinary or seminar course model for their first semester writing course (Hassel and Giordano). For the average student at a community college or a less-selective comprehensive institution, first-year writing is at least two courses, and for some students takes place over more than one year, particularly given the breaks in enrollment that many self-supporting students take between semesters.

Writing programs at open-access institutions offer courses that are different from first-year writing at selective research campuses in terms of their purpose and the learning that students need to do (often over multiple semesters) to prepare for and enroll in a degree requirement fulfilling research-based writing course, which is the starting point for “first-year” writing at many R1 institutions. Sometimes programs emerge from adult basic education or have different departments for learning support, academic skills, and basic writing courses that operate entirely separately from English or humanities programs. Sometimes faculty have input into how students are placed into writing courses, and sometimes they have none at all. Sometimes students have been away from school for three, five, ten, or twenty years, and they are unsure about whether college is for them.

For writing programs at two-year colleges and increasingly at less-selective regional comprehensives, all faculty regardless of background and disciplinary training teach first-year writing. And as Emily Isaacs’ *Writing at the U* documents, 86% of the programs in the institutions she surveyed are located in English departments (rather than independent writing programs), while 89% reported that tenure-line instructors teach first-year writing. In other words, such programs are very different from R1 and PhD granting institutions (the writing programs where most instructors

are trained to teach) where large proportions of first-year writing courses are taught by graduate students and contingent faculty, a WPA coordinates many elements of the program from curriculum to placement to assessment, and faculty have exclusive jurisdiction over what happens in a writing program.

Within this picture of higher education today, we want to share a few of the assumptions that we operate from in our work as two-year college writing teacher-scholar-activist-administrators.

#### ACADEMIC HIERARCHIES, ACCESS AND PRIVILEGE, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Three key and interrelated concepts inform our thinking, research, and writing: (1) academic hierarchies, (2) access and privilege, and (3) social justice. Our first and most basic assumption is that students receive benefits from going to college. According to the Pew Research Center, adults with college degrees earn more, have lower poverty rates, and are more likely to be homeowners. They are more likely to vote (Sondheimer and Green), to have higher levels of social trust, to volunteer, and to exercise regularly (Ma, Pender, and Welch). The foundation of our talk today is that first, students benefit from a college education in ways that influence their lives beyond the job market. Second, more students could and should have access to those benefits. Third, writing programs serve important functions in giving students access to the benefits that a college education offers, especially students whose experiences before college have not provided them with access to the resources available to more privileged students. Students who do not meet the admissions standards of selective universities often come to college with limited experience as academic readers and writers, and their overall success and pathways toward a degree are more closely linked to what happens in a writing program compared to some (but not all) students at more selective institutions. We want to describe some other assumptions that we see as potentially impeding the goal of providing access to the benefits of an equitable college education for all students.

Our second assumption is that hierarchies in higher education exist, are detrimental to the field, and impair our disciplinary work. As we discussed in our 2013 *College Composition and Communication* article, “Occupy Writing Studies,” one of the major barriers to educational access, retention, and success for structurally disadvantaged students is the academic hierarchy system. Elaine Maimon has talked about this persuasively in her book *Leading Academic Change: Vision, Strategy, Transformation*, particularly looking at how harmful some of the embedded assumptions about higher education are such that they interfere with the ability of colleges and

universities to fulfill their stated mission. In an interview about her book, Maimon explains:

Hierarchies are hard to break down because there's such a strong emotional quality to them. People really connect their identities to being at a university that is "prestigious," in part because it rejects large numbers of students. We have to turn that all around. . . . Right now, in the United States, we have a new majority. We have a large number of students who are not being well served and who have never been well served. And it's our challenge to make sure that they are. First-generation students, students of color, returning adults, and veterans.

People ask us at Governors State, What's your biggest competitor for students? Is it this whole thing in Illinois about people going out of state? Well, our biggest competitor is not the University of Wisconsin, or Indiana University, or private universities, or community colleges. Our biggest competitor is nowhere. Thirty-four percent of the freshmen that we admitted for the last three years, fully qualified, went nowhere. That loss of human capital to this democracy is something that we should all be very concerned about. (Brown)

We summarize here some of the misconceptions that we see as troubling obstacles to the work that we do in the field of writing studies (as Maimon, Andrew Astin, and Leonard Cassuto also discuss in their work). These barriers include, in practice:

- the idea that the selectivity of an institution's admission process is a signal of quality—of students, instructors, the working conditions, the labor that takes place in that context, and the work produced there;
- the belief that positions that require less teaching are inherently better, more satisfying, or more valuable than those with more teaching;
- that graduate school prepares most students for the kind of work they will actually do in their careers; and
- that the terms "good student" or "smart student" mean something about a student's value or potential, when in actuality they reflect an individual's learning experiences, resources, and privilege prior to arriving at college.

Our third assumption is that privilege and access to higher education are connected. As a result of these first two assumptions, we see that one of the major challenges for the field of writing studies and writing program administration is to accurately acknowledge and respond to the changing

demographics of college students and college instructors. When we say *privilege* and *access*, we mean the pathways that will lead students to college, how they will get there, the potential barriers that might impede their progress toward a degree, and what makes it most likely that they will earn a credential.

As one brief example, consider the concept of the education desert, or what Ben Meyers explains in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* as “areas where it’s difficult for placebound students to get to a college.” A factor as simple as where students live can determine whether they receive a degree and the ease with which individuals with limited financial resources can attend college.

A May 2019 news story from *Inside Higher Ed*, “Race, Geography and Degree Attainment” illustrates the connected relationships between privilege and access (Fain):

- Almost 40% of Americans over the age of 25 have earned an associate, bachelor’s or graduate degree.
- However, only 18% of adults from underrepresented racial minority groups hold a bachelor’s degree in contrast to 35% of white adults.
- Only 8% of bachelor’s degree holders live in rural areas (and attainment rate in those communities is lower than the national average, with 20% of residents holding a college degree compared with 34% in urban areas).
- Some urban areas with the highest degree attainment rates for white residents also have the largest gaps and racial inequities for adults from underrepresented groups. Some of the largest cities in the United States have significant educational gaps based on race: 56% in New York City, 47% in Denver, 44% in San Francisco, and 62% in Washington, DC.

Our final assumption is that social justice is central to the work of writing instruction and program administration. We know that writing programs have a very specific and significant function, one that is extremely high stakes for many students. At most institutions, first-year writing is a required gateway course or set of courses for a college degree. For first generation, lower income, and academically less prepared students, the pathway through developmental coursework and a writing program can mean the difference not just between earning credit or retaking a course but between staying in college or leaving higher education all together.



## THE RESHAPING OF OPEN-ACCESS WRITING PROGRAMS

Writing program work in the 21st century is fundamentally different from the work that many of us were trained to do. New technologies and continually expanding ways of communicating and accessing information have rapidly changed our students' experiences with literacy both inside and outside of school. Expectations for acquiring and using new literacies are part of what Daniel Keller calls "a culture of acceleration" in which "literacy is tied to educational, business, social, and technological contexts that value speed and increasingly enable and promote faster ways of reading and writing" (5). As a result, at the same time that students need to adapt to these new literacies, college students are also expected to enter and exit writing programs at a faster rate regardless of their prior experiences with writing, their preparation for college reading, and the life circumstances that shape their time as college students.

Pressure to speed up the rate at which students develop as college readers and writers is rapidly and unalterably changing writing program administration, instruction, and the experiences of student readers and writers at open-access institutions. Arguably no other group of faculty in higher education is currently micromanaged by individuals and groups outside of their discipline as much as those in two-year college writing and developmental English programs, which have increasingly been forced to give up authority over disciplinary work that should normally fall under their jurisdiction. Throughout the past decade, college completion and acceleration agendas have driven placement, curriculum, and instruction in writing programs at many (if not most) open-admissions institutions and at some less selective public universities. Some of these initiatives build on disciplinary scholarship and faculty-driven work—for example, the Accelerated Learning Program developed at the Community College of Baltimore County (Adams, et al.), which moves students from the highest level of developmental writing into credit-bearing coursework with a corequisite support course.

However, developmental education reform initiatives are increasingly imposed on writing programs through administrative and legislative mandates (Rutschow and Schneider; Whinnery and Pomeplia) in ways that are often disconnected from their disciplinary roots and that disproportionately affect institutions that serve low income, first-generation, returning adult, and underrepresented students. For example, in California, the most populous state in the country, state law AB 705 sets guidelines for placement procedures and requires community colleges to "maximize the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and math within a one year timeframe" (California Community

Colleges). Imposed mandates can stem from legitimate concerns about obstacles to student success, the inaccuracy of standardized test scores for placement, and increased time to degree completion. But they can also be an austerity measure that limits access to higher education for students who need support and time to develop as readers and writers before taking transfer-level writing coursework and transitioning to reading and writing in other disciplines.

As a profession, we need to develop a systematic, concerted effort to respond to forces external to our discipline that are fundamentally changing how reading and writing are taught at America's community colleges where more than one-third of college students enroll in any given year and where almost half of all undergraduates take at least some of their college coursework (Community College Research Center). Otherwise, we will continually scramble to respond to mandates that shape curriculum and instruction for the students who need quality postsecondary literacy instruction the most. We need advocacy, scholarship, and a shift in our own disciplinary thinking about who college students are and carefully collected evidence about what types of writing program structures and courses support literacy development for the diverse range of learners whose pathways through K–12 education and college are different from well-resourced residential students at selective universities. Unless we take action to respond to the forces that are reshaping our profession at open-access institutions, we will limit higher education to students who start college with the skills and cultural capital that we think that they should already possess before they arrive, increasingly restricting opportunities for students who benefit the most from time in a college writing program.

Developmental education reform initiatives (Hassel et al.; Schak et al.) provide a promising but complicated direction for writing program work that needs to more fully account for students who do not meet traditional definitions of college ready and are only admissible at open-access campuses. Rethinking how we place, teach, and support students in non-degree writing, reading, and English language learning programs is an essential endeavor that needs to draw more extensively from disciplinary knowledge, faculty expertise, and evidence rather than politically motivated decision making processes. Every writing program that offers non-credit-bearing writing and other forms of postsecondary literacy courses should actively assess the extent to which their basic skills programs create or reinforce educational hierarchies and systematically assess how they might change curriculum and instruction to reduce inequities and barriers to learning. Here are just a few examples:

- Reduce unnecessary layers of developmental coursework and determine how to create the fewest barriers possible for students' transitions to credit-bearing composition.
- Create placement mechanisms that reflect disciplinary knowledge to give individual students their best possible start to college.
- Replace standardized developmental education exit testing with an assessment of multiple pieces of student writing produced over time in a course.
- Design curriculum and instruction to engage students in meaningful reading and writing activities that support their literacy development and transitions to credit-bearing coursework.
- Assess whether placement and teaching practices create inequities for students of color and second language writers.

Writing programs also need the flexibility to create courses and academic learning support structures that effectively respond to the needs of local student populations rather than using curriculum and instruction developed for different students in a different teaching and learning context. For example, Giordano currently teaches at a large urban community college in Utah with a diverse global refugee population. Our small campus in Wisconsin enrolled students from small, underfunded rural high schools and Hmong students from urban schools with varying levels of experience with English, including many who could not read or write in their primary language. Giordano previously taught at an urban community college in the Northeast where most students were US-educated second language writers of color who came from a high school that the state government had taken over because of low performance. Each of these open-access teaching contexts requires a unique approach to curriculum and writing program development work that draws from the expertise of faculty who understand the diverse needs of their students.

Further, each of these institutions (and others with similar student populations) enrolls students who need time and intensive support from professionals who can help them develop proficiency in English and learn how to navigate the expectations of higher education. In contrast, some writing programs with developmental courses might be able to successfully accelerate all of their students to credit-bearing composition with or even without corequisite support based on their student populations or institutional missions (for example, a campus with an admissions process that requires students to demonstrate college readiness through high school performance or an applied technical college with an institutional mission that does not require students to take university transfer composition courses).

Developmental education reform is one of the most pressing social justice issues currently facing writing studies. At the national level, we haven't yet figured out how to achieve a balance between avoiding putting already marginalized and structurally disadvantaged students in non-degree courses that they don't need while also providing students who need support with equitable access to instruction and literacy experiences that will increase the likelihood that they can stay in college and attain a degree.

College access and privilege are deeply connected to the role of WPAs and writing studies faculty and their work in developing writing programs that support students' development as readers and writers, especially the extent to which members of our profession eliminate, push back against, ignore, or reinforce practices that create inequities for students and obstacles to degree attainment. However, the ability to engage in writing program change work and maintain authority over what happens in a program is a privilege that is increasingly taken away from faculty who work at open-admissions institutions. Such initiatives place an additional, often uncompensated workload on all faculty, but contingent faculty in particular can bear a disproportionate responsibility for implementing curricular changes at the classroom level.

Here are just four of many examples of educational reform initiatives that need to be faculty driven but that are often imposed on program administrators and instructors by legislation or higher education administration.

First, integrated reading and writing is a course structure and enrollment model that eliminates an extra non-degree class by combining reading and writing into a single course (Saxon et al.). This approach to structuring basic English skills curriculum reflects the statement from *NCTE Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing* assertion that "Reading and writing are related" and a growing recognition that writing courses should more fully address the role of reading in postsecondary literacy development (Horning et al.; Sullivan et al.). Open-admissions writing programs need to account for the presence of less prepared readers at every level of a writing program. However, we are concerned about integrated reading and writing mandates imposed on instructors without training in reading, especially when combined with approaches to program development work and instruction that ignore scholarship on postsecondary reading and the teaching practices that support students' development as college readers (Flippo and Bean). When integrated reading and writing courses simply become reading-intensive writing courses without evidence-based reading instruction, students have limited or no opportunities for developing the skills and strategies required for reading in disciplines that require widely

varying reading tasks that are different from the work that they do in writing courses.

Second, guided pathways reform, which has been implemented at more than 250 community colleges (Jenkins et al., “Implementing Guided Pathways”; Jenkins et al., “What We Are Learning”) is another example of how decisions about curriculum and course structures are increasingly imposed on two-year college faculty. The Community College Research Center’s (CCRC) *Redesigning America’s Community Colleges* (Bailey et al.) provides an alternative to the “cafeteria model” of curriculum, replacing diverse curricular array with more narrowly focused options that put students into early pathways toward a career. The guided pathways model addresses very real concerns about low degree attainment rates for community college students, and the CCRC recommendations draw from extensive research, including writing studies scholarship about placement, acceleration, and co-requisite support. However, guided pathways reform can turn into a mechanism for giving administrators control over curriculum and putting already disadvantaged students on tracks that eliminate educational options and provide them with less autonomy over their education in comparison to students at other types of institutions.

Third, placement reforms (Toth et al.; Klausman et al.; Hassel and Giordano) that work toward more equitable, evidence-based approaches to placing students into writing courses and assessing college readiness are a crucial component of writing program administration work not only for open-admissions institutions but also for every institution that bases students’ starting point in a writing program entirely on standardized test scores. As we know, the use of standardized test scores is disconnected from students’ actual experiences as writers (Klausman et al.) and disciplinary knowledge about writing assessment (NCTE and CWPA). But methods for placing students into writing courses often fall under the jurisdiction of administrative units outside of a writing program. Placement methods that are imposed on writing programs ignore the reality that effective placement happens only within the context of a program, the purpose of its courses in relation to an institution’s mission and curriculum, and locally situated needs of student writers. Inequities in placement are likely to occur the further that processes for making decisions about placement are removed from the literacy experiences of students in writing courses, their prior learning, and a realistic understanding of the strengths and constraints in the support that a writing program can provide. However, as a profession, we also need to rethink our expectations about what it means to be ready for college writing and the extent to which our assumptions about the ideal college

writer create barriers and reinforce inequities for students on their pathways toward a college degree.

Finally, online learning is an important example of how social changes impact both postsecondary literacy and access to higher education. Two-year colleges serve the broadest range of students in any type of online program, including students who are inadmissible at other institutions and college seniors or even graduate students seeking to fulfill graduation requirements or prerequisites for professional school through courses with low tuition. Open-admissions online writing courses provide access to higher education for students who would otherwise be excluded from college, including place-bound students in rural communities, adults with full time jobs, learners with mental or physical health issues that prevent them from attending a physical campus, and students from underfunded campuses with limited curricular offerings. Faculty who express contempt for or dismiss online learning or do not believe that learning can take place anywhere but in a face-to-face classroom ignore the possibilities and opportunities that come from online education for students who have no other options for attaining a degree or who would experience significant delays in their time toward completing a degree without online coursework. Like the other examples of imposed mandates that we have discussed, control over curriculum and instruction for OWI courses at two-year colleges is sometimes taken away from faculty through administrative approaches to managing online education, ranging from required use of standardized courses to outsourcing courses commercially rather than developing them locally. As a profession, we need more scholarship on effective practices in online writing instruction in open-access contexts and for students who are less prepared for reading, writing, and using technology in a text-heavy but literacy-rich online learning environment.

#### DISCIPLINARY RESPONSIVENESS, KNOWLEDGE, AND INCLUSION

Equally important for WPAs and faculty who work with the “new majority” of college students is not just the ability to respond to external mandates but also the ability to recognize when disciplinary developments do or do not take into account the needs of the complete range of college students. For example, transfer theory, writing about writing, and threshold concepts have become increasingly more important trends in our field, but all emerged from programs and scholarship at more selective institutions. Therefore, our discipline must ask questions about whether and how the knowledge derived from these models—and subsequent significant curricu-

lar reform that has emerged from them—suits students at two-year colleges and other open-access institutions.

Scholarship and curriculum development using the teaching for transfer model recently included participation from several two-year college teacher-scholars, and one of the first pieces that discusses teaching for transfer in two-year colleges appears in the September 2019 issue of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* (Andrus, Mitchler, and Tinberg). However, somewhat limited attention to two-year college students and instructors has been paid to this model, to the development of writing about writing curricula, and the professional articulation of threshold concepts in the field, a concept that Jan Meyer and Ray Land have defined

as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress. (1)

Recognizing what we previously noted, that students from a much wider range of social, economic, linguistic, racial, and age ranges make up student populations in writing programs, are we sure that our disciplinary knowledge is fully reflective of what a portal to writing studies looks like? Do we know how to adapt and assess the teaching for transfer model for students who start college in basic writing courses? What could we learn from two-year college instructors and students who use Wardle and Downs' writing about writing approach, increasingly influencing the teaching of postsecondary writing? Have we substantively considered whether teaching for transfer, writing about writing, and threshold concepts in writing studies themselves will be richer and more inclusive by accounting more fully for the new majority of college students?

Similar questions might emerge from looking at the current work on antiracist writing assessment practices, including the scholarship and theory of contract grading, and how this work can both effectively include and respond to the learning environments and students in two-year colleges and other open-access contexts. For example, does measuring labor and hours rather than using other evaluative approaches serve all students better, creating structured opportunities for them to take risks and be assessed on growth and process? Or does it place demands on students with extra-academic responsibilities and lives vulnerable to disruptions from family, work, and health issues that they cannot meet? Maybe it is both? We see value in making sure that our disciplinary efforts and published scholarship are inclusive before they become characterized as epistemological certainty within the discipline. We are interested in (and many in this room are prob-

ably also interested in) how we define the borders of our disciplinarity—the object we study. If it is writing, whose writing? Whose texts? In what contexts? And under what circumstances?

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

What we hope to open up in this last part of our talk is a series of questions that link disciplinary scholarship, writing program development, and teacher training practices with the realities of new majority students, including the diverse literacy and learning needs of students both at open-access institutions and in all types of contexts for teaching college writing. We ask you to consider how your program work and teaching might support access to higher education through teacher-scholar-activism work, as Patrick Sullivan first introduced in 2015 (“The Two-Year College Teacher-Scholar-Activist”) and which Darin Jensen has carried on in his blog of similar name. We also invite you to think about the strategies and practices we might use as a discipline to respond effectively to external legislative and Education Intelligence Complex (EIC) imperatives. Linda Adler-Kassner defines the EIC as a collection of NGOs (nongovernmental granting agencies), businesses, consulting firms, policy institutes, actions, and actors. The story it tells is

called *The Problem with American Education and How to Fix It*. Elements of the story include what education is and isn’t, what learning should and shouldn’t be, and why. This story matters—for us writing professionals, for our students, and for what we are able to do with and around writing. (“2017 Chair’s Address” 320–21)

We are interested in questions that help us connect the big picture with the local picture, the larger structures and values of our discipline with the specific choices made in programs and writing classrooms. As such, we pose a series of questions that we hope will invite conversation about the relationship between the larger work of the field and the locally situated work of individual writing programs and their instructors:

1. What assumptions do we make about academic literacies and what makes a “good” writer and a “bad” writer? What limitations do our assumptions about good writing and bad writing place on students’ potential as writers?
2. What assumptions do we make about academic behaviors and what makes a “good” student or a “bad” student? To what extent do our assumptions about academic behaviors create inequi-



ties for students whose experiences and access to resources place constraints on their lives as students?

3. What assessment practices do we use in our programs and classrooms, and do they actually assess student learning, rhetorical growth, and proficiency? Are they fair? Are they just?
4. Do our policies and practices support and promote access, emphasize learning and growth, and invite all students to participate in college learning? Or do they reward behaviors and skills that students develop before they enter college?
5. Are we working on developing students' potential as readers and writers in our classrooms or are we rewarding the students who already meet our perceptions of what it means to be a "smart" student?
6. Are we using our perceptions about rigor as a substitute for careful reflection as instructors or intentionality in creating effective writing and learning environments for our students?
7. To what extent is our prevailing disciplinary knowledge inclusive—does it reflect, and/or adapt to, the range of college writing classrooms and spaces and students who are seeking a postsecondary credential?
8. Are we teaching our graduate students pedagogical adaptability—how to take what they learned and adapt it to new students, programs, institutions?

Last, we ask:

- What is our pathway forward as a discipline in advocating for public education for all students?
- How are we serving students whose only pathway is through an open-access institution, less selective regional comprehensive university, or online program?

These are the students who are already most harmed by austerity measures and imposed mandates. They are harmed when administrators impose models for curriculum and instruction that are disconnected from students' experiences as writers and systematically collected evidence that particular practices work within the local context of a writing program. They are harmed when instructors do not recognize, respond to, or design writing

courses that help them navigate their past or present academic and non-academic challenges. They are harmed when we create courses or program policies that become obstacles to degree attainment for reasons that are disconnected from skills, proficiency, and demonstrated learning. We think these questions can help us keep access and social justice at the forefront of our programs and of the discipline of writing studies.

#### WORKS CITED

- Andrus, Sonja, Sharon Mitchler, and Howard Tinberg. "Teaching for Writing Transfer: A Practical Guide for Teachers." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 47, no. 1., 2019, pp. 76–89.
- Adams, Peter, Sarah Gearhart, Robert Miller, and Anne Roberts. "The Accelerated Learning Program: Throwing Open the Gates." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2009, pp. 50–69.
- Adler-Kassner, Linda. "2017 CCCC Chair's Address Because Writing Is Never Just Writing." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 69, no. 2, 2017, pp. 317–40.
- Adler-Kassner, Linda, and Elizabeth Wardle. *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*. UP of Colorado, 2015.
- Astin, Alexander W. *Are You Smart Enough? How Colleges' Obsession with Smartness Shortchanges Students*. Stylus Publishing, 2016.
- Axelrod, Josh. "University of Alaska Readies for Budget Slash: 'We May Likely Never Recover.'" *National Public Radio*, 3 July 2019, [npr.org/2019/07/03/738569508/university-of-alaska-readies-for-budget-slash-we-may-likely-never-recover](http://npr.org/2019/07/03/738569508/university-of-alaska-readies-for-budget-slash-we-may-likely-never-recover).
- Bailey, Thomas R., Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins. *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*. Harvard UP, 2015.
- Brown, Sarah. "A Veteran President Calls on Colleges to Stop the Snobbery." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. 12 Aug. 2018, [chronicle.com/article/A-Veteran-President-Calls-on/244230](http://chronicle.com/article/A-Veteran-President-Calls-on/244230).
- Calhoon-Dillahunt, Carolyn. "Writing Programs Without Administrators: Frameworks for Successful Writing Programs in the Two-Year College." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2011, pp. 118–34.
- California Community Colleges Assessment and Placement. "What Is AB 705?" 2018, [assessment.cccco.edu/ab-705-implementation](http://assessment.cccco.edu/ab-705-implementation).
- Cassuto, Leonard. *The Graduate School Mess: What Caused It and How We Can Fix It*. Harvard UP, 2015.
- Community College Research Center. "Community College FAQs." [ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html](http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html).
- Durhams, Sharif. "Walker's Proposal Cuts UW system Budget." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. 1 Mar. 2011, [archive.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/117193223.html/](http://archive.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/117193223.html/).
- Downs, Doug and Elizabeth Wardle. "Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning 'First-Year Composition' as 'Introduction to Writ-

- ing Studies.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 58, no. 4, 2007, pp. 552–84.
- Fain, Paul. “Race, Geography and Degree Attainment.” *Inside Higher Ed*, 27 June 2019, [insidehighered.com/news/2019/06/27/rural-areas-lag-degree-attainment-while-urban-areas-feature-big-racial-gaps](https://insidehighered.com/news/2019/06/27/rural-areas-lag-degree-attainment-while-urban-areas-feature-big-racial-gaps).
- Flippo, Rona F., and Thomas W. Bean, editors. *Handbook of College Reading and Study Strategy Research*, 3rd ed., Routledge, 2018.
- Fry, Richard, and Anthony Cilluffo. “A Rising Share of Undergraduates Are from Poor Families, Especially at Less Selective.” *Pew Research Center: Social and Demographic Trends*, 22 May 2019, [pewsocialtrends.org/2019/05/22/a-rising-share-of-undergraduates-are-from-poor-families-especially-at-less-selective-colleges](https://pewsocialtrends.org/2019/05/22/a-rising-share-of-undergraduates-are-from-poor-families-especially-at-less-selective-colleges).
- Hassel, Holly, Jeffrey Klausman, Joanne Baird Giordano, Margaret O’Rourke, Leslie Roberts, Patrick Sullivan, and Christie Toth. “TYCA White Paper on Developmental Education Reforms.” *Teaching English in the Two Year College*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2015, pp. 227–43.
- Hassel, Holly, and Joanne Baird Giordano. “The Blurry Borders of College Writing: Remediation and the Assessment of Student Readiness.” *College English*, vol. 78, no. 1, 2015, pp. 656–80.
- Herzog, Karen. “UW System Will Propose Merging Two- and Four-Year Campuses to Cut Costs, Raise Graduation Numbers.” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 11 October 2017, [jsonline.com/story/news/education/2017/10/10/uw-system-propose-merging-two-and-four-year-campuses-cut-costs-raise-graduation-numbers/751622001](https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/education/2017/10/10/uw-system-propose-merging-two-and-four-year-campuses-cut-costs-raise-graduation-numbers/751622001).
- Horning, Alice, Deborah-Lee Gollnitz, and Cynthia Haller, editors. *What Is College Reading?* WAC Clearinghouse, 2017.
- Isaacs, Emily. *Writing at the State U: Instruction and Administration at 106 Comprehensive Universities*. UP of Colorado, 2018.
- Jenkins, Davis, Hana Lahr, and John Fink. “Implementing Guided Pathways: Early Insights.” Community College Research Center (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University, Apr. 2017, [ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/implementing-guided-pathways-aacc.html](https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/implementing-guided-pathways-aacc.html).
- Jenkins, Davis, Hana Lahr, John Fink, and Elizabeth Ganga. “What We Are Learning about Guided Pathways.” Community College Research Center (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University, 2018, [ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/what-we-are-learning-guided-pathways.html](https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/what-we-are-learning-guided-pathways.html).
- Jensen, Darin. *Teacher-Scholar Activist*. 2019, [teacher-scholar-activist.org](http://teacher-scholar-activist.org).
- Johnson, Shawn. “Budget Committee Passes 4250M Cut to UW System: Republican Plan Will Also Scrap Tenure as Part of State Law.” *Wisconsin Public Radio*, 29 May 2019, [wpr.org/budget-committee-passes-250m-cut-uw-system](https://wpr.org/budget-committee-passes-250m-cut-uw-system).
- Keller, Daniel. *Chasing Literacy: Reading and Writing in an Age of Acceleration*. Utah State UP, 2013.
- Klausman, Jeff, Christie Toth, Wendy Swyt, Brett Griffiths, Patrick Sullivan, Anthony Warnke, Amy L. Williams, Joanne Giordano, and Leslie Roberts.

- “TYCA White Paper on Placement Reform.” *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2016, pp. 135–75.
- Ma, Jennifer, Matea Pender, and Meredith Welch. “Education Pays 2016: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society.” College Board, 2016. Trends in Higher Education Series.
- Maimon, Elaine. *Leading Academic Change: Vision, Strategy, Transformation*. Stylus Publishing, 2018.
- Meyer, Jan, and Ray Land. *Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines*. U of Edinburgh, 2003. Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses Project Occasional Report Series.
- Myers, Ben. “Who Lives in Education Deserts? More People Than You Think.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 17 July 2018, [chronicle.com/interactives/education-deserts](http://chronicle.com/interactives/education-deserts).
- National Center for Education Statistics. “Table 326:10: Graduation Rate from First Institution Attended for First-Time, Full-Time Bachelor’s Degree-Seeking Students at 4-Year Postsecondary Institutions by Race/Ethnicity, Time to Completion, Sex, Control of Institution, and Acceptance Rate: Selected Cohort Entry Years, 1996 Through 2010.” Institute of Educational Sciences, US Department of Education, 2010, [nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17\\_326.10.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_326.10.asp).
- “National Survey Results: How Well Do We Really Know Today’s Students?” Higher Learning Advocates, Oct. 2018, [higherlearningadvocates.org/gfk-insider-survey-2018/](http://higherlearningadvocates.org/gfk-insider-survey-2018/).
- Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing*. NCTE, 2016, [ncte.org/statement/teaching-writing](http://ncte.org/statement/teaching-writing).
- “Public Disclosure: University of Wisconsin Colleges Resignation of Stand-Alone Accreditation Effective: July 2, 2018.” Higher Learning Commission, 2 July 2018, [hlcommission.org/download/\\_PublicDisclosureNotices/UW%20Colleges%20Resignations%20PDN%207.11.2018.pdf](http://hlcommission.org/download/_PublicDisclosureNotices/UW%20Colleges%20Resignations%20PDN%207.11.2018.pdf).
- NCTE and CWPA. *NCTE-WPA White Paper on Writing Assessment in Colleges and Universities*. NCTE, Apr. 2008, [ncte.org/statement/ncte-wpa-white-paper-on-writing-assessment-in-colleges-and-universities/](http://ncte.org/statement/ncte-wpa-white-paper-on-writing-assessment-in-colleges-and-universities/).
- Rutschow, Elizabeth Zachry., and Emily Schneider, E. *Unlocking the Gate: What We Know about Improving Developmental Education*. MDRC, June 2011, [mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full\\_595.pdf](http://mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_595.pdf).
- Saxon, D. Patrick, Nara M. Martirosyan, and Nicholas T. Vick. “NADE Members Respond: Best Practices in Integrated Reading and Writing, Part I.” *Journal of Developmental Education*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2016, pp. 32–34.
- . “NADE Members Respond: Best Practices and Challenges in Integrated Reading and Writing: A Survey of Field Professionals, Part 2.” *Journal of Developmental Education*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2016, pp. 34–35.
- Schak, Oliver, Ivan Metzger, Jared Bass, Clare McCann, and John English. “Developmental Education Challenges and Strategies for Reform.” US Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Jan. 2017.

- Scott, Tony. "Austerity and the Scales of Writing Program Administration: Some Reflections on the 2017 CWPA Conference." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2018, pp. 113–21.
- Smith, Ashley. "Study Finds More Low-Income Students Attending College." *Inside Higher Ed*, 23 May 2019, [insidehighered.com/news/2019/05/23/pew-study-finds-more-poor-students-attending-college](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/05/23/pew-study-finds-more-poor-students-attending-college).
- Sondheimer, Rachel Milstein, and Donald Green. "Using Experiments to Estimate the Effects of Education on Voter Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2010, pp. 174–89.
- Sullivan, Patrick. "The Two-Year College Teacher-Scholar-Activist." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2015, pp. 327–50.
- Sullivan, Patrick, Howard Tinberg, and Sheridan Blau. *Deep Reading: Teaching Reading in the Writing Classroom*. NCTE, 2017.
- Toth, Christie, Jessica Nastal, Holly Hassel, and Joanne Baird Giordano, "Introduction: Writing Assessment, Placement, and the Two-Year College." Special issue on two-year college writing placement, *Journal of Writing Assessment*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2019.
- Welch, Nancy. "'Everyone Should Have a Plan': A Neoliberal Primer for Writing Program Directors." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2018, pp. 104–12.
- Whinnery, Erin, and Sarah Pompelia. "50-State Comparison: Developmental Education Policies." Education Commission of the States, 10 Dec. 2018, [ecs.org/50-state-comparison-developmental-education-policies](https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-developmental-education-policies).
- Yancey, Kathleen, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak. *Writing across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing*. Utah State UP, 2014.

**Joanne Baird Giordano** teaches at Salt Lake Community College. Previously, she coordinated the developmental reading, writing, and ESL program for the University of Wisconsin System's two-year colleges. She is chair of the 2019 and 2020 Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) National Conference.

**Holly Hassel** taught at the University of Wisconsin Colleges for sixteen years before joining the faculty in the English Department at North Dakota State University in Fargo. She has served as the editor of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* since 2016. She was elected to assistant chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 2019.

