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Connecting: On “Showing Up” in Teaching, Tutoring, and Writing: A Search for Humanity

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Connecting: On “Showing Up” in Teaching, Tutoring, and Writing: A Search for Humanity

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CONNECTING

On “Showing Up” in Teaching, Tutoring, and Writing: A Search for Humanity

Christy I. Wenger

When I teach my upper-level students about the theories and practices of rhetoric and composition, I often start the semester by taking an informal poll. I ask students to choose which is more important in college writing classes: a focus on conventions and structure, or a focus on voice or individual expression. This is a trick question, of course, since I hope to prove to students that both are necessary, though the degrees to which they are necessary and in which contexts and at which times is the challenge I present for them to investigate throughout the semester.

A few outliers recognize the philosophical query presented by this poll and refuse to choose one over the other. But most students eagerly choose a “side” on the first day of class, approaching my challenge as a debate, as they’ve been well-trained to do over the course of their education. The majority of students side with conventions. As the semester progresses, we talk about why. We talk about how they are expected to master author-evacuated prose as English majors and minors and to avoid personal pronouns in their writing. We talk about their success mastering these conventions, continual achievements that paved the way for students’ entry to my upper-level writing seminar. We talk about how they often feel pressure to write papers on topics their teachers “like” and frame arguments in ways consistent with their teachers’ readings of texts. We talk about where that pressure comes from and how it shapes their writing. As we read more and more composition theory, including Joseph Harris and Michele Eodice but also David Bartholomae and James Berlin, the majority of my students revise their original viewpoints.

Time and again, the same majority that ardently supported conventions at the beginning end the semester championing voice. Students don’t simply abandon the importance of conventions—they confirm their desire to be read and understood—but they do develop a hearty respect for voice. This shift is a hallmark of the class likely because of how it is situated in our program as one of the first and few courses to ask students to come to terms with who they are as writers and who they want to be; to question and analyze writing and not only to do it.

This semester, I asked my students who shifted their views to tell me *why* voice is important. They collectively described voiced writing as “real” and “full” and “meaningful.” When I asked them what those descriptors meant, they admitted they were abstract but nonetheless important. Naming voice in writing is hard. Peter Elbow agrees and has called voice variously a “warm and fuzzy word” (1), raising suspicion in a university that valorizes defined and discrete skills, and, even worse, a “swamp” (11), particularly when it is used as a measure of authenticity.

When supporting the importance of voice, my students aren’t so much arguing for authenticity as they are pointing to another term Elbow uses: resonance. Resonant writ-

ing reveals and connects with lasting impact. The “sound of resonance” in writing is “the sound of more of a person behind the words” (12). When I mentioned Nicole Wallack’s recent naming of voice as a “showing up” in our writing to these students, they agreed that Wallack’s term felt less abstract and somehow more modern. Showing up means being present in our writing, being a presence on the page. We can do this in many ways: by including personal experience as evidence; creating a distinctive voice; owning a sense of identity or self and connecting that to our ideas and arguments; other distinctive moves that explicitly suggest the writer behind the text (Wallack 28-31). This isn’t a search for authenticity so much as it is one for humanity, a present person behind and within the text who connects to the present reader.

The pieces collected in this section of *Connecting* all exhibit ways of “showing up” in writing. They do so by modeling how we might claim very specific, very material conditions of learning and thinking and speak from the authority of personal experience. They are full of voice. They show up by revealing the presence of their writers and by making intentional space for readers to show up in response, as a writer’s presence begets the readers’. The writing contained within this section also offers practices that might help us think through the dynamics of a pedagogical praxis of “showing up.”

First up is “Sylvia Wynter Over Tea.” Coauthors and graduate research assistants Nicole Wilson, Angela Montez, and Sara Yiseul Chung write a triple-voiced narrative about their experiences working with black studies scholar and humanist philosopher Dr. Sylvia Wynter, O.J. in order to curate her archive. In this process of curation, they find inspiration to fashion their own, bricolaging their graduate studies experiences, their reading of field texts, and their personal experiences. Their effort to create an authorial harmony with solo parts instead of a chorus is their intentional means of “showing up.” As they note: “This work is a practice in collective sameness-in-difference that opens the table to multifaceted voices and perspectives.” These women’s stories diverge, but their voices coalesce around the need to find a sense of presence in their fields of study and their commitment to a project that allowed them to get to know an author as specific and real, which affirmed their own presence as scholars and writers.

Like Wilson, Montez, and Chung, Christina M. LaVecchia and Cristina D. Ramírez also find meaning for their academic career pathways and studies outside of the narrow scope of scholarly study, outside of the university’s formal structures. They also “show up” by joining their voices to explore the bridges between alternative-academic, “alt-ac,” and academic work, bridges they argue that can be traversed both ways, so that alt-ac becomes a pathway for a dual-directional transfer of skills and not a way out. Because of their alt-ac experiences, LaVecchia and Ramírez “show up” dynamically in their present academic lives, since those experiences, they say, allow them “to engage in different and meaningful work, learn more about writing practices outside the discipline, and most importantly, operate in highly collaborative environments” where they feel “valued ... as scholars/professionals.”

Student voices pepper the last piece by Patricia Pytleski. Student writing tutors voice their experiences tutoring each other and outline the benefits of being on the “other side” of the tutoring table in this reflection on a novel method of tutor training, what Pytleski calls “Tutor to Tutor Teaching.” Notably, students featured in this essay echo the importance of helping other students, tutors or not, find and establish their voice in

their writing regardless of its generic function as a graduate application, academic essay, and beyond. Pytleski argues that tutor's individual reflections on their experiences tutoring each other form the most persuasive argument for including this sort of training alongside more conventional models such as observations and workshops.

Individuality and investment are evident in these pieces, testaments to these expert writers' ability to generate authorial presence. As my students would say, these pieces are full of voice, are "real" and "full." As teachers of our craft, this collection of essays in *Connecting* makes us think about how we might better invite our students to show up in their own writing, of how we might help students approach authorial presence as an invitation to appear as individuals, and to use their voices to address the connections between their lives and their ideas.

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Sylvia Wynter Over Tea

Nicole Wilson, Angela Montez, and Sara Yiseul Chung

Throughout the Spring and Summer of 2018, we fled the bounds of the university to sit at the kitchen table of esteemed Black Studies scholar and Humanist Philosopher Dr. Sylvia Wynter, O.J.¹ We were selected to work with Dr. Wynter through the Texas A&M "Wynter Project," following her flight from California to Texas, where she sought to continue her productions of critical work as a retired Stanford professor. As graduate research assistants, our charge was to help Dr. Wynter curate her archive, which included locating and assembling her research materials, as well as reading, editing, and revising her most recent scholarship.

Over many warm cups of tea, we conversed, worked, and moved in excess of these scholarly tasks. Our many conversations led us to see Dr. Wynter as a mentor and aca-

1. Sylvia Wynter, a Caribbean philosopher, playwright, novelist, and dancer, is an influential critical thinker whose work draws on Black studies, history, economics, literature, philosophy, and material science. Wynter's oeuvre is an ongoing project built since her participation in the anti-colonial struggles of the Caribbean between the 1940s and early 60s. She unpacks and critiques the ways in which the "ethnaclass" mode of our present global humanity misrepresents the human, by limiting it to specifically the European Man. Her theoretical framework urges us to move away from the colonized idea of modernity and the modern man that is deeply ingrained in Eurocentrism and seeks to de-colonize our minds and our modes of thinking.

demic mother who encouraged and inspired us to unsettle the university. At Dr. Wynter's home, we were able to escape, even if temporarily, the structures of power that can create a toxic environment for those of us who are considered *other* leading to unbalanced working hours, neglected care towards students of color, and discriminatory practices that favor individual productivity over communal labor and effort. At Dr. Wynter's home, we were freed from these structures of power that precipitated our complex feelings of scholarly inadequacy and anger.

Here, we share our inspiring conversations to reflect on our active engagement with each other and Dr. Wynter's decolonial praxis. We acknowledge that this collaborative piece could have been filtered through the voice of singularity, but utilizing the collective voice speaks to the ethos of the Wynter Project, which brought together divergent voices and peoples under the banner of mentorship, care, and fugitive scholarship. There is power in collective difference, in sitting together as one over tea, while maintaining our distinct positionality and interests. This work is a practice in collective sameness-in-difference that opens the table to multifaceted voices and perspectives. As laborers para-external to the university, we experienced a more rich and fruitful production of knowledge through the supportive communal environment of a non-traditional space. Together, we produced care-oriented work in the undercommons.

Tasting Grief: Herbal Tea and Sylvia Wynter's Necessary Bread

Nearly two years after the commencement of the Sylvia Wynter Project, I continue to parse Black women's kitchen table gatherings as a complex aesthetic. What grammar, I have wondered, fully expresses the dynamism of Black women meeting, laboring, and conversing at the kitchen table? As the origin narrative of the pioneering Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press suggests, for Black women always already at the edge of their "symbolic integrity," the kitchen table remains a force of personal, political, and social change (Spillers 66). While I have been meeting Black women (my mother, sister, aunts, and grandmothers) at the kitchen table for conversation, Sunday morning hairdos, and to learn and teach since girlhood, what did it mean to flee the university, enter the interior of Dr. Sylvia Wynter's home, and be seated at her kitchen table? What did it mean, to share time, space, energy, and the most delectable tea as Dr. Wynter and I moved through grief? In paying homage to Dr. Wynter, this reflection attends to the paradoxical conditions of possibility that precipitated being mentored and mothered by her even as she mourned the loss of community (upon relocating to Texas from California) and even as I mourned the loss of my womb.

In Spring 2016, I found Sylvia Wynter somewhere between fatigue and mayhem caused by microaggressions and growing health concerns. I found the critical theorist and humanist philosopher as I had found her contemporaries, Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman, at a predominantly white institution (PWI). I found Sylvia Wynter while I was making peace with the reality that I had, in fact, lost the lone brilliant Black woman professor in the Department of English. In short, I found Sylvia Wynter on the page and while mourning what felt like compounding loss.

A Gender Theory course would serve as my initial introduction to Dr. Wynter. My excitement would be short-lived, as an advanced Sociology graduate student fractured

the gravitas of the course's inclusive pedagogical design. "Do you find it strange," my colleague whispered, "that the only assigned reading by a Black woman is not written by her; instead, it is written *about* her?" Well sure I found this strange.

My colleague and I were both determined to discuss the omission during the next class session. Our objective was not to challenge course design, but, as the next generation of Black women academics, we did not want to ignore the silence. We wished to engage an organizing logic that allowed many amazing theorists (Foucault, Lacan, Butler, Fausto-Sterling, Spivak and Rodriguez) to critique society, shape conversation, and challenge classroom praxes while absenting others. We sought to understand why Wynter's own work was voiced by Alexander Weheliye (a Black male academic and critical theorist) and other women of color theorists were entirely eliminated. That discussion never happened.

I was hospitalized, as exceptional pain, massive bleeding, and growing fibroids had attached to and crowded my uterus. I was unable to return to work, class, and life as I had known it. I would have a surgically invasive abdominal hysterectomy or, what I aptly mark, theft of my uterus, cervix, and fallopian tubes. During the recovery process, I would seek the voices of those Black women my professor had chosen to silence. Outside of that classroom and away from the university, Wynter, Spillers, and Hartman's texts were a healing salve allowing me to closely parse their words, trace their insurgent rhetorics, place my tongue on their theories, voice their discontent, and make audible the blues embedded in their discourses. But it was Wynter's description of the global "jobless archipelago," and its population of "life/unworthy of life," that bequeathed me a language to narrate the impact of medical apartheid in my own family and thereby transform silence into utterance. That is, bringing Dr. Wynter's texts and theorizing to my working-class mother's kitchen table helped me name the tyrannies my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother were made to swallow as they navigated the fine line between abdominal hysterectomy as necessary medical intervention and a long history of Black women and forced sterilization. While seated at my mother's table, I gained intimate knowledge of what it means to experience myself through a lineage of wombless women. Three generations before me. Three unnamed and silenced Black women, and how lucky I am/was to be number four.

Two years after meeting Dr. Wynter on the page, and two years after losing my uterus, cervix, and fallopian tubes, I was standing in her kitchen. I was seated at her table. She encouraged me to reimagine my origin story—to locate a space where joy abides in the messiness of grief. Over herbal tea and sometimes through tears, I consumed Sylvia Wynter's "necessary bread." In her "Necessary Bread: Black Women's Literature" chapter, Akasha Gloria T. Hull states, "For a Black woman, being face-to-face with another Black woman makes the most cruel and beautiful mirror" (194). Especially when the moment is fleeting, reparative, effectual, transformative, and precipitates the sharing of deep, vast knowledge. And most certainly when Sylvia Wynter, the teacher you have waited your whole life to meet names you: Daughter.

I am convinced that Dr. Wynter and my meeting in the center of her home and in the middle of our grief, as we expanded the restorative power of words and consumed the healing power of tea, was part prophecy, part foresight, and wholly necessary.

English Breakfast: Studying Nineteenth-Century Literature as Praxis

A warm cup of tea with Dr. Wynter allowed me to reconsider my position as an emerging literary scholar. As a Korean student studying nineteenth-century British novels, I follow the footpath of Dr. Wynter and many scholars who aim to decolonize and disorient the Eurocentric standpoints of humanism and humanist studies. With them, I lament that the multifaceted and colorful variety of human groups and their origin stories are condensed and homogenized to a single genre, and I am concerned with how our society readily accepts the categories structured according to “evolutionarily pre-selected degrees of eugenic ‘worth’ between human groups at the level of race, culture, religion, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and sex” (Wynter 54). Thus, I want to add voice to unsettling our ways of reading and consuming literature. I believe in the power of literature being a primary platform where we can reflect the effort to decolonize our ways of perceiving the world. I see my attempt not as singular, but as a communal effort and a gesture of ethical care for others who want to unsettle norms.

Literature reflects our humanist history and philosophy as a set of knowledge based on “story-telling”; literature itself functions as a mode of telling origin stories, establishing certain images and ideas of human life. At times, these stories function as records and depictions of lives that enhance the image of the world that certain people *wanted* to represent. In this context, I believe that tracing the systematic operations of these divisions and classifications of humans in past literary works can help us understand how these literary productions contributed to solidifying systematic operations. Specifically, the nineteenth century and its novels are accomplices in producing the problematic idea and notion of “Man,” making the white liberalist figure of “Man” as the default figure of human while the others are defined as being the Other; it is when people expanded on the idea of the liberal human, conflicts over social classes, gender, and de-humanizing institutions such as slavery and child labor persisted. The characters’ categorization according to nineteenth-century norms of social class, gender, and race is a symptomatic function of the overrepresentation of valuable peoples of biological and economic standards.

Based on this perspective, my scholarly commitment goes to the “othered” characters that are neglected, orphaned, oppressed, gendered, marginalized and foreign. I want to examine how their otherness works to reify a certain type of humanness that society is willing to accept; I want to study how these othered characters are often gothicized and to understand their ontological functions. Approaching literary works from this angle and committing to the othered characters, I hope to build upon Dr. Wynter’s theorizations and explore how reading literature of the past with a decolonized mind can be a process of re-illuminating different origin stories; it should provide the modern reader with a horizon of stories that we did not encounter before.

The expression “being human as praxis” (McKittrick 4) is what I want to hold on to while pursuing my research in literature. It leads us to question our lives, our knowledges and discourses because if we acknowledge that our beings are *praxes*, we also see that our productions of humanist history and philosophy are open to being (re)read and (re)viewed, to yield new meanings and values.

Rather than consuming literary works as a reflection and an engagement of humanity in the past, I suggest that we read them as *praxis* and trace how they continually work to foreground the existence of the “othered” to aid the narratological representation of “Man.” I believe it is right to recognize this “always already” existence of the othered characters, and this knowledge should be the basis of our aim to disorient, deconstruct and re-construct ways of thinking and viewing our worlds, incorporating the voices of people from all kinds of groups; it is an ethical gesture and a work of care and love. Rediscovering the existence of others could potentially offer us a version of a story that open up a new literary horizon. I want to engage the othered imaginatively and question how the humanities would look if we are not basing our ontologies on the figure of the “Man” but rather on the ghostly, the monstrous, the fleshy, and the gothicized. As such, through literature, we can (re)write our understanding of ourselves as the collective “we” and multiple “genres of humans,” unsettling the oversaturated and colonized modes of thinking. To quote Dr. Wynter, “this task – to set the human free – therefore demands that we must begin, for the first time, to track a complete version of our species’ history as it had been performatively enacted from its origins” (Wynter and McKittrick 63).

Doing so, if I am to be fugitive in conventional academia, I proudly acknowledge that. And I urge and reach out to others to take part in this project, to (re)read and write literature as praxis, with the lens of care, ethics, and love of our multifaceted and beautiful humanist fruits of creativity.

Rooibos Tea: Dr. Wynter’s Care as Critical Analysis

Before participating in the Wynter Project, I did not understand the integral relationship between community, care, and scholarship. Though I understood that intersecting research interests brought colleagues and professors together, I did not understand how these intersections produced communities of belonging, yet alone care, in the academy. Rather, pessimistically, I tended towards framing most professional interactions as strategies of advantage – another line on a CV, another publication, another potential job placement. Yet, even with an intense drive to do whatever I needed to succeed, I wondered about the value of human life in the academy, including my own deteriorating mental health, my friend, who had just attempted suicide, and the lives of Black Americans, which I studied and sought to represent.

In a system founded upon heteronormative, Western, White, Male scholarly formations of cold logic and rationality, I questioned if there were sites for emotionality and care within the university that were not simultaneously sites of racialized female denigration. It was alienating to wonder about the value of human life in the academy. As a result, I was bitter and exhausted. I did not want to live as a fractured being, negotiating the parameters of logic and care, within the university. So I was determined to leave this space, until I met Dr. Wynter.

It is perhaps telling that I found reprieve outside the university—in the home of a scholar while assisting in an archival project that moved beyond academic research into mentorship and care. From Dr. Wynter, I learned that the best and most radical of research demands care and community, even as these facets of research are disavowed in the popular imaginary of academic life.

Here, I share my journey to a better understanding of the integral relationship between community, care, and scholarship through the reproduction of two inspiring conversations I had with Dr. Wynter. Both conversations taught me to analyze the world in a (non)scholarly, affective manner that focused on WE (rather than ME).

During our first meeting: Dr. Wynter advised that “we return to the 60s.” Initially, I did not understand her suggestion. My confusion was not a result of misrecognizing the impact the 60s had on American civil society. But in the wake of Rodney King, Eric Garner, and Trayvon Martin, it seemed to me that the 60s were dead. When prompted, she explained that the 60s had a revolutionary atmosphere—“We” were rising together. The “we” referencing the global community of black scholars, artists, politicians, and laborers coming together to fight for their common humanity. I understood then and agreed—We should return to the 60s. I learned then that the best scholarship does not happen alone, absent of care or community. Rather, it is communities of belonging and communities of care that drive scholarship. Despite their status as scholars, artists, or laborers, the scholarship produced then and now is for them. It is for us. So that we may rise together.

The Parkland, Florida Shooting: Out of the concern Dr. Wynter expressed for Parkland, Florida students, she told me “Watch those kids.” She said: “They are the future. They have the potential for so much change because they have gone through an experience that has changed each of them and brought them together indefinitely.” I was silent. I felt in that moment that Dr. Wynter understood and knew something (about scholarship and life) that no one else would ever understand. Powerfully and affectively, she understood that the Parklands students were doing much more than politically protesting gun violence. They were coming together as a community. They were bringing the 60s to us. From this interaction, I learned that care allows us to access fugitive possibilities and ways of thinking. Dr. Wynter’s care for the Parkland students and for humanity as a whole sharpened her insight in the Parkland protests. Her analysis was a (re)orientation of analysis: a way of understanding the world and people in a manner that did not dissect but rather blurred the lines between feeling, care, and intellect.

Soon after the culmination of the Wynter Project, Nicole asked, “What are you learning from the project?” I shared with her and Sara these two moments. From Dr. Wynter, I learned that community and care are integral to the production of knowledge—or at least, integral to the types of knowledges that open us up to fugitive understandings and critical lenses of analysis. While the toxicity of the university attempts to fragment us, care (for each other and for our fields of study) brings us together. In this way and in many more, care can be an affective/effective mode of critical analysis to unsettle the logics of the university that positions scholarship as individualistic, cold-blooded, and detached.

More Tea, Please

Through communion with each other and esteemed critical theorist Sylvia Wynter, we have witnessed the underbelly of the academy. The criminality of care is that it ruptures the Capitalist Machiavellian logics of the university to produce pockets of *otherwise* being and knowing. The narratives shared here textualize our fugitive journeys to care

and community for the (re)production of an affective scholarship. Over one cup of tea, we discussed literature. Sara brought up the idea if it is possible to read literature in a different way, and together we asked, can we decolonize the way we read and think about literature of the past? Over the next, we discussed discourses of displacement. Nicole parsed the conditions that made meeting Dr. Wynter at the intersections of race, class, gender, nationality, and grief possible. Over another, we discussed care and its relationship to scholarship. Angela challenged the notion that scholarship need only be framed through a Western, White, Male understanding of attachment and analysis. As emerging female scholars of color, we hope our reflections have set the table for extended contemplations on the future of humanities scholarship that invites multifaceted voices and perspectives and brings into being an ethos of care. We invite all to enter, to sit, to share with us a cup of tea.

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The Versatility of a Rhetoric and Composition Degree: Tales from Former Postdocs Outside the Field

Christina M. LaVecchia and Cristina D. Ramírez

As rhetoric and composition doctoral students head out onto the job market each fall, they are understandably anxious about what their future holds. In the past decade, the academic job market has shifted from a traditional timeline with predictable openings to an unpredictable space with fewer opportunities. According to Jim Ridolfo's rhetmap,

only 220 jobs were listed in 2018-19, compared to the 287.8 average number of jobs annually posted over the last 5 years.²

Those seeking jobs each year may ask themselves, what jobs will I qualify for—where I can truly utilize my skills and passion for teaching, learning, and research? Although it's often assumed that most job seekers will envision an R1 tenure-track position as the answer to these questions, some may see themselves looking at jobs not just outside of the traditional tenure-track lines, but outside of academe altogether. Others may be prioritizing personal and/or family choices that necessitate casting a wider net in terms of institutional and job types. In this piece, we seek to normalize a wider set of pathways for rhetoric and composition graduates and show that the skills they acquire during their graduate careers are highly valued outside academe.

We are two former postdocs who took this road less traveled. We reflect here on the unusual, out-of-field places our careers have taken us in order to (re)consider:

- What can we do with rhetoric and composition knowledge, expertise, and training? Further, what *is* the work of our discipline, and what can it become?
- How might rhet/comp training and skills transfer outside of the traditional higher ed faculty position? What does that work look like in other contexts?
- How could such work benefit you if you do return to the academy?

Both of our postdocs might be described as “alt-ac”—as, while they involved research, writing, and teaching/mentoring, they were not the typical higher ed position, let alone the kind of position advertised on the MLA *JIL* or rhetmap. At the time, being in these positions outside of our academic training seemed “less than” what was expected of us as doctoral graduates in our field. However, we came to realize that these were not “step down” positions, but adjacent, rewarding opportunities that enabled us to engage in different and meaningful work, learn more about writing practices outside the discipline, and most importantly, operate in highly collaborative environments in which we felt valued as scholars/professionals.

Looking back from our current positions (tenure-track at the University of Arizona and full-time at a small private university without a tenure system), we see how working in non-traditional and fast-paced settings enhanced our careers more than we could have imagined. We bolstered our critical thinking, maneuvered strategically in our work spaces and with colleagues, and imagined different and noncongruent ways to utilize our writing and research skills—specifically, in healthcare and federal think tank research, as you will read below. At first, thinking outside our comfort zones made us nervous, and at times, we felt unprepared for our situations because traditional graduate school pathways don't typically ask students to think outside the academy. But quite contrary to our fears, our skills in rhetoric and composition gave us the edge in being able to perceive work situations, projects, and studies from a writing perspective.

2. However, we recognize limitations on direct comparison of data from rhetmap year-to-year, as rhetmap's data sources have changed (from purely mirroring the MLA *Job Information List* composition/rhetoric category to later including the technical and business writing category; it also increasingly includes jobs listed only on rhetmap). In short, it's important to know that rhetmap is only a partial snapshot of the job market.

Through these experiences and in recognition of the shifting realities of the job market, we hold a vested interest in sharing and examining the many ways that rhetoric and composition graduates can not only work outside the discipline, but excel in many high-level roles and positions.

Our Stories

LaVecchia: Strong geographic constraints led me to consider a wide range of positions when I finished my PhD and went on the market: traditional tenure-track assistant professorships at SLACs; a WAC staff position; an online teaching position in graduate education for a department of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership; and staff positions in instructional design or research and college grant offices, to name a few. After a two year search, I was hired as a postdoc by a healthcare research unit at Mayo Clinic.

The Mayo Clinic Knowledge and Evaluation Research—or KER (pronounced “care”)—Unit is a space that thrives on interdisciplinarity: clinicians, healthcare services researchers, clinical researchers, designers, statisticians, social scientists, study coordinators, and patient advisors, among others, all contribute to the work of the KER Unit. That work is the advancement of patient-centered care through researching and developing interventions for shared decision making, evidence-based medicine, and minimally disruptive medicine. Due to that interdisciplinary culture, I found a comfortable collaborative home in this fast-paced environment.

Before coming to Mayo, I didn’t have a research background in health and medicine. So, what got me hired? At the time, KER was looking for a qualitative researcher and my doctoral coursework, attendance at the Dartmouth Summer Seminar, and orientation in a humanistic field with social science influences qualified me. More importantly, I conducted an informational interview with a unit member—which persuaded my principal investigator of my enthusiasm for the position and that I would fit well with the culture of the KER Unit. Looking back, it’s tempting to attribute getting this opportunity to the luck of stumbling upon a place with the right culture and local need that also valued interdisciplinary perspectives. Yet, these same conditions land us jobs *inside* the field, too.

KER often operates like a think tank, and my rhetorical perspective was highly valued during brainstorming conversations, weekly huddles, and project meetings. Within KER we were encouraged to be involved in multiple projects (turn around, enter into a conversation about a problem someone is trying to solve, and all of a sudden you’re an author, I’d joke), and I soon found myself pulled into a wide range of conversations. These included patients’ experiences with care for unexplained and/or contested illnesses, the range of purposes of shared decision-making, the nature of conversations about cost or diagnostics in clinical encounters, measuring high-quality diabetes care, end-of-life decision making, and more. I often helped to advocate for storytelling and qualitative approaches; my perspective on communication was valued; my meta-understanding of my discipline and research practices was recognized; and it was seen as highly desirable that not only did I come ready to write and present on my own, but I could mentor other trainees in the unit on those critical skills.

Once I got my foot in the door with my postdoctoral appointment at KER, I found further opportunities to contribute my disciplinary perspective. Attending a welcome lunch hosted by the Mayo Research Fellows Association (a group supporting postdoc professionalization and socialization similar to many English graduate organizations), I let slip to one of the organization's officers that I was a writing specialist. She immediately asked if I would deliver a lunchtime workshop for their monthly series. I agreed and a few months later delivered an interactive talk in a dimmed lecture hall (that was also broadcast to the Florida and Arizona campuses) that demystified the common writing metaphor of "flow" and reviewed strategies for improving coherence at the document, paragraph, and sentence levels.

The director of the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and Research Training attended my talk, remarked with enthusiasm on the "high added value" of my writing expertise, and invited me to offer additional "deeper dive" programming. Their office, I came to learn, was inundated with requests for writing support from postdocs, trainees, and graduate students—and crucially the director, an alumnus of a small liberal arts college, recognized the importance of our field's work. Thus I designed a four-workshop series on scientific writing in which I introduced participants to key ideas from rhetoric and writing studies (writing as a situated and social act; writing as a process); coached productive feedback practices and engaged participants in peer review; and explicitly discussed the expected conventions and moves of the IMRaD (introduction, methods, results, and discussion) genre, section by section. Much to my initial surprise, our discussions on the scientific paper genre were the most valuable part of the workshop for my participants. I had assumed that my (insider) participants knew more about this genre than I did as a humanist and would find such discussion a waste of time, but I soon (re)learned the value of my ability to analyze and demystify writing genres. This experience taught me about how scientists write and think. I also learned that writing teachers sometimes have allies in surprising places.

Ramírez: The domino effect of greater social and economic influences in the spring of 2009 that unfolded over a course of a year led to my failed national job search. Going on the job market outside the field, I wanted a position that would incorporate my research skills and experiences as a rhetoric and writing studies scholar. Not giving up the search, I became aware of a postdoctoral position opened on my home campus of The University of Texas at El Paso with a federally funded Center of Excellence, The National Center for Border Security and Immigration. With a focus on conducting research into the newest technologies along the border, the Center had just opened, and they were hiring for a postdoctoral full-time research position. The Center was also seeking to improve the experience and education of those who worked within the ranks of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), such as Border Patrol and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). With another researcher who held a doctorate in criminal justice, this post-doc was marked to conduct an education needs assessment of the entire Department of Homeland Security within a year's time. The Center valued not just the doctoral degree, but the skills that accompanied it. While this position was at the University, it was in a community foreign to rhetoric and composition.

In my first week, the committee noted that my skills in writing, reporting research, and developing curriculum, along with an understanding of educational programs—all

grounded in my degree in rhetoric and writing studies—signaled the primary reason I was hired for the position. Further, they mentioned that my vast experience in presenting at national conferences was attractive to them because the findings of our research had to be reported to federal governmental agencies. I had found a position in which I could use the skills I had and also grow in terms of using them in a different setting.

The task that was placed before my research partner and me was to survey all five agencies of the Department of Homeland Security and, from the survey results, develop a curriculum for an associate's, and eventually a bachelor's, degree. A background in rhetoric and writing studies was immensely valuable at every stage of the research project, from developing and framing the questions of the study to testing the survey questions. As we were developing the survey questions, my research partner with a doctorate in criminal science had some understanding of the educational needs and desires of federal workers. We developed an instrument that contained fifty-two courses and subjects from five academic areas, such as mathematics and ethics, politics and the world, laws and law enforcement, public relations, and planning. While developing the survey, my co-researcher had not considered writing skills as a subject to include in the survey. Yet, with my background in rhetoric and writing studies, I knew that writing would be a valued skill among the federal workers, and so we included various iterations of writing skills from critical thinking/analytical skills to ethics, technical writing, interviewing skills, and English composition.

In the process of collecting the survey data, we visited forty-five DHS sites across the country, speaking to hundreds of groups of workers about the survey and what we intended to create from the data (Ramírez and Rioux 8). Conducting this kind of research was not included in my training as a graduate student; however, speaking to ten to fifty people or more and having to carefully explain the process of an assignment resonated with being in the composition classroom. By the end of the study, we had collected 5,122 surveys (Ramírez and Rioux 12). Graduate student assistants entered the data into a qualitative data software collection database, and as the numbers emerged, we were surprised at what they showed. Among the top listed subjects of the fifty-two listed, the surveyors ranked the top six subjects as critical thinking/analytical skills, ethics, technical writing, and English composition. As these numbers emerged in the data analysis, we had to shift our perception and conclusion about what educational skills are valued in the federal workplace. As noted, we predicted that criminal justice or management would rise to the top of educational needs. On the contrary, writing and communication skills were most valued. A quote from the published report of this study notes, "Two subjects that are consistently among the top twenty for these agencies are Technical Writing and English Composition. Also consistently listed is the subject Informational and Descriptive Oral Communication. The importance of these topics was reinforced through the informal interviews, roundtable discussions and focus groups. The researchers were told repeatedly about the importance of these skills" (23). The experience in this research gave even me a new understanding of my own skills and how they can function in the workforce. During our analysis and presentation of these results, my skill set in writing studies felt validated at every turn.

I brought these expert skills to the table in my postdoctoral position, and so the contributions I was able to provide when writing up and proposing some of the curriculum

served the team well. At the end of the study, my research partner, Dr. Gail Rioux, also had a newfound understanding of the importance of writing and communication skills.

What We Learned

Beyond gaining invaluable skills outside of the normal composition educational setting, we were surprised, and our thinking was enriched, by a number of aspects of these experiences. First, in order to succeed, we learned how to denormalize our ways of thinking, writing, and doing—to more acutely understand what we bring to the table that’s valuable outside the traditional disciplinary imagination of a writing classroom. Disciplinary enculturation can blind us to our skills and worth, making this a challenging shift in thinking. But we soon learned to articulate our value and to anticipate the ways in which we might contribute to a project—say, the impact a bread-and-butter rhetorical perspective can have on a conversation about a study (like, “Is the true purpose of coding these videos to *evaluate* or to *describe* this clinical interaction?” or “What kinds of questions are we asking?”).

Learning how to be the outside disciplinary expert in the room who thinks in a different way than everyone else proved to be the true challenge of this work, but also one of its deepest rewards. Often, we were not merely the sole rhetorician or writing specialist but indeed the sole *humanist* in a conversation. This challenge isn’t unique to those working outside the field—faculty at small schools who routinely have to collaborate across disciplines, WPAs and WAC directors, and grant and industry proposal writers also know this role well, to name a few. However, we soon realized that making a place for ourselves in unfamiliar work spaces, in which we often felt we were an ambiguous fit, involved critical rhetorical skills: evaluating the writing or research situation and figuring out why the groups were approaching a project in a particular way. For example, Cristina Ramírez was able to see the explicit need to ask a question about writing needs within the survey, which the political science researcher had not even considered. And in hindsight, had this focus to the questions been left off of the survey, the most important aspects of the educational needs assessment would have been left off and the curriculum would have been structured much differently.

What fortified our courage in these situations was discovering that the threshold for “expertise” plays out differently when you’re in an out-of-field or industry context compared to when you’re inside of the field. Inside the field, we typically don’t make claims to expertise without years of research and (sometimes extensive) publications. However, outside the field, colleagues can (at times) grant an immediate recognition of the value of our most basic skills—writing up reports from raw data, asking questions from the perspective of a writer, tracking the congruency of the written word—which may allow us to bravely jump into arenas we might otherwise consider related to yet outside our skillset. For instance, Christina LaVecchia had little research or teaching background in scientific rhetoric and writing, apart from teaching two semesters of undergraduate technical writing and taking a graduate seminar in professional writing theory. Yet she was seen as an expert in scientific writing at Mayo and was able to leverage the opportunity to develop a scientific writing workshop series, as described above.

As a whole, we were impressed with the extent to which our colleagues outside the field were using rhetoric and writing in sophisticated ways. Indeed, while we in rhet/comp certainly develop expertise in and deep knowledge of rhetoric and writing, our field does not have exclusive knowledge of these domains and professionals outside of our field highly value these practices. Nonetheless, we want to stress that those schooled in rhetoric and composition have skills in teaching writing, structuring and producing writing, collaborative work, and peer mentoring others through writing projects small and large that are welcomed in industry and address their needs. Bringing the classroom to the boardroom—being able to pinpoint the use of the rhetorical lens in settings outside the academy, explain it, and harness it—was indeed seen as an incredibly valuable skill in our experience.

In short, we both found our skills and everyday work of writing were highly valued outside the field—at times, we perhaps felt more valued than at any other time in our careers. We found traction and thrived in these unusual spaces because we were able to contribute as mentors, project managers, grant writers, collaborators, co-authors, sounding boards, readers and responders of writing, and qualitative data collectors and analysts. While both of us have returned to traditional paths in the academy for rhetoric and composition graduates, we look back on our experiences not as detours but as important, formative, and beneficial periods of our careers and encourage others to follow in our footsteps.

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Writing Center Reflections: The Impact of Tutor to Tutor Teaching

Patricia Pytleski

Besides accessible locations, ample resources, and sufficient funding, an essential consideration for a successful writing center involves content knowledge and pedagogical training of the undergraduate and graduate student tutors. Most centers train their tutors with classes or programs highlighting best practices in writing and tutoring instruction and also encourage tutors to observe experienced tutors' sessions. Tutor training, tutors' observations of tutoring sessions, and the discussions that follow are useful to writing center training; students witness varied tutoring styles and methods and then can discuss and analyze their own tutoring process and choices. Even once tutors begin tutor-

ing, their training continues, through ongoing meetings and discussions, guest speakers, and assigned scholarship.

As Kenneth Bruffee states, "Tutors learn tutoring 'techniques' by working with each other as writers and critics... As peer critics, in fact, they are genuinely responsible for each other's academic growth, and for each other's well-being in the class" (79). This collaborative sharing of perspectives and practices and their responsibilities to each other and to their tutees demonstrate the mission of my writing center of supporting scholarship, creativity, and composition on campus. As Director at Kutztown University's Writing Center (UWC), I have begun to supplement all of this conventional training with what I call "Tutor to Tutor Teaching." Tutors should draw from their own writing choices and experiences inside and outside of the center and share their knowledge and practices with student writers *and* other tutors during sessions. By tutoring each other, tutors create and enhance the shared practices of the writing center.

Here I hope to demonstrate the benefits of Tutor to Tutor Teaching. Essential to my reflection on this training method is not only relevant scholarship from sources such as Anne Ellen Geller and Elizabeth Boquet but also tutors' experiences as voiced by themselves, in their own words. The inclusion of a variety of voices, scholars, graduate and undergraduate tutors, as well as my own as director, is intentional: to literally voice the importance of Tutor to Tutor Teaching writing sessions on the success of campus writing centers.

In our UWC, tutors are encouraged to experience Tutor to Tutor Teaching, a hands-on authentic training that engages them in tutoring with other tutors, as they work together on their writing within sessions. Pedagogically, this training has proven that students often learn better or at least differently, collaboratively, from one another. I have begun encouraging all tutors to sign up for writing sessions after seeing its beneficial effect on the center's community and in later tutoring sessions.

Through their experiences working with students and with their peer tutors' writing, tutors start to learn what a difference they can make in the lives of writers as they are also improving their own writing and reflecting on their writing choices. In Bruffee's speech to peer tutors, in "What Being A Writing Peer Tutor Can Do for You," he states, "Being a writing peer tutor is related to all kinds of productive relationships among human beings. Your tutees learn from you, you learn from your tutees, you learn from the writing peer tutors you work with, and they learn from you" (5). Through tutoring collaboration, tutors and tutees reap personal and intellectual benefits, and tutors benefit from working with each other. In Tutor to Tutor Teaching, tutors put themselves on the receiving end of a tutoring session and benefit as writers *and* as tutors.

It is essential that tutors think about themselves as writers and draw from their own writing processes and writerly choices within their tutoring sessions, whether they are the tutor or the tutee. As Gellar and her coauthors note, "Those of us who educate tutors must be mindful as well, as we are in danger of forgetting one (at least one) powerful motivating factor that brings tutors to their work in writing centers: namely, their senses of themselves as writers... we believe their identities as writers can, will, and should influence their tutoring" (Gellar, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, and Boquet 72-3). Students should incorporate their writing selves, choices, and reasoning behind these choices into their tutoring sessions. In reminding our tutors that they were chosen as tutors partially

due to their own writing experiences and successes and encouraging them to never leave their roles as writers out of sessions with other students, we are helping them to formulate their feedback to students around what has worked for them as writers.

When tutors put themselves in the receiving end of a tutoring session, they benefit as writers and as tutors. Most indicative of the success of Tutor to Tutor Teaching are the testimonies of KU's writing center tutors.³ Heather was with the writing center first as an undergraduate student, then as a master's graduate assistant, and eventually as the GA Research Assistant and GA Manager of the writing center. Heather used Tutor to Tutor Training because of the pressure to perfect graduate applications: "As I was preparing my PhD applications in the fall of 2017, I wanted to make sure my writing sample was as clean as possible." She made two appointments with different peer tutors to focus on two different things within her writing: organization/ content and "narrative flow of the piece ...[to] smooth out any areas of clunky sentence structure and mixed metaphor." Due to her knowledge of tutoring sessions to begin with, she was able to determine that she needed two different sessions to get the type of feedback she felt would be beneficial. Her prior knowledge and personal tutoring experiences in these two sessions helped her encourage students to tackle a few things at a time and perhaps return for more sessions to work on all writing areas of concern. Her experience as a tutor first, and then as a tutee, helped inform her tutoring processes immensely to encourage students to focus on a few things within each session.

Eddie, who held the same undergraduate and then graduate status as Heather, and also as the Research Assistant and eventual Manager, determined that his experience as a tutee informed his tutoring strategies afterwards and also improved the camaraderie and trust within the center; he shared, "If the staff understands that the singular goal is to help students find their voice through their writing, they will be able to support each other as they support their fellow students in their sessions." As an additional benefit, he said, "[when] the tutors all signed up for sessions with each other for their own work... not only does this reinforce the need for the UWC overall, but it shows the trust the tutors have in each other." Eddie's comments demonstrate the impact Tutor to Tutor Teaching can have on the environment and on the center's welcoming and trusting community. Tutor to Tutor Teaching of these two graduate assistants highlighted different experiences and revealed various benefits from their sessions as tutees: focusing on a few things within each session and the impact of the center's environment and tutors' sense of trust. Yet it is not only the graduate student tutors that engage in this practice and have shared their positive experiences; an undergraduate tutor, Greg, also shared his experience from the student side of the tutoring session as well.

Greg, a former undergraduate KU student now working on his MA at another university, stated that "One of the most important lessons I learned as a tutor ... was to know when to ask for help on my own writing ... I learned that there is no such thing as having 'mastery' over writing." Greg shared that even the students trained to teach others benefited from writing help and a tutor's objective look at his work. Greg stated that he benefitted when the tutor "helped me out of writer's block by going over my ideas ... in brainstorming sessions... [and] helped me feel more and more confident in

3. All student testimony is IRB approved.

my writing and my voice by being both an encouraging tutor and an engaged audience for my work.” Through Greg’s experience being tutored, he saw firsthand the value of the writing process and of discussing voice and audience as a tutor. Through Tutor to Tutor Teaching, pedagogies were validated, writing choices were considered, analyzed, and discussed, and these tutors saw the positive impact of these sessions on the writing centers’ sense of community and on its practices within sessions.

The testimonies of two graduate and one undergraduate writing center tutors, the related scholarship on collaborative learning and peer tutoring and my own prolonged study of its effect on the Kutztown University Writing Center all demonstrate that Tutor to Tutor Teaching benefits tutors’ tutoring practices, their own writing, and the overall writing center community. I encourage all writing center directors to promote Tutor to Tutor Teaching within their centers as an essential supplement to their training but also as a pedagogical service to their tutors.

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