CHAPTER 5.

WRITING STANDPOINT(S): INSTITUTION, DISCOURSE, AND METHOD

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The chapter before you is not what we envisioned when we began drafting it in early 2020, just before we began to experience the radical spatial disjuncture delivered by the global pandemic. The pandemic disrupted not only our ongoing longitudinal research on conceptions of writing circulating within our institution but also our site of study and every aspect of our lives and those of our participants. What we imagined to be a straightforward continuation of our ongoing institutional ethnography (IE) quickly morphed as the "COVID-19 discourse" (Luken 2) rewrote and recalibrated local and translocal relationships in ways we could not have anticipated; however, as this chapter demonstrates, IE is helping us to see and make sense of these disrupted and shifting relations by "opening up new and different analytic windows, as well as opportunities for activism and change" (Spiner and Comber 253), specifically within our first-year writing (FYW) curriculum and professional development initiatives.

Taking up Michelle LaFrance and Melissa Nicolas' call for "more institutional ethnographies in our field" ("Institutional Ethnography" 145), we initially framed our multi-stage project as one intended to uncover what, where, and how *writing* means for varied stakeholders at our institution, DePaul University (DPU), a mid-sized, private, Catholic university in the Midwest. Inspired by LaFrance's study "on the circulation of *information literacy* as a key term" in her FYW program (105), we began a similar inquiry on *writing*, first focusing on institutional sites known for their attention to writing—the writing center and our independent writing department—and eventually expanding our exploration to university sites

where the activity of writing facilitates, but is not understood as, *work*. We aimed to make visible university stakeholders' conceptions of writing as they "circulated through the many ways of doing, knowing, and being that constituted" our university (LaFrance, "An Institutional Ethnography" 108) and, like Cristyn Elder (this volume), to map where on campus undergraduate writing is valued and supported. Unforeseeably, IE would only become more crucially significant to us, as writing researchers, to acutely recognize the "disjunctions and erasures" (LaFrance, *Institutional Ethnography* 73) of work processes and social relations made manifold by the COVID-19 pandemic. While our research questions have remained consistent over the four years of our study, our research site, and our individual positions in relation to it, has changed. Having found other preliminary reports on ongoing IE projects (e.g., Eastwood; LaFrance and Nicolas, "What's Your Frequency?") instructive for our own, we hope that our readers will likewise find value in our reflections on how the methodology continues to reshape our understanding of the problematics that we set out to explore.

This chapter begins with a description of our research design and modifications we made as the project progressed. It then illustrates how we have recursively analyzed our data to identify "sites of interface between individuals and a vast network of institutional relations, discourses, and work processes" (McCoy 111), foregrounding how disruptions surfaced by the pandemic have revealed to us the unstable and co-constitutive nature of standpoint and ruling relations. As we trace the *work processes* mapped in our study (i.e., how people's work is organized and coordinated by their activation of texts), and what these processes reveal about writing at DPU, we argue that writing is not only a vehicle for work processes, but *is* work in many institutional sites, whether stakeholders recognize it as such or not (see Miller, this volume, for a discussion of writing as work). Although the claim that writing is work appears self-evident for writing centers and departments, the processes by which that work is continuously coordinated and co-accomplished in "micro-moments" as individuals interface with institutional discourses and ruling relations are not always visible or evident, especially as these processes and practices become so routinized as to be just *how things are done*. After addressing limitations and implications of our study for the everyday work of writing at DPU, we conclude by reflecting on opportunities for action emerging through this research.

RESEARCH DESIGN: STANDPOINT(S), PROBLEMATICS, AND METHODS

Our project arose from the situated, temporally oriented perspectives of the three contributing researchers: Erin, a newly hired assistant professor and

incoming FYW Director hoping, like LaFrance, to "gain[] important understandings of the complex program" she would soon direct ("An Institutional Ethnography" 106); Pete, founding chair of our independent writing department seeking to understand how and why writing instruction faded from its privileged role in strategic planning efforts of the mid-00s; and Madeline, a master's student and writing tutor interested in exploring the motivations and purposes behind local writing center practices. Given our distinct yet overlapping interests, we took up IE for its systematic, foundational concepts through which to analyze relationships between individual practices and experiences and the social and institutional forces that continuously reshape, and are reshaped by, those practices. Central to our interests, the heuristics of *standpoint*, *work*, *work processes*, and *ruling relations* guided our research design and data analysis across all stages of our project.

Data collection and analysis have spanned four years to date and unfolded across three stages, each focused on differently positioned stakeholders in various university sites, though, as we came to realize and will address below, the stability and uniformity of institutional categories, which subsume individual standpoints, work against the aims of IE. Because institutions are "site[s] of dialogic and multivocal belongings," institutional ethnographers often begin their studies with surveys and interviews "to get a sense of the 'language, thinking, concepts, beliefs and ideologies' that constitute a site" (LaFrance, "Institutional Ethnography, *Handbook*" 461, 467), a process that we likewise followed. Although we modified protocols to account for varied particularities of context across individuals, all participants were asked to define writing and discuss influences shaping that definition; they also discussed their writing practices and work processes when speaking, for example, about specific texts or in relation to their job description(s). These questions prompted participants to reflect on the extent to which their conceptions of writing (re)shape, and are (re)shaped by, their institutional position(s) and daily work processes. As the following sections will illustrate, the flexibility of IE, along with our project's development across three stages, has afforded us opportunities to refine research protocols along the way to bring into focus the "micro-moments" in which university stakeholders "actively negotiate their belongings within institutional locations" (LaFrance, "Introduction," this collection).

STAGE I: CO-CONSTITUTIVE PERCEPTIONS OF WRITING AND WORK IN THE WRITING CENTER

Our research began in May 2018 with an IRB-approved pilot project in the writing center (WC), the central program of the University Center for

Writing-based Learning (UCWbL) within the Office of Academic Affairs.[1] Like the study conducted by Michelle Miley and her team (this collection) our inquiry began in the WC and then branched out to closely interconnected sites. Because IE "begins in the reality of work experience," the methodology guided us to ask how tutors' "understanding and experience of their work coordinates with the work of the writing center and how the actuality of that work shapes our understanding" (Miley, "Looking Up" 109). Beginning with tutors' standpoints to "look up" at how their work is textually mediated by boss texts inscribing ruling relations, Madeline, from her position as a member of the WC's research and assessment team, distributed a survey to her fellow tutors, asking about their conceptions of writing and writing practices in relation to their perceptions of the work of tutoring (for a similarly focused faculty survey, see Nugent et al., this collection). Understanding that "texts create the essential connection between the local of our bodily being and the translocal organization of ruling relations" (Smith 119), Madeline also conducted discourse-based interviews (see Crozier and Workman; Odell et al.) with tutors, using their self-selected written feedback samples from recent tutoring appointments to ground discussions of practice while staying attuned to "the situated variability of experience within institutions" that give rise to different practices (LaFrance and Nicolas, "Institutional Ethnography" 133). These discourse-based interviews helped us to elicit tutors' knowledge about the work of writing and to trace their activation of boss texts—such as the tutoring handbook and UCWbL mission, values and beliefs—in their written feedback.

To identify standpoints and trace work processes, we read data for hooks and traces of institutional discourses and moments "where discourse and the particularities of lived experience refuse[d] and resist[ed] one another" (LaFrance, *Institutional Ethnography* 39-40). We came to realize, like LaFrance and Nicolas before us, the difficulty of "[a]ttempting to account for various standpoints in the writing center community" given "variations in job descriptions and related work practices" ("What's Your Frequency?" 11). Although our participating WC administrators shared the same HR classification of *full-time professional staff*, participating tutors ranged from undergraduate and graduate students with various disciplinary and departmental affiliations to long-term professional staff, some of whom also teach part-time for FYW. Tutors across these institutionally designated categories also held WC leadership positions or, like Madeline, contributed to one or more "teams;" consequently, tutors' work knowledges and processes vary considerably depending on the "two or three" roles they elect to "take on" (UCWbL 21).

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1   IRB protocol #MC051718LAS.

For example, two participants sharing the institutional category of *graduate assistants* articulated different understandings of WC work contoured by the particularities of their additional roles, which they held for equal lengths of time. Participant C, assisting the multilingual writing team, defined WC work as "providing a sense of community" for "a student who is coming from another country," emphasizing that the WC should be "a home away from home," a place where tutors make "them feel like they're part of the community." Participant E, serving on the workshops team and as a writing fellow and WC receptionist, understood WC work as "supporting writers in any stage of the writing process, in any discipline, and for any genre" and made no reference to multilingual writers or linguistic diversity. Just as these participants conceptualized WC work differently, so too did they offer different definitions of writing, with participant C emphasizing that writing can be defined from "multiple perspectives" and participant E defining writing as "expressing your ideas through written form." By drilling down into the nexus of roles and positions subsumed by institutional categories, which imply uniformity and stability not reflective of embodied practice, we began to see how tutors' standpoints, definitions of writing, and perceptions of WC work co-evolve as they routinely activate organizational texts "for another first time" with each tutoring appointment (Dippre 73).

STAGE II: INSTITUTIONALLY CAPTURING WRITING IN THE WRITING STUDIES DEPARTMENT

Struck by the ways in which institutional categories subsumed individuals and WC discourse regulated variations in standpoint, we chose to focus the second stage of our project on the majors and minors in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, & Discourse (WRD). We were curious about the variations we were certain to find between boss texts—catalog content, course descriptions, learning outcomes, and so on—and students' individualized uptake of the programs' efforts to regulate and authorize particular understandings of *writing* and related practices in alignment with the ruling relations and disciplinary discourses of writing studies. By extending our inquiry into our department as a point of relation to the WC, we also hoped to develop a better understanding of "the effects of the coordination between the two," especially given their independence from one another (Miley, "Mapping" 76). Thus, in May 2019, after refining the survey instrument and discourse-based interview protocol to focus on WRD and participants' self-selected meaningful writing projects (Eodice et al.), Madeline distributed the survey using the department's student mailing list and conducted interviews with survey respondents who opted in.[2]

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2   IRB Protocol #MC041819LAS.

In keeping with the disciplinary orientation of our department, we were not surprised to find that participants identified themselves as writers across contexts, though we found the variation in participants' talk about writing quite striking. While some used department language to define writing as "a system of communication" or anything where "symbols [are] produced visually," a few participants, who defined writing as *expression* and emphasized the actions writing can accomplish, pulled from their lived experiences across lifeworlds while also illustrating how they were acculturating to and resisting professional and disciplinary discourses. Pete, from his perspective as founding department chair, expressed dismay that some WC tutors—lacking substantial coursework in rhetoric and writing theory taken by WRD majors and minors—displayed vocabulary that seemed to better control (or be better controlled by) disciplinary threshold concepts. As we studied department texts, such as website copy and course descriptions, we came to see that although explicit discussions about writing occur in all WRD courses, there are no boss texts like those Jim Nugent et al. (this collection) describe that are purposely intended to motivate a shared conceptual vocabulary—such as those mediating the work of tutors in the WC. While syllabus policies and course descriptions may *intend* such an outcome, lacking the WC's cohort structure and boss texts, they do so only implicitly and therefore less influentially.

Examining this disjuncture by way of IE led us to a crucial insight about our tacit expectations that WRD majors and minors would define writing in terms of writing studies threshold concepts (Adler-Kassner and Wardle). Attuned to the importance of researcher reflexivity, Pete and Erin considered how their standpoints as unit- and program-level administrators shaped their valuation of expressive conceptions of writing, rendering them more susceptible to *institutional capture*, defined by Dorothy Smith as "a discursive practice, regulated by the institutional procedures of text-reader conversations through which institutional discourse overrides and reconstructs experiential talk and writing" (119). Because their managerial roles required them to enact ruling relations inscribed in disciplinary texts (e.g., Adler-Kassner and Wardle; CWPA) and to routinely create and activate institutional texts (e.g., WRD Dept. Bylaws, FYW Faculty Handbook, Syllabus Checklist, Term Faculty Observation Form) to render individual practices accountable within *institutional circuits*, Pete and Erin came to see how key terms they understood to be shared across the department—including *writing*—actually "len[t] an illusory sense of pedagogical connection to national and professional discussions of writing pedagogy" (LaFrance, "An Institutional Ethnography" 107). As we will discuss when considering the implications of our study, this disjuncture between ideals of practice and individuals' actual material practices opened space for us to consider and "initiate productive

and lasting interventions" to our writing curricula (LaFrance "Introduction," this collection).

STAGE III: WRITING AS WORK IN ACADEMIC AND CO-CURRICULAR UNIVERSITY SITES

Up to this point of our study, we assumed a relatively stable institutional field across our three stages of inquiry, having no way to anticipate a global pandemic that would quite literally dis-orient our participants and ourselves, dramatically altering our embodied experiences of institutional work and the ruling relations coordinating that work translocally. Virus mitigation measures necessarily re-oriented our relationship to each other and to our participants in several crucial ways: we modified interview protocols to include questions about the effects of remote work on writing processes; we conducted all interviews via Zoom, an adjustment enabling Pete and Erin to co-conduct more interviews with administrators and staff than would have been possible given travel between DPU's Lincoln Park and Loop campuses; and, although we did not initially plan to interview staff members, we came to see the value of doing so early in our Stage III data collection and, thus, revised our IRB protocol[3] to include staff members whose position descriptions entailed communication with various stakeholders.

When we began interviewing participants in early April 2020, it became clear that the context of COVID-19 created significant "difference, divergence, and disjunction within sites of writing" that revealed disruptions in some, but not all, participants' work processes (LaFrance, *Institutional Ethnography* 71). As we discuss in the next section, these disruptions surfaced previously hidden social relations and habitual practices that, ironically, became visible only in their suddenly notable absence. No matter the extent to which digital technologies may have already been mediating institutional relations locally and extra-locally, the sudden collision of competing discursive values and habits as work and home came to overlap decidedly altered both the work of writing and how we would continue our project of tracing this work.

TRACING THE WORK OF WRITING IN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

In our WC and WRD stages, participants sometimes struggled to describe in detail their writing and work processes, but this difficulty disappeared with our Stage III participants who were concurrently grappling with disruptions to their

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3   IRB Protocol #EW020320LAS-R3.

typical work processes and able to consciously reflect on practices that would typically fly below the radar. For instance, as norms and conventions for institutional email correspondence gave way to quickly emerging and pressing exigencies, participants had to reconfigure their approach to this ubiquitous genre in ways that rhetorically addressed the gravity of the current moment and considered readers' decreasing bandwidth as emails came to replace what would typically be face-to-face conversations. As one newly appointed department chair noted during her April 18 interview:

> I found that all of us have come up with a thousand new ways to say, *I hope all is well.* Every email is a variation on *how are you*? Then the final, the salutation . . . at the end is also *be well*, some variation of that, too. I think we're embedding in our writing to each other these well wishes, or trying to voice some kind of concern, and also acknowledge the insanity of this moment. You [Pete] and I even exchanged some emails about this, about how weird it is to be doing business when there are cooler trucks with dead people in them. It's just crazy. There's such a cognitive dissonance, sort of, that you're like making a D2L quiz, and you can't go outside. (Participant 14)

The emotional labor of "coming up with a thousand new ways" to embed care and well wishes into emails that have, conventionally, avoided such expressions, emerged across administrator and staff interviews and was further amplified by the recognition that words could not repair the cognitive dissonance of going about business as usual while infection and death rates were growing exponentially worldwide, with "alarmingly disproportionate rates" in Black and Latinx communities in Chicago and across the U.S. (Corley, para. 1).

Focused on ways to stay connected with and support students—especially those who are multiply marginalized or unhoused—in their routine and emergent needs, the coordinator of a support center in Student Affairs described the work of creating various channels in Microsoft Teams to direct "students who have needs for food [to the] Dean [of student]'s office or places where they can find food," like DPU's food pantry, or "to help students with books because . . . there's no longer inter-library loans" (Participant 209). Although the coordinator acknowledged that "Teams has been essential to make sure we're not . . . dropping the ball for any of our students who need us," he also admitted that "it's information overload. I'm not gonna lie. It can be a bit intimidating, and sometimes I just have to log off 'cause I'm just like, 'Okay, I can't keep up with all this information coming from everywhere.'" Recognizing the need to quickly pivot from campus-based outreach to digitally-mediated outreach, this

coordinator described how writing—and reading—became the focal work of his office. As LaFrance observes, "how people are positioned within a site will often dramatically impact not only what people do but how they do it" (*Institutional Ethnography* 110). When "the site" becomes exclusively virtual, altered material conditions produce functional changes with both material and ontological implications.

Many participants *felt* these functional changes in relation to the impact of physical space on their writing and work processes. From a librarian to the many students who, having previously relied on writing in the library and on campus, found themselves affected by the disruption of working remotely, struggling to develop new work processes and maintain "professionalism" in spaces that were typically *not* used for DPU work.

> **University Librarian 213:** I've got this [gestures to] china cabinet behind me and I don't have an office at home, but I have an office at work. And I have a system where I put different things on different post-it notes and move them around and I don't—I mean, I suppose I could do that [here, on the china cabinet], but I haven't found my legs yet for that.

> **First-Year Student 305:** I was writing this [philosophy essay] at my childhood home with my grandma walking in, asking me if I want apple slices and stuff. I feel like being at home definitely adds a different context to it where it's like . . . *I still feel like a child here* because I'm at my house rather than an apartment or something. [It] takes away the professionalism to me.

For stakeholders like this librarian and student, whose work routinely takes place on campus, the shift to working remotely required additional material resources and labor that remained invisible to those faculty and administrators for whom remote work was already typical, such as faculty in the College of Business where online, asynchronous courses have long been a standard part of the curriculum.

> **Associate Professor of Business 404:** [L]argely what I've been doing for the past 10, 15 years is working remotely. I find that if I go into the university for anything but teaching or a scheduled meeting, if I'm in my office *it descends into gossip*. People come by and they want to chat and want to fool around. If I want to get stuff done, I work here at my home office. I've designed an ergonomic space that I've had

for 25 years, and it just totally rocks for me. I've got every-
thing I need.

Interestingly, what this well-resourced associate professor refers to as "gossip" was understood differently by faculty-administrators and staff who routinely work both on and off campus and came to recognize, in their absence, how integral those moments of stopping by to chat were for their (seemingly isolated) work processes.

Almost overnight, teleconferencing modalities reconstituted not only the material interface between stakeholders, but their potential for interaction. We saw this most decidedly in our administrator and staff participants' discussions of working to create new processes for collaboration and connection. No longer able to "just go next door to talk to somebody" (Dean 23), some administrators and staff realized the importance of happenstance interactions, now conspicuously absent, and created virtual spaces to encourage and mediate the informal social connections essential to maintaining communities of practice.

> **Associate Provost (AP) 12:** *I hadn't realized so keenly until now* how much intel you're just picking up standing reheating your lunch or walking down the hall or *in the women's room now that we have a lady provost.* Little bits of stuff you pick up here and there that then when you get back to your desk, have helped you understand how better to say something in order to be heard. . . . I've been missing that kind of just *unscripted, incidental,* intelligence of the community.

> **Vice President (VP) 10:** Something that has come up in the last few weeks, obviously, the new normal, whatever we want to call it—DPU 1.5—while we're in this *temporary* mode, we've really been trying to think about community, and how do we keep our community strong while we can't be physically close to each other? And so, there's a tool we rolled out for the institution called Microsoft Teams that's sort of got a social component to it, and we've really pushed this [in Information Services (IS)]. So, we created a space—we call it IS-ta-gram, like playing on Instagram. I'm just trying to get people to share pet photos, just anything, little comedic things you found in the news today.

Analyzing these moments through the IE concept of *standpoint*, which "recognizes that we are implicated in social networks in ways that may not always be entirely clear," we see in these participants' talk about *work processes* the invisible

social relations that come into view when routine processes are interrupted (La-France, *Institutional Ethnography* 95). AP 12, in referring to conversations that take place "in the women's room now that we have a lady provost," reveals a recent shift in social relations that afforded administrators using the women's room private access to the provost—access that, presumably, was previously afforded to administrators using the men's room. Because these encounters happen behind closed doors, the co-constitutive work of writing is erased, resulting in texts understood by both author and reader(s) as the work of one person. In the absence of physical proximity, what VP 10 likened to a "spiderweb that you can feel the threads being pulled" on by others, many stakeholders came to recognize the degree to which their work had always been co-constituted, acknowledging how integral these incidental conversations are to how the work of writing—and of the university—comes to happen as it does.

REFLECTING ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF WRITING AS WORK

As we acknowledge above, ongoing analytical work has revealed limitations in our multi-stage research design. By tightly circumscribing each stage and site, we initially "look[ed] at each individual site as unique," precluding the possibility of seeing "the effects of the coordination" among the WC, WRD, and various university sites (Miley, "Mapping" 76). Likewise, our reliance on institutional categories for identifying and recruiting participants prevented us from seeing how unique standpoints are subsumed by these categories: WC tutors are undergraduate and graduate students—in some cases, WRD majors, minors, MA students, and alumni—and they are also part-time instructors for FYW; administrators with various disciplinary and professional identifications also hold faculty and staff positions; and staff, some of whom are also WRD MA alumni, are integral to the work of writing at all levels of the university, from (re)designing curricula for the career center to coordinating professional development opportunities for faculty, from serving as instructional designers to teaching part-time and piloting new modalities for FYW. Looking only from the macro perspective of organizational charts, one could easily surmise that the work of writing is limited to those university units claiming it as their subject.

However, as we were reminded through the process of reanalyzing WRD data, even in these sites where writing explicitly organizes work knowledge and processes, what *writing* means varies just as much, if not more so, than in other university sites. When confronted with our devaluation of expressive conceptions of writing and our tacit expectations that WRD participants would discuss writing by way of disciplinary threshold concepts, we traced this ideological

position to ruling relations inscribed in disciplinary texts like the WPA Outcomes Statement (CWPA), which has been critiqued for "enact[ing] Eurocentric epistemological perspectives" that "inflict covert racial violence by marginalizing the linguistic epistemologies of raciolinguistically minoritized students" (Kareem 28) and reinscribing "race evasive" discourses (Kynard 166); excluding "African American rhetorics, Native American rhetorics, Chicano/Chicana rhetorics, Asian American rhetorics, and queer rhetorics just to name a few" (Carter-Tod, para. 13); and perpetuating habits of white language supremacy (Inoue) and anti-Black linguistic racism (Baker-Bell). As Carmen Kynard, Staci Perryman-Clark, Sheila Carter-Tod, Vershawn Ashanti Young and Michelle Bachelor Robinson, and many other Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and scholars of color have been arguing for the duration of our field's existence, incorporating African American and cultural rhetorics into writing curricula and professional statements offering ideals of practice—like the WPA-OS—is imperative for cultivating antiracist and inclusive programs and courses, countering linguistic racism, and "helping students understand, analyze, and produce based on a broader concept of knowledge of rhetoric(s)" (Carter-Tod, para. 19). Extending similar critiques to *Naming What We Know*, Tessa Brown argues that excluding "creative writers' knowledge," as Pete and Erin were inclined to do, further "limit[s] contributions and theorizations from writers of color" (607). Surfacing this problematic, then, helped to reveal "whose interests are served," or not, through local instantiations of recommended best practices (Campbell and Gregor 15).

Through IE, we can see how what appeared to be an unquestioned disciplinary value for non-expressive conceptions of writing actually has more pernicious consequences for social justice and equity. As Marie Campbell and Frances Gregor remind us, "[n]ot understanding an organization is one form of domination. Understanding it and having it shape a course of action is another" (15). Uncovering this problematic opened up new lines of inquiry, enabling us to explicate these differently valued conceptions of writing, and provided an exigence for revising our FYW curriculum to be inclusive of and attentive to non-Eurocentric epistemological perspectives (Kareem), literacies, cultural rhetorics, and rhetorical traditions beyond the "Aristotelian rhetorical model" (Carter-Tod, para. 11)—a project already underway through FYW's development of a custom, student-facing textbook like that described by Nugent et al. (this volume). In combination with a modified "disparate impact analysis" of student learning outcomes (Poe et al.) and a new professional development initiative for FYW faculty, program-wide adoption of the *DPU Guide to Meaningful and Transformative Writing* (Workman, Hohenzy, and MacKenna-Sandhir) in Fall 2022 will, hopefully, prompt students and faculty alike to reflect on and expand their conceptions and valuations of writing.

Despite the limitations of our research design, we hope, like Elder (this volume), that continuing to trace writing across our university will contribute to "a more accurate map . . . that spans a much wider territory and offers a more layered landscape," one that we already see coming into view through our ongoing IE project and related programmatic initiatives (Miley, "Looking Up" 124). We hope that this map will offer us a "means of creating a culture of writing and a recognition of interdependence within our institution," especially as we work toward linguistic justice and antiracist practices (Miley, "Mapping Boundedness" 77).

CONCLUSION: MAKING SENSE OF EMERGENT RULING RELATIONS

We began our study intending to uncover "the routine textual work [that] puts together [our] large-scale institution and its outcomes" so that we could render visible the complex of institutional discourses and ruling relations mediating various stakeholders' work processes (Turner 139). Now in November 2022, over four years later, we find our IE project in a state similar to most other aspects of our lives; it has been disrupted in ways we could not have anticipated, and while this disruption has surfaced tacit work knowledges, revealed co-constitutive writing and work processes, and opened up space for critical intervention in FYW, its trajectory seems inevitably moving toward problematics we can scarcely predict. As the perceptions of disruption articulated above reveal, some of the situated textual activities that give rise to "replicable forms of social action," which, for Turner, "*are* the acts *of* the institution" (140), have lost definition in the institutional architecture. Others are emergent, but far from mundane, routinized, or standardized.

While IE positions us to locate and investigate a "temporal sequence of activities that is coordinated, recognizable, and reproducible" (Turner 148), more visible at the moment we revise this manuscript are ripples traveling through the ruling relations. Even as DPU transitioned most stakeholders back to campus in the 2021–2022 academic year, both quickly emergent exigencies and routine committee meetings *still* call out for teleconferencing, and the weakened temporal constraints associated with face-to-face orders of interaction continue to disrupt the familiar textual order—circumstances will no longer wait, for example, on the leisurely meeting schedule written into Faculty Council bylaws. The capacity to launch meetings with fewer material constraints, for some, makes possible new affinities, alliances, and working relationships unimaginable when this study began, though, by the same token, stakeholders without material and technological resources to participate in these conversations are excluded. The

"architectural significance" of some boss texts, as mechanisms of social control, have been lessened as familiar conditions of material organization are replaced by these other measures of coordination. Robert's Rules of Order never saw the Zoom Chat functionality coming.

In these uncertain conditions, we push forward with our project, assured that where routinized prescriptive texts or sequenced textual practices are losing shape or giving way, the methodology of institutional ethnography will continue to offer a means for understanding how the work of writing comes to happen as it does and opening spaces for activism and change.

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