

CHAPTER 5.

BASIC WRITING'S INTEROFFICE, INTERCAMPUS ACTOR-NETWORK: ASSEMBLING OUR HISTORY THROUGH DOLMAGEAN ANALYSIS

John Paul Tassoni

Miami University

“TRYING TO FIND” BASIC WRITING

I tried to find basic writing (BW) at my university but found instead what BW tells. This being the case, it occurs to me that if you don't find this story that BW tells about its place, you might only learn what that place tells you about BW. Not that this is an unrelated or insignificant story: that place (depending on the place) might tell you something about equal opportunity or student needs, or about a drain on resources, or about errors and standards, or even about civilization in decline. And if you get the story of BW from those of us who actually teach and administer BW, you'll learn something about students with dyslexia and depression, students with unreliable cars and full-time jobs; you'll learn something about class and ethnicity, about teachers working for substandard pay, and even about some private concerns as to whether we, in the end, open doors to institutional and cultural transformation or unwittingly affirm an oppressive status quo. You'll also find us recounting stories about students who defy their “at-risk” designation to earn degrees and drastically improve their life chances, and you'll encounter tales about students whose struggles throw our teaching into crisis and propel us toward new methods and theories. Come to think of it, though, just about anyone in higher education can tell you something (actual or mythic, but something always telling) about BW; but while these things they tell you (or don't tell you) indeed intertwine, inform, and trammel the story of BW, they are not necessarily the story that BW tells. To get that story, you almost have to be trying to find BW.

Positioned in this way—“trying to find”—I draw on actor-network theory and Jay Dolmage's (2017) critique of academic ableism to describe BW's presence(s) among a system's aligned and competing interests and concerns. Theorists

such as Bruno Latour (1999) and John Law (1999), as well as Ehren Pflugfelder (2015), Yrjö Engeström (1987), and Kate Crawford and Helen Hasan (2006) help me discern BW as not just a story of teachers, learning assistance staff, and “at-risk” students, but as what Pflugfelder (2015) would call a “strange entanglement” of institutional dynamics (p. 115), of humans, programs, and offices, many of which would fail to chart BW as a principal concern. While I am in total agreement with Lynn Reid (in this collection) whose chapter articulates the value of extending our focus beyond issues of localization to “the larger discursive network that influences basic writing today,” my focus falls on the internal people, programs, and offices that reinforce a network in which BW persists (see Porter et al., 2000), as nebulous as that persistence sometimes is.

Any search for a BW program will convey volumes about its school’s commitment to democratic access and student learning, what scholastic and cultural markers it uses to designate students worthy or unworthy of a higher education, what efforts it makes to open gates or shore-up walls, what kinds of professional labor it values, and what discourses it relies upon to describe itself amidst all these varied attitudes and practices. Toward this end, Dolmage’s (2017) consideration of “steep steps,” “retrofits,” and “universal design” help me construct a story that intersects the histories, practices, and beliefs of entangled institutional agencies. This story/assemblage is designed to help agents/agencies recognize their involvement in BW’s interoffice, intercampus actor-network. At the very least, knowing the story that BW tells at their particular schools, writing program administrators (WPAs) are in a better position to “find allies,” as Ira Shor (1997) recommends (p. 102), in order to create new stories/trajectories where those allies find cause. Far from eschewing the broader, external forces that impact post-secondary education, the theories and stories I deploy in this chapter can help people, programs, and offices across campuses recognize their stake in BW and the political exigencies of their acknowledgment. When you try to find the assemblage that is BW, in short, you find that school’s mettle: this is the story that BW tells.

STEEP STEPS, RETROFITS, AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN

One of the reasons you have to go searching for BW at my school is that BW, to some degree, has been hidden (intentionally forgotten) and to other degrees, people have just kind of lost track of it (accidentally forgotten it) or never really thought about it at all (very telling). My school is Miami University, a public ivy comprising a selective, central campus in Oxford, Ohio, and two open-admissions regional campuses. I principally work at the regional campus in Middletown, a town 25 miles east of the Oxford location. When I arrived at the school

in 1994, BW offerings were taught through Middletown's Office of Learning Assistance (OLA), virtually without any oversight on the part of the English Department at either the central or regional campus. Students, referred to the course through an examination that tested their knowledge of grammar and punctuation, signed up for two concurrent writing workshops (English 001 and 002), and these sections operated as a two-credit, current-traditional, BW class. A free-standing BW course, English 007, staffed as well through the OLA, was not developed by that office until 1998. This course does not count toward graduation and does not appear in Miami's course catalog—its omission from this publication a prerequisite for its existence (DeGenaro, 2006). While English 001/002, on the other hand, did appear in the catalog when I joined Miami's faculty in 1994 and has so, I now know, since 1974, my colleagues on the College Composition Committee at Oxford expressed no knowledge of the courses' existence, let alone a stake in their operation.

As you might have guessed, no files labeled "Basic Writing" exist in our university archives or even in the English Department's WPA office; however, I learned that multiple institutional sites intersected with, foreshadowed, and named-without-naming the demographic, economic, pedagogical, and architectural matters shaping trajectories of BW at the school. Having encountered the work of Dolmage while he was still a doctoral student in our rhetoric and composition program, I found that a legend he had developed to image institutional approaches to disability could help me identify ways our department systematically managed its elitist and democratic impulses. With notes of thanks to Jay included, I published a series of articles that employed his legend to explain how BW had "left" the English Department and come to reside at the regionals' OLA. While my earlier works frame BW programming within cultural and pedagogical debates that shaped writing instruction during the time BW emerged at our main campus in the form of an Equal Opportunity Program (EOP) workshop, my approach focused almost exclusively on debates that informed English department actors and their eventual encounter with the OLA. Such a focus on one particular department, program, or course divorces local actants from other entities operating within the university structure and, thus, limits possibilities for positive and sustainable changes that might benefit not only BW students and teachers but strengthen, as well, institutions' (professed) commitments to social justice. Actor-network-theory helps me take that description of these impulses/trajectories and situate them as part of a broader system that circulates BW's interests and concerns.

I draw from Dolmage (2017) to extend descriptions of his legend and provide a more comprehensive and complicated view of the actor-network through which BW persists, pushes, and perishes at a variety of institutional sites—not just English departments and/or offices of learning assistance. I use the components of the

legend, in other words, to describe the manner in which the network assembles in heterogeneous ways that block and/or facilitate the institution's responsiveness to BW (see Law, 1999). Dolmage's legend comprises the key terms—"steep steps," "retrofits," and "universal design"—I use to assemble "the internal tensions and contradictions" within the school's actor-network (Crawford & Hasan, 2006, p. 51). This assemblage includes, as Crawford and Hasan (2006) wrote, echoing the work of Engeström (1987), "both historical continuity and locally situated contingency that are the motive for change and development" (p. 51). Dolmage's legend helps me articulate the dynamic among various actors, including sites and events that have shaped our school's approach to diverse constituencies and, particularly, what room and direction these actants provide for BW. In conjunction with Dolmage's (2017) legend, actor-network theory's "ruthless applications of semiotics," as Law (1999) has characterized it, helps me to "take . . . the semiotic insight, that of the relationship of entities, the notion that they are produced in relations, and [apply] this [insight] ruthlessly to all materials—and not simply to those that are linguistic" (Law 1999, pp. 3, 4). Dolmage's (2017) legend, in short, helps me to describe the network trajectories of the assemblage that is BW at Miami University.

Simply, "steep steps" represent those systemic features/practices that restrict access: they work to mark certain demographics as mainstream business while keeping other constituencies at bay. In academia, such features might take the form of aptitude tests, or fluency in a prestige dialect (and BW curricula that privilege it exclusively), legacy admissions, tuition rates, cultural events on campus that consistently showcase a singular demographic, or even, as Dolmage (2017) points out, literal stairways. Meanwhile, "retrofits" are those features of a system that signal attempts, after the fact, to include previously marginalized groups. An actual ramp, for instance, indicates an attempt to include individuals with certain physical disabilities among a structure's activities. The retrofitted ramp, however, does not ensure that the individuals, once inside, will find other facilities accessible or the people anti-ableist. In this sense, the retrofit can come to represent institutional efforts, like the EOP, or Diversity Week, or a single "Learn Chinese" workshop that invites (although not necessarily through the front door) "non-traditional" constituencies or highlights, in effect, non-mainstream concerns (and reaffirms what is mainstream or essential in the process). A key concept toward determining the intent and effectiveness of systemic change/stasis, a retrofit can serve as an escape valve ("We've done our part; we need no further alterations") or instigate additional changes ("Are other features of our structure accessible too? What more do we need to do?").

The "more" that could be done prior to or even following a retrofit is reflected in "universal design" (UD). Unlike retrofits, which are by definition afterthoughts geared to provide special accommodations to certain segments of

the population, UD asks from the beginning of the design process how all of its features might be aesthetically pleasing and functional for the greatest diversity of users (Alexander, 1995). In a previously published article that traces my department's approach to BW, I describe the significance of UD to BW in this way:

Related to basic writing, universal design, then, would look for ways of integrating the issues and concerns of “at-risk” students into the mainstream business of the department and the institution more generally, rather than merely retrofitting onto its structure a single course [like the ENG 001/002 workshops] that is perpetually [not supposed to exist at a public ivy]. (Tassoni, 2006, pp. 102-103)

The passage goes on to describe UD as a challenge to what Mike Rose (1989) has called “the myth of transience” (p. 5), which characterizes BW as always a provisional (retrofitted) response to writing crises and new constituencies rather than part of the real work of postsecondary education. My 2006 work also calls on UD consultant Elaine Ostroff (2001), who indicates that such views of postsecondary education limit diversity in favor of “a mythical average norm” toward which activities tend to direct themselves (p. 1.12).

In *Academic Ableism*, Dolmage (2017) describes the ableist implications of such a “norm” and the ways in which UD represents an ongoing process that can destabilize this status quo in favor of more equitable designs. While Dolmage (2017) principally focuses on disability, an analysis of BW as actor-network could also lean on this notion of UD as process. This notion provides a sense of ways BW has emerged at various points at various sites in the university's history and how its actor-network might continue to create spaces to invite and support the multiple literacies, interests, and concerns BW represents. In the same light, however, steep steps and retrofits also represent processes that persist in this actor-network. They set and reset along the way but are always coming into being as effects of the institution's ambient rhetorics and related activities, as network trajectories shaping what Miami has become and what it still aspires to be.

Dolmage's (2017) legend helps assemble ambient rhetorics and institutional entities in such a way as to mark the circulation (and sometimes lack thereof) of BW concerns; or better yet, Dolmage's (2017) legend helps (actant/assemblage) BW tell the story of ways its concerns circulate throughout a network of competing and aligned interests. Understanding this movement of BW generated in relation to university entities leads me to, as Latour (1999) would say, “the summing up of interactions” among various offices, individuals, and ideologies “into a very local, very practical, very tiny locus” that is our BW program (p. 17). In this manner, one can explore the structures of the institution without

being led away from these local sites “but closer to them” (Latour, 1999, p. 18). I might speak in terms of mainstream and periphery, current programming, and historical trends, but these elements all define the other; they are all elements of the system and are all part of the story that BW tells.

“THE INSTITUTION MORE GENERALLY”

In that 2006 work referred to above, I mention “the institution more generally,” but in retrospect, I must not have meant it, and even if I did, I would have needed to understand BW as actor-network to avoid losing the local in favor of “the more generally” I sought to characterize. As it turns out, my earlier analyses drew upon Dolmage’s legend to frame and discuss English department debates during the early years of the workshops that a member of its faculty had helped develop for EOP students: BW’s broader actor-network receives scant attention in that earlier work. I traced the ways in which efforts to distinguish mainstream students from those students whom English faculty saw as needing remediation helped fuel the network trajectory that eventually led (after the death of the one English department member who had founded and oversaw the EOP workshops) toward ENG 001/002’s being relocated to the regional campuses (alone), outside the house of English (and inside the OLA). Given efforts devoted then to distinguish mainstream students from those in need of remediation, it was easy to see that the English department was not prone to view the EOP students or other students considered to be in need of “remediation” as the department’s business.

Within the English department, the EOP workshop, which comprised predominantly working-class and African American students, was never perceived as anything but a retrofit (the escape-valve kind) to a core institutional identity, which was marked by singular-plural standards (Fox, 1999), not to mention a White, affluent demographic. Under such circumstances, the retrofit could not hold. Anything resembling UD failed to enter the department’s deliberations on writing instruction, deliberations which would not come to call for a truly plural view of standards (a view which might have situated the EOP workshops as a push toward broader change) but as a means to deprive non-traditional students of their “right to learn and use a dialect other than their own” (Freshman, 1975). In various notes addressed to the Director of Freshman Composition, English faculty affirmed the value of their traditions and standards (steep steps), one department member analogizing the school as an elitist playground in which one needed to learn the existing rules in order to join. My earlier article (Tassoni, 2006), in short, focused a good deal on individual, human actants and the ways in which they had come to (re)constitute the public ivy at a single site, the

English department. The report did not expand its scope in ways that considered the assemblance of discourses that had driven these discussions, the ways, in other words, the broader institution itself served as actant in BW's actor-network.

Similarly, another previously published work on BW doings at Miami, one I co-authored with my colleague Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson (Tassoni & Lewiecki-Wilson, 2005), reports on our attempts to revitalize the ENG 001/002 courses (previously the EOP workshops) as studio workshops. In a sense, we labored in the wake of debates that had resulted in the siphoning of BW concerns to not only the regionals, but out of the house of English itself. New to the school and ignorant of BW's actor-network, I was able to convince our department's College Composition Committee to form a subcommittee devoted to BW concerns, my argument being that the courses that constituted BW programming were, after all, English courses. Because BW programming was situated in the OLA, however, Lewiecki-Wilson's and my attempts to support, inform, and alter the BW landscape involved negotiations with that office, negotiations that rarely, we felt, led anywhere. Our 2005 *Journal of Basic Writing* article depicted our interactions with OLA staff as

a series of scripts and counterscripts: pitting current-traditional pedagogies against process and (post)process pedagogies; the Office of Learning Assistance against the Department of English; adjuncts (hired through the Office of Learning Assistance to teach basic writing) against full-time faculty (who traditionally had steered clear of basic writing). (p. 79)

We describe the goals we did agree upon as “daunting, often involving the development of new courses and expanding the power and scope of writing centers university-wide”; we “lament our failure to generate third-space discussions in these meetings, meetings that in retrospect appear to us as but manifestations of rigid polarizations”; and we conjecture as to whether “we just needed more time in this [sub]committee to engage our differences [and move] toward understanding and improving conditions for students labeled basic writers” (Tassoni & Lewiecki-Wilson, 2005, p. 79). My colleague and I could label forces at work, but little did we consider that we were, in effect, merging with broader institutional arrangements. Pflugfelder (2015), drawing on the work of architect Lars Spuybroek (2009), describes the ways driving a car becomes a “strange entanglement of human-vehicle interaction” (Pflugfelder, 2015, p. 115). In the scenario above, the OLA and Lewiecki-Wilson and I struggle (from somewhere in the backseat) for control of the wheel in a car (Miami University), a vehicle (itself composed of multiple moving parts) we name as context earlier in the essay but never really acknowledge as actant itself.

I wonder now where those discussions with the OLA would have taken us had we considered the car we drove (the one that drove us?) in regard to the competing and overlapping principles represented in Dolmage's legend, all of which, I argue below, inform access initiatives at Miami. We (the OLA staff, Lewiecki-Wilson, and I) all wanted improved conditions, but were the human actors at these meetings sitting in car seats destined for steep steps, retrofits, or UD? In other words, the passage I quote from above indicates that my colleague and I could identify segments of the actor-network at odds in our meeting with OLA staff and that we knew the rhetorical space of those meetings was too narrow. We did not, however, consider the extent to which these meetings coursed in a machinery we needed to better understand; our work existed in relation to these other parts of the system, not just in relation to the OLA. Our better understanding of the ways in which the institution itself served as an actor would have helped us locate and merge with the equipment (discourses, programs, administrators) in ways that best suited BW's needs. Just as Dolmage's legend facilitated my analyses of attitudes and beliefs shaping the English department's earlier considerations of BW, the legend proves equally helpful in naming mechanisms that drive "the institution more generally."

A Dolmagean analysis provides an especially useful vocabulary for identifying BW concerns and assembling those institutional agents that generate BW, react to it, and act upon it. Such an analysis involves converting Dolmage's legend into a series of overlays. In this manner, it is easier to understand the elements as not a sequence of (hoped-for) stages/improvements but a system of attitudes, beliefs, practices, as well as material and bureaucratic structures that persist, push, and perish simultaneously and continuously. Its network trajectories move horizontally across the current institutional structure and vertically in terms of the school's history: an *allatonce*, if you will. As an *allatonce*, the legend's features defy dichotomization. A Dolmagean reading of our institutional arrangements marks not an instance of the bad elitist selective campus (steep steps) pitted against a good, democratized (universally designed) regional campus but an ongoing interplay of inclusions and exclusions (enacted at all sites and defining each), retrofitted programs and entities (the regional campuses themselves being one of these retrofits) and ongoing efforts at deep, democratic change.

MORE "MORE TIME"

Reflecting on our early meetings with the OLA, Lewiecki-Wilson and I (2005) contextualized our differences through static fields (the OLA vs. Department of English; full-time faculty vs. part-time staff; etc.) that eschewed debates within

each field. We failed to consider, as well, historical factors that had constructed and continued to inform this actor-network. Assembling the actor-network in which we worked, a Domalgean analysis could have helped us locate better the competing and aligned goals that transected our meetings and complicated our discourse, rather than perceive ourselves (as we did) settled into hypostatized local camps.

The OLA itself has evolved from an earlier entity, the Developmental Education Office (DEO). Of particular significance to BW's story, Miami's then-president Phillip Shriver (1973) projected the inaugural director of the DEO in these terms:

[H]e [sic] should be aware of the educational problems of not only those students from underprivileged backgrounds but of those whose low standardized test scores or erratic high school records demonstrate a distinct academic deficiency. Included among such students at Miami would be those in the Educational Opportunity Program [EOP], a significant portion of the commuter group, veterans whose recent experience or time away from formal schooling results in academic handicaps, and some of the students from various special admission groups [i.e., including students selected based on physical handicap or English as a second language].

Shriver's proposed job description is significant for multiple reasons: (1) it emerges at approximately the same time the English 001/002 EOP workshops appear in Miami's course catalog; (2) it describes an administrative position for an office that would eventually come to house the university's BW programming; (3) it decidedly views that office's mission in terms of a deficit model, one that views "non-traditional" constituencies in terms of lack rather than in terms of diversity; (4) it names the multiple constituencies the president characterizes as "underprivileged" and likely to "demonstrate . . . academic deficiency"; (5) each of these constituencies represents a complicated and conflicted institutional history in terms of ways they have been invited into and excluded from the school's mainstream business (in order to affirm its mainstream); and (6) the office (now the OLA) and BW programming would eventually find themselves on the regional campuses alone, a development (siphoning) that speaks volumes to the ways in which the system manages diversity. Lewiecki-Wilson and I (2005) believed that "more time" might have helped us generate more productive dialogues with OLA stuff, but we already had more time and more institutional space in front of us and behind us (in the past) than we were prepared to even recognize, let alone sort out and herd toward anything resembling direction.

I do not have the space here to provide comprehensive histories of agencies relevant to all of the groups mentioned above in Shriver's proposed job description. What I will do, however, is use Dolmage's legend to quickly assemble a few of these constituencies and their histories. "Trying to find" these constituencies/histories, I spoke to various individuals across the campuses and interviewed retired faculty and staff. I reviewed documents I located (and ones people helped me to locate) in our WPA office, the university archives, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Office, and Personnel Office.

"SHOULD BE AWARE OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS"

In the sections below, I rely on Dolmage's *Academic Ableism* (2017) to extend descriptions of steep steps, retrofits, and UD, particularly as features of his legend depict historical trajectories relevant to groups named in Shriver's proposed job description for DEO director—military veterans, EOP students, and students with disabilities. In the section following this one, I briefly reference implications for ESL students and the commuter group, demographics also named in Shriver's proposed job description, but I still need to research their histories at the time of this writing. Their histories, I do not doubt, are as significant as the others traced here. The commuter group eventually was absorbed into the regional campus student body—another instance of siphoning. The increase in international students currently generates much discussion regarding language standards across the curriculum. Reflective of its earlier discussions regarding BW students, the English department here in the last decade or so has even debated as to whether it was its responsibility to teach English to the growing number of international students and not the role of some other campus entity. So it goes . . .

STEEP STEPS AS NETWORK TRAJECTORY

As Dolmage (2017) points out, "[S]teep steps, physically and figuratively, lead to the ivory tower. The tower is built upon ideals and standards—historically, this is an identity that the university has embraced" (p. 44). Faced with new constituencies or other possible "threats" to this identity's ideals and standards, steep steps can become even more apparent. In the aftermath of the G.I. Bill, for instance, Miami, like other schools, performed its patriotic duty through attempts to accommodate returning WWII veterans; nevertheless, its administration at the same time worried about space needs. As a result, one program, which had been designed to provide vocational training to "salvage" students who might not have been successful in college curricula, was dropped, and in

its wake the university president asked the Miami community to now critically consider “Who should be educated?” (Hanhe, 1947, p 10).

In response to this question, the university instituted a “pre-entrance test” that would gauge students’ possible college success. The director of Student Counseling Services at this time called the test an “outstanding addition to the program” in its ability “to aid prospective students of very low academic ability to redirect their vocational planning” (Crosby, 1948, p. 84). This director saw it as a mark of success that, in the wake of this exam, a good number of prospective Miami students “changed from college plans to vocational training programs . . . while a still larger number made no further contact with the University . . .” (Crosby, 1948, p. 84). In short, faced with a class of students whose numbers and backgrounds exceeded those to which the institution was accustomed, a new hurdle was constructed to affirm just who would be college educated and who would be encouraged to go elsewhere. As these affirmations (and exclusions) were taking place, administrators such as Robert Miner (1948), Director of Student Affairs, reported that the veterans who remained “intermixed well with the student body and have renounced their identity as veterans in favor of being students first and foremost” (p. 74). As steep steps saw themselves reinforced in the form of canceled programs and pre-entrance tests, those populations who negotiated the steps would be lauded for their ability to assimilate and “renounce their identity” rather than generate any change to the school’s identity.

For those who habitually find entry to the institution, steep steps might appear as neutral ground, rather than as a system of inclusions and exclusions. In a memo following passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, for example, Shriver (1975) considers prospects for students with disabilities at Miami, only to affirm its literal steep steps. In the memo, he suggests that the school “list positively in our Catalog the accommodations [for students with disabilities] that we do have, rather than stressing what we do not have,” but the memorandum does not seem to acknowledge ways that the university functioned as a system structurally designed to accommodate able-bodied norms and to invite people with disabilities as an afterthought. This rhetoric situates the institution in such a way as to allow for retrofits to an already integrated whole but not in a way that willingly gears itself to a revision of this integrated whole in anticipation of the greatest diversity of users. “I do not see that we are in any position to consider handling bed cases and wheelchair cases,” wrote Shriver (1975), affirming an able-bodied “we” that excludes certain people with disabilities. He “believe[s] that there are some things we can do to help ambulatory students, including the deaf and the blind, the rheumatoid arthritics, etc.” However, he did “not see Miami in any position to begin to prepare for wheelchair cases in light of the age of our buildings and extent of our campus.” In the end, Shriver’s 1975 memorandum

expressed a desire for a situation in which “handicapped students . . . will self-select” their colleges “according to the nature of [the students’] handicaps,” but does not articulate ways his university already pre-selects, through environmental and attitudinal dispositions, an able-bodied clientele.

Tellingly, he wrote in another memorandum on the subject: “I do not see the potential for non-ambulatory handicapped students in any significant numbers here. However, I see no reason why the Hamilton and Middletown Campuses could not provide these, with their provisions for ramps and elevators” (Shriver, 1976). As with BW, the regional campuses, as a glorious retrofit (the escape-valve sort), were seen as a principal site for difference management, as a way to capture constituencies, concerns, and interests the actor-network defined as peripheral. While various forms of steep steps helped establish a stable, normative clientele, the university could look ahead to the formation of a DEO, whose director would consider the interests and concerns of groups named above in Shriver’s memo (EOP students, veterans, students with disabilities, international students, commuters) and consider how the university’s steep steps might be retrofitted in ways that (at least) gestured toward expanded access.

RETROFITS AS NETWORK TRAJECTORY

By choice and sometimes by mandate (e.g., the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Ohio Laws and Legislative Rules), the university will at times retrofit its steep steps in ways that invite constituencies it identifies as special (not mainstream) populations. Against the background of steep steps, of traditions focused on able-bodied, affluent, White norms, these retrofits are marked by what Dolmage (2017) calls “a chronicity—a timing and a time logic—that renders them highly temporary yet also relatively unimportant” (p. 70). Like the “myth of transience” that so often guides BW funding and programming, this chronicity leads to “what might be called abeyance structures—perhaps allowing for access, but disallowing the possibility of action for change” (Dolmage, 2017, p. 77). As I say above, retrofits in this sense serve as escape valves. They gesture at inclusion but expect constituencies, once inside, to overcome differences or assimilate rather than challenge or alter what the institution might consider its core identity.

The institution will rhetorically position itself, when it comes to questions of access, as a stable, whole entity willing (kindly or under mandate) to flex toward constituencies it denotes as special; however, as Pegeen Reichert Powell (2013) argued, such an emphasis on students’ abilities to adjust “treat[s] failure as the problem of the individual rather than that of the institution” (p. 98). This kind of steep-step stability is underscored as the university retrofits various programs

and offices to its core identity, often with the stated goal of assimilating “non-traditional” groups. The EOP itself was drawn up, at least from the perspective of the school’s upper administration, to “provide the necessary remedial education that will enable disadvantaged students to overcome their handicaps and complete their college degrees.” It was expected that “students coming with different backgrounds [would] overcome the difference” rather than contribute difference (Shriver, 1969).

The implications of this dynamic were not lost on student Carter Richards, a Black Student Action Association (BSAA) member who in a 1971 newspaper interview voiced his concern that it is “always the blacks that must adjust to a community like this. We have been brought up in black homes in black neighborhoods. [But it] is the black who must adjust to the white student” (quoted in Nichols, 1971). Richards had an ally in EOP administrator Lawrence Young, who tended to see retrofits as opportunities to throw into relief the status quo and expose it to serious questions. “An unfortunate and distasteful fact of life in the West,” he wrote in a column in 1978, “is that all integration starts with a token. . . . However, a token can agitate for further change. Remove that and you have a comfortable, anxiety-free, complacent, self-righteous, lily white, morally bankrupt status quo” (Young, 1978). Further change, movement toward UD, is necessary in these cases, or else, as Dolmage (2017) explained,

[W]hite students know that the fakeness and ineffectiveness of diversity initiatives on campus maintain their white privilege sometimes just as powerfully as overt forms of discrimination do. If white students play along with the pantomime of tokenized diversity, they won’t have to challenge their own privilege or lose their own positioning. (p. 45)

To take retrofits beyond pantomime, the actor-network must continue to ask what additional changes need to be made. While the influx of veterans to campus after WWII generated increased attention to spatial needs and a series of exclusionary practices to address those needs in a timely fashion, Miami’s Oxford campus nevertheless engineered a series of retrofits that pushed Miami toward more lasting changes. In *Miami University: A personal history* (1998), released the same year that Miami Middletown launched its studio program, the school’s former president Shriver, renders a brief account of the post-war period, 1946–1952, focusing on the number of G.I.s returning to the Oxford campus. As there had been no construction at Miami during the United States’ involvement with the war and little construction during the decade of the Great Depression that had preceded it, the campus, at least architecturally, was ill-prepared to accommodate so many returning students. Some “quick conversions,”

as Shriver (1998) describes them, had to be made. A physical education facility, for example, was converted into a men's residence hall. The university lined the basketball court with four-hundred double-decker, wall-to-wall bunks, creating what Shriver (1998) calls a "Spartan accommodation" (pp. 200-201).

Shriver's constructed memory of the post-war years, along with other such recollections, like Walter Havighurst's *Miami Years* (1984) and Robert White, Jr.'s *Oxford and Miami University during World War II: A remembrance* (1994), operate in conjunction with archival evidence to reveal discourses that continue to inform the school's considerations of democratic access. I've come to view the school's accounts of this post-war constituency as early signals of tensions that persist between its democratic aims and selective functions. Aided by the G.I. Bill, which provided tuition, fees, books, and sustenance funds for any person under twenty-six who had had his or her education interrupted by military service, students now flocked to Miami in increased numbers, many of whom were years older than those who had traditionally attended the school and many of whom brought with them literacies, concerns, and experiences far different than the university had previously entertained. While newly instituted pre-entrance exams did throw up steep steps for some of these new students, the "quick conversions" engineered to meet the immediate needs of those who persisted would point to deeper changes that the university would eventually make.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN AS NETWORK TRAJECTORY

Dolmage (2017) describes UD as "a way to move." He also describes it as "a world view." "Universal Design," he wrote, "is not a tailoring of the environment to marginal groups; it is a form of hope, a manner of trying. The push toward the universal is a push toward seeing space as open to multiple possibilities, as being in process" (Dolmage, 2017, p. 145). While groups like the EOP students and veterans might signal forms of "academic handicaps" and find themselves classified as the purview of a DEO director, the groups nevertheless have a history of challenging the status quo.

As retrofits, they resisted the status of "quick conversion" and spurred instead questions of the broader design. The presence of WWII veterans, for instance, helped administrators recognize that much more than difficulties with curricula could hamper students' persistence rates and led to the formation of the Office of Student Affairs, which provided, among other resources, psychological counseling (Crosby, 1948; Hahne, 1947; Minor, 1948). Other broader changes included the addition of more lights in more classrooms and the scheduling of night classes and summer classes to facilitate the schedules of the older adult students (Hahne, 1947). New academic buildings and residential buildings

followed (Hahne, 1947), including residences for married students to provide more access for the non-traditional clientele. And despite the Director of Student Affairs' characterization of returning GI's having relinquished their identity as veterans, there are reports of global themes being incorporated into classes in order to invite returning veterans to draw on their recent experiences and reports as well of returning veterans winning writing contests by virtue of essays based on their war experiences abroad (Havighurst, 1984).

Thinking of tokenism (retrofitting) as an opportunity to agitate for broader changes, EOP administrators also actively sought means of redesigning the university structure in ways that diversified its actor-network. The program's inaugural director, Heanon Wilkins (1969), stressed from the EOP's very beginning that it "must be more than a mere show of tokenism by Miami University." The Office of Black Student Affairs, which housed the EOP, introduced practices that included: delays of suspension for students whose grade point averages were below passing in order to give the students more time to adjust; credit reductions, so that the students could spend more time on fewer courses; formation of a cultural center and additional cultural events reflective of the EOP students' own backgrounds; recruitment practices that looked beyond GPA in order to locate talented and committed students; the development of Black studies programming; an increase in Black faculty and staff; and office space for the BSAA in the student center. The BSAA is particularly worth mentioning here in that they were one of the student groups who supported students who occupied Oxford's ROTC building as part of a 1970 Vietnam War protest. As part of this protest, the BSAA's principal demands included extension of the EOP, particularly in the form of supportive services, like the ENG 001/002 writing workshops.

Just as Shriver's (1973) vision for the DEO's director intersected diverse constituencies likely to demonstrate "academic deficiencies," I look for BW in those intersections. What I find there are network trajectories indicating—to various degrees at various times—steep steps, retrofits, and/or UD. The sum of these histories and the movements (or lack thereof), culminating in BW's eventual situation on the regional campuses, is the story that BW tells.

CONCLUSION: "THE SUMMING UP OF INTERACTIONS"

BW tells me that: (1) more people, programs, and offices than would admit so have a stake in BW; (2) the attitudes and beliefs that these people, programs, and offices share (or fail to share) about BW still very much course through and intersect within the campuses and these coursings and intersections have not yet been documented in any sustained narrative, making it difficult for human actors to recognize their involvement/position in these chains of influence; and (3)

critical histories such as the one I undertake here provide ways for actors to recognize their stake in BW by recognizing just how deep, how multiple, and how politically volatile these stakes can be. In short, BW's story persists, perishes, and pushes in its relation to institutional entities (demographics, offices, campuses) and those various network trajectories (steep steps, retrofits, UD) that assemble them, and it can serve rhetoric and composition program administrators (hereafter WPAs) well to know this story.

Listening to the story BW tells of its interoffice, intercampus actor-network, rhetoric and composition program administrators can position themselves better to "story change," as Steve Lamos (2012), borrowing from Linda Adler-Kassner (2008), might say. "Specifically," wrote Lamos (2012), "we should imagine new ways to identify and publicize BW as an institutional space explicitly dedicated to success for the increasingly diverse populations that are entering [predominantly White institutions] in greater numbers" (p. 18). Story changing, in this regard, involves intersecting campus units and histories relative to diverse populations and assembling them through the lenses of steep steps, retrofits, and UD to mark their trajectories. Dolmage (2017) warns of making the "interest convergence" argument that UD necessarily benefits all students, that such an argument might lead us to ignore specific pathways that bring students to our schools, as well as the ones that block their access (pp. 146-150). Lamos (2012), however, argues that critical and careful approaches to interest convergence dynamics can help remind those in power that BW persists and that diversity-conscious approaches to programming and curricula can benefit the contemporary neoliberal, predominantly White institutions as well, especially where their goals and interests include cultivation of a diverse student body and global engagement.

The story that BW tells encourages institutions toward UD while still recognizing the specific pathways that facilitate or curtail students' access. Dolmage's legend can help WPAs identify network trajectories circulating among institutional entities, those trajectories that align with as well as those that thwart educational access. At the same time, those entities (e.g., veteran affairs, disability offices, diversity councils, international education, etc.) can attend to the pathways that bring students to their offices. Not all ethnic-minority students or students with disabilities, military veterans, not to mention international students or regional campus (commuter) students, will seek or be referred to BW courses. Nevertheless, the programs and policies produced by agencies devoted to their concerns (e.g., at my school—the Diversity Council, OLA, the Disability Office, campus writing centers, Veteran Affairs, Global Initiatives, Department of Global and Intercultural Studies, Department of English, the Center for Teaching and Learning, Physical Facilities, etc.) all to various degrees map current and future areas of support for

BW students. Doing so, they collectively mark movement toward UD in ways that can radically alter the brand of public ivies such as ours.

Identifying these entities as BW's actor-network, WPAs can better gauge university-wide policies and practices that determine the success of their BW students and identify human actors, beyond English departments, who might contribute to BW's transformative potentials. WPAs might also take it upon themselves to examine the histories of these various agencies at their schools, seeking the matter in which Dolmage's legend might unfold in their various files. You might not need to pursue as long a history as I trace in this chapter; however, the process itself, which can take you into various offices and archives, provides kairotic moments in which you can articulate to others the objectives of your search, your search for BW and the story that it tells. In bringing these other entities to the table (whether in the form of committees that discuss BW curricula, or communiques that inform other network actors of BW's doings, or even merely requests for documents via emails that help other actors in other offices connect with BW practices), WPAs help agents in the actor-network identify their stake in the ongoing (rather than transient) effort to make their school as accessible and as beneficial as it can be, not only for student writers whose skills challenge traditional standards, but also for the greatest diversity of users, those whose interests and concerns can retell tradition. At the same time, these efforts could very well help universities present a more effective message as they address the sorts of policy changes and initiatives proposed by the state legislatures, popular media, and non-profit organizations that Lynn Reid described in this collection, those policies and initiatives set to shape "the future of basic writing in the United States."

Given the extent to which "the tiny locus" of our BW programs represent "the summing up of interactions" among an institution's various offices, individuals, and ideologies (Latour, 1999, p. 17), WPAs can most immediately move their schools and their states toward UD through attention to relevant policies and practices within their programs. WPAs can make sure their instructors attend to the multicultural, anti-racist, and anti-ableist imperatives of BW programming; and WPAs can ensure, as well, that their faculty are versed in vocabularies, such as those in Dolmage's legend, to help them trace the trajectories of this work. Likewise, WPAs can help design curricula that encourage BW students themselves to examine institutional entities that might curtail or facilitate their persistence rates, and these curricula can encourage students to compose accounts of their home and institutional lives in ways that thicken their own sense of agency in the story that BW tells. WPAs should use their interactions with other network actors to ensure that BW students' stories circulate through the broader network, that their challenges to the "mythical average norm" pulse through

each of its trajectories (Ostroff, 2001, p. 1.12), story changing at each center of their schools' mainstream business.

REFERENCES

- Adler-Kassner, L. (2008). *The activist WPA: Changing stories about writing and writers*. Utah State University Press.
- Alexander, J. (1995). Introduction. In P. Welch (Ed.), *Strategies for teaching universal design* (pp. iii). Adaptive Environments.
- Crawford, K., & Hasan, H. M. (2006). Demonstrations of the activity theory framework for research in IS. *Australian Journal of Information Systems*, 13(2), 49-68.
- Crosby, R. C. (1948). *The report of the student counseling service. Annual report of the president, the vice president in charge of finance, the deans, and other administrative offices of Miami University*. Miami University.
- DeGenaro, W. (2006). Why basic writing professionals on regional campuses need to know their histories. *Open Words: Access and English Studies*, 1(1), 54-68. <https://doi.org/10.37514/OPW-J.2006.1.1.05>
- Dolmage, J. (2017). *Academic ableism: Disability and higher education*. University of Michigan Press.
- Engeström, Y. (1987). *Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach in developmental research*. Orienta-Konsultit.
- Fox, T. (1999). *Defending access: A critique of standards in higher education*. Boynton/Cook. Freshman English Text and Program Committee (1975, February 11). *Response to the CCCC resolution on students' right to their own language*. Miami University.
- Hahne, E. H. (1947). *The report of the president. Annual report of the president, the vice president in charge of finance, the deans, and other administrative offices of Miami University*. Miami University.
- Havighurst, W. (1984). *The Miami years: 1809-1984*. New York, NY: Putnam.
- Lamos, S. (2012). Minority-serving institutions, race-conscious "dwelling," and possible futures for basic writing at predominantly White institutions. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 31(1), 4-36. <https://doi.org/10.37514/jbw-j.2012.31.1.02>
- Law, J. (1999). After ANT: Complexity, naming, and topology. In J. Law & J. Hassard (Eds.), *Actor network theory and after* (pp. 1-14). Blackwell.
- Latour, B. (1999). On recalling ANT. In J. Law & J. Hassard (Eds.), *Actor network theory and after* (pp. 15-25). Blackwell.
- Miner, R. J. (1948). *Report of the director of student affairs. Annual report of the president, the vice president in charge of finance, the deans, and other administrative offices of Miami University*. Miami University.
- Nichols, J. (1971, February 14). "Betrayal" to Miami Blacks just integration to Shriver. *Dayton Daily News*.
- Ohio Laws and Legislative Rules. (2015, September 28). Section 3345.06: Ohio Revised Code. "Entrance Requirements of High School Graduates—Core Curriculum." Legislative Service Commission. <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3345.06>

- Ostroff, E. (2001). Universal design—The new paradigm. In W. Preiser & E. Ostroff (Eds.), *Universal design handbook* (pp. 1.3-1.12). McGraw-Hill.
- Pflugfelder, E. H. (2015). Is no one at the wheel? Nonhuman agency and agentive movement. In P. Lynch & N. Rivers (Eds.), *Thinking with Bruno Latour in rhetoric and composition* (pp. 115-131). Southern Illinois University Press.
- Porter, J. E., Sullivan, P., Blythe, S., Grabill, J. T., & Miles, L. (2000). Institutional critique: A rhetorical methodology for change. *College Composition and Communication*, 51(4), 610-642.
- Rehabilitation Act of 1973. (1973). U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. <https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/rehabilitation-act-1973>
- Reichert Powell, P. (2013). *Retention and resistance: Writing instruction and students who leave*. Utah State University Press.
- Rose, M. (1989). *Lives on the boundary*. Penguin.
- Shor, I. (1997). Our apartheid: Writing instruction and inequality. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 16(1), 91-104. <https://doi.org/10.37514/jbw-j.1997.16.1.08>
- Shriver, P. R. (1969, July 19). *Letter to alumni regarding creation of the Equal Opportunity Program* [Memorandum]. Miami University.
- Shriver, P. R. (1973). *Memo regarding realignment of the EOO and the inaugural director of the Developmental Education Office*. [Memorandum]. Miami University.
- Shriver, P. R. (1975, April 29). *Memo Regarding formation of a task force in response to the Rehabilitation Act*. [Memorandum]. Miami University.
- Shriver, P. R. (1976, May 17). *Coming out of the report on the Rehabilitation Act*. [Memorandum]. Miami University.
- Shriver, P. R. (1998). *Miami University: A personal history*. Miami University Press.
- Spuybroek, L. (2009). *The architecture of continuity: Essays and conversations*. Nai010 Publishers.
- Tassoni, J. P. (2005). Retelling basic writing at a regional campus: Iconic discourse and selective function meet social class. *Teaching English in the Two-Year Campus*, 33(2), 171-184.
- Tassoni, J. P. (2006). (Re)membering basic writing at a public ivy: History for institutional redesign. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 25(1), 96-124. <https://doi.org/10.37514/jbw-j.2006.25.1.06>
- Tassoni, J. P., & Lewiecki-Wilson, C. (2005). Not just anywhere, anywhen: Mapping change through studio work. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 24(1), 68-92. <https://doi.org/10.37514/jbw-j.2005.24.1.05>
- White, Jr., R. (1994). *Oxford and Miami University during World War II: A remembrance*. The Smith Library of Regional History.
- Wilkins, H. W. (1969, September 27). *Draft of a brochure for the Office of Black Student Affairs*. Miami University.
- Young, L. (1978, February 24). Give me tokenism or give me less. *The Miami Student*.